



Dr. the Hon. Duane Sands
Minister of Health

COVID-19 Update Press Conference

The Ministry of Health
Thursday, 23 April, 2020

Good afternoon,

I begin today with the latest information on COVID-19 in The Bahamas.

Sadly, we announce today two additional deaths from this coronavirus.

A 53-year-old male. And a 51-year-old male died at (time) at (location).

This brings the total number of COVID-19 deaths in The Bahamas to 11.

We give our heartfelt condolences to the families of the two men who lost their lives. Our prayers are with you in this difficult time.

There are two new COVID-19 cases. A 50-year-old female of New Providence who is in home isolation. And a 29-year-old female of New Providence who is also in home isolation

This brings the country's total number of confirmed cases to 72 – 61 from New Providence; seven from Grand Bahama; three from Bimini; and one from Cat Cay, Bimini.

Fifteen of the 72 confirmed cases of COVID-19 are health care workers.

There are two new recovered patients for a total of 14.

Nine patients are hospitalised – eight in New Providence at Doctors Hospital West, and one in Grand Bahama at the Rand Memorial.

There has been much public discussion the past few days regarding the Medical Surgical Ward II at Princess Margaret Hospital. Let me provide an update on the situation.

Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre referred a patient from the Robert Smith Unit to PMH for further medical management on the April 5th, 2020.

This patient received treatment at PMH and was discharged on April 15th, 2020, to Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre.

Days later, the Medical Surgical Ward II of PMH was declared compromised on discovery of a confirmed positive COVID-19 case on the ward.

Consequently, the ward was closed to new admissions on April 18th, 2020.

The patient of the Robert Smith Unit was returned to PMH on April 19th, 2020 to be tested for COVID-19.

On April 20th, 2020, it was confirmed that the Robert Smith Unit patient had contracted COVID-19. This patient is now receiving care at the Doctor's Hospital West facility.

The remaining 39 patients at the Robert Smith Unit at Sandilands were immediately placed in an isolation cohort and the unit was sanitized.

Forty-six staff members at Sandilands were identified for risk exposure assessment.

In total more than 200 health care workers are in quarantine. However, we believe that upon completion of our risk assessment the number is expected to decrease significantly.

One staff member, two patients and two registered nurses were quarantined for 14 days.

Subsequently, all remaining patients on the Medical Surgical Ward II were tested for COVID-19.

Contact tracing and exposure assessments commenced for the people discharged from the ward, and those who were in contact with current patients on the ward.

Currently, four patients remain on the ward. Three of the four remain in isolation and one remains on the open ward.

As long as patients remain on the ward, routine sanitation standards are being followed.

High cleaning is scheduled as soon as all patients are discharged.

As a precaution, and in order to take proactive steps to protect their health, all persons will be monitored closely, tested for COVID-19, and if required they will be admitted to one of our COVID centres for care.

We are committed to providing all necessary support and treatment through every step of this process.

As part of updated prevention measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, visiting hours at all public and private wards at PHM have been suspended.

Patient updates will be made to the identified and/or nearest relative and/or guardian by the assigned physician via telephone.

Meals and beverages delivered for patients will not be accepted during this restricted period.

If a patient requires a personal item, the hospital will contact the identified and/or nearest relative regarding the request.

In this case, the delivery must be pre-arranged with Ward management.

Efforts are being made to provide videoconferencing for our patients on the Children's Ward so they can interact daily with a parent or guardian.

In an effort to expand our treatment capacity we opened the South Beach Acute Care and Referral Centre.

The south, northwestern and north wings of the centre were converted to isolation rooms.

The air-conditioning system was changed from positive pressure to negative pressure. The centre has also been divided into 10 zones. These steps were taken to improve air safety.

The negative pressure of the air-conditioning prevents patients and staff from coming in contact with air-borne droplets. Ultraviolet light is used to clean the air, making it cleaner than air in an operating theatre.

We have also created an adjusted workflow for staff, patients and medical waste; and designed systematic and independent safe staff zones, including bathrooms and rest areas.

Out of the 10 private rooms created at South Beach there are eight en-suite bathrooms with appropriate airflows.

There is also continuous upgrading of the positive and negative airflows, sewer, toilets and showers for patients and staff.

All retrofits have been completed according to the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers, the World Health Organization and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

South Beach Acute Care and Referral Centre started to accept COVID-19 patients on Sunday, April 19th, following re-fitting for accommodations for 10 beds.

The South Beach Centre will be further re-fitted to accommodate an additional 10 beds, bringing to 20 the total number of beds for COVID-19 patients at that facility.

Contractors are working around the clock to complete the additions by the weekend.

This should bring the total number of beds for COVID-19 patients in New Providence to 40 (20 at South Beach; 16 at Doctors Hospital West; and four at the PMH Modular Unit).

By tomorrow morning six COVID-19 beds will be available in Grand Bahama and within a week to 10 days a total of 22.

The work of the Ministry of Health's Communicable Disease Surveillance Unit is key to the fight against this coronavirus.

The hardworking staff members of this unit are important frontline workers in keeping all of us safe.

I want to highlight their work to you.

The unit is responsible for collecting and evaluating health information to control the spread of communicable diseases in the country. It:

- responds to disease outbreaks;
- gives healthcare facilities a description of communicable disease symptoms and protocols to follow;
- informs healthcare providers and the public of infectious diseases that could affect or are currently circulating in the country; and
- works with private and public clinics and other stakeholders to identify cases.

The unit leads our contact tracing efforts.

Contact tracing is a fundamental public health tool that can break the chain of transmission and decrease the spread of an infectious disease.

On average there can be 10 to 20 contacts from one infected person.

The Surveillance Unit uses the following three-step process to find these potentially exposed people.

Step 1: Contact identification. During this process, once Case A is confirmed positive for COVID-19, staff members talk intimately with the person to determine what activities he or she was involved in, and the people he or she came in contact with around the time sickness began. The contacts given for Case A usually are –

- a. Family,
- b. Workmates;
- c. Friends; or
- d. Healthcare providers.

Step 2: Contact Listing. During this process all contacts noted are listed with information on how to reach them. These people are informed they were exposed to the coronavirus. They are provided with information about the necessary steps to take to avoid potentially exposing others, such as quarantine.

Step 3: Contact Follow-up. This process requires following up with the contacts once to twice a day to monitor for symptoms and potentially test for infection.

Contacts are monitored for up to 14 days to determine if there are signs of illness developing such as fever, a dry cough or shortness of breath.

Once symptoms develop that meet the case definition these persons are immediately tested for COVID-19.

If they are found to be positive, then they are also questioned about their contacts and the cycle on contact tracing begins again.

People who have been exposed to the virus are required by health officials to limit their contact with others to prevent its spread. This can be done by quarantine or isolation.

Quarantine is used to separate and restrict movement of people who are well, but may have been exposed to the coronavirus.

Quarantine is usually for a period of 14 days from the exposure to a confirmed COVID-19 case. During this time the person is monitored to see if he or she experiences flu-like symptoms.

People may be required to self-quarantine if they visited an area or country where community infection is present, or if they were in close contact with a COVID-19 patient.

Self-quarantine takes place at home and usually lasts for 14 days.

If a person starts to feel sick during self-quarantine, that individual should contact his or her healthcare provider or the COVID-19 hotline.

Those in mandatory quarantine are placed in a designated quarantine facility and are monitored daily by a healthcare provider.

This allows for monitoring for the development of symptoms and early detection of a case. This too is usually for a period of 14 days.

Isolation differs from quarantine because now a person who is ill or infected needs to be separated from others to prevent the further spread of infection.

For people with mild flu-like symptoms such as low-grade fever, dry cough, fatigue, runny nose, and sore throat, they may

isolate at home. They must remain in a separate room away from the rest of the household.

If more moderate to severe symptoms develop, such as shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, then hospitalization in an isolated room at the South Beach Centre or the Doctor's Hospital West facility in New Providence or a facility in Grand Bahama will be required.

To those who have received recommendations to quarantine or isolate, you are strongly advised to remain at home until the prescribed time has ended.

Since you as a quarantined or isolated contact have been exposed, you have the potential to shed the virus, infect others and accelerate the spread of the disease.

Contacts who have had close association with a positive COVID-19 case are considered high risk of infection if they:

- share a bed;
- slept in the same room for one or more nights;
- live in the household and share the same enclosed living space for one night or extended periods of time; or

- are a healthcare worker who provided direct care without using personal protective equipment;

Moderate to low-risk people are those who:

- travel in close proximity with a COVID-19 patient; and
- who were in a social situation with no physical contact or close proximity to the case.

Those in quarantine and isolation should request a family member to complete shopping for essential items.

If this person lives outside your home, ask them to leave the groceries at the door and to leave.

If you are receiving assistance from a family member at home, then ask them to leave your food outside the door and not to enter the room you occupy.

Following this simple advice is paramount to preventing the spread of COVID-19 in our communities.

The Surveillance Unit provides valuable information and helps to inform the Government on what decisions should be made to halt further spread of the coronavirus.

Contact tracing has provided a number of benefits:

1. Patients are able to receive care if detected early;
2. Contacts can be transferred to a treatment centre so the infected person is taken out of the community and isolated so as not to aid further COVID-19 spread;
3. It can prevent the extension of the pandemic.

I thank the Surveillance Unit for their hard work.

I also want to again encourage you to donate blood.

There remains an urgent need to replenish our blood supply.

To add to the ordinary blood donations you can still make at the blood banks, a national blood drive has been organised.

We are encouraging all who are able to give blood to do so on Wednesday, April 29th from 8am to 5pm at the National Stadium.

Remember to eat at least 30 minutes before you donate.

You will need identification. Please bring either your driver's license or NIB card.

You cannot donate if you are sick or experiencing respiratory symptoms.

Please come forward and make a blood donation. This simple act will save lives.

On the 21st of April, 2020, the Prime Minister signed the Emergency Powers (COVID 19) (No.2) (Amendment) (No. 10) to give effect to improved medical, therapeutic or other patient care in homes and residential care facilities.

Consequently, all medical, therapeutic or other patient care providers are expected to submit the following documents to the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health:

- A valid government issued identification;
- A current residential address, telephone number and other contract information;
- Evidence of training and certification to provide medical or therapeutic care;
- Details on care provided to and contact information for current patients or clients; and

- To undergo infection control protocol training provided by the Ministry of Health prior to providing any further care.

Additionally, a current license to practice is required.

Once the requirements have been submitted, the Ministry of Health will issue a letter to therapeutic and other patient care providers to continue to provide care.

The Ministry of Health advises that persons can contact the Chief Medical Officer at 502-4708, or 502-4855, or by email at COVID19@bahamas.gov.bs to submit the required documents.

I end today by thanking all of you who are staying home and following the public health advice. Continue to do so.

This virus has killed more than one hundred and eighty-five thousand people around the world.

Staying home as much as possible is our best weapon in the fight against COVID-19.

Thank you, and Good Afternoon.