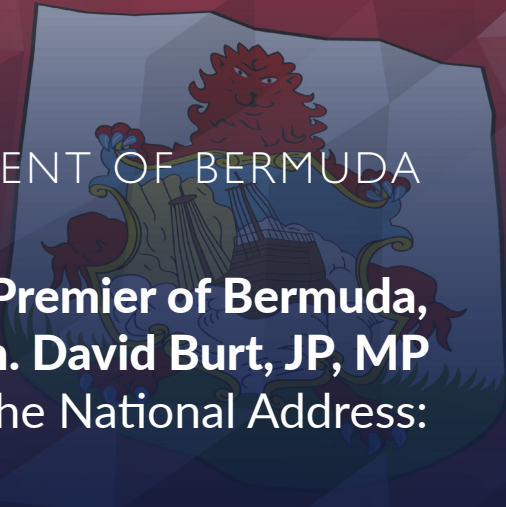




GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA



The Premier of Bermuda,
the Hon. David Burt, JP, MP
Presenting the National Address:

MOVING BEYOND THE PANDEMIC

Sunday, 25 April, 2020



Introduction

Good evening Bermuda.

For the last year, Our Island has journeyed through the highs and lows of every aspect of uncharted change this pandemic has brought to the world. This journey has taken us from the earliest days of 2020 when COVID-19 was a new story affecting other countries, to today where we are now in the midst of a wave of infections that has robbed us of too many loved ones and caused upheaval in our families, our schools, our livelihoods, and our economy. Through all of this, we have worked together. We have shared our frustrations and we have voiced our anger. We have developed innovative ways to deliver services, to keep in contact with our friends and family, and to celebrate personal milestones. Virtual meetings and remote learning have become part of our daily routines. And - through all of this, we have persevered as a people. When the personal, emotional and economic challenges seemed at their worst, it was our unity of purpose that kept us going.

As the virus began to impact our community, the Government acted early to create sensible regulations to control its spread. Thanks to the cooperation of all Bermudians, we implemented a successful border reopening strategy last July making Bermuda not just the envy of the Tourism world, but a country that was applauded as an example of how to safely re-open borders. Visitors and locals felt safe thanks to our strong testing regime. We successfully introduced programmes such as Work From Bermuda and hosted international events like the Bermuda Championship. Renewed tourism activity supported local businesses and jobs throughout our economy. This allowed thousands of Bermudians to go back to work as our hotels reopened, which supported taxi drivers, minibus operators, boat charters and many others.


While our early success in the fight against the virus remains a cornerstone of Bermuda's economic recovery, recent events have dented that cornerstone. However, tonight I will outline not only how we will repair that cornerstone, but also what we must do collectively and individually to build our future success. I feel the weight of the country's fatigue around the continued restrictions of basic rights and freedoms and hear a country that is crying out for a return to normalcy. This Government will provide the strong leadership necessary to move Bermuda beyond the pandemic.

What changes are necessary to move beyond the pandemic

As we look to the future, it is vital that we acknowledge how much we have learned and improved our capacity to tackle this virus over this extraordinary year.

Last year, we knew very little about the novel coronavirus. This year we have the ability to test widely and to detect variants. Our hospital has more tools to treat those admitted with COVID-19. We have cutting edge technology with the WeHealth app and we now have access to vaccines which have been proven to be highly effective in preventing Coronavirus disease.

However - all of these tools were not enough to stop the current outbreak of a new variant which required the Government to reimplement restrictions not seen since last April.



Bermuda, we have learned that we cannot underestimate this virus. This virus is constantly changing, with new mutations continually testing the world's leading medical and scientific minds to find ways to slow its spread and defeat the virus. What does this mean for us? It means that the tools and strategies that last year allowed us to enjoy a degree of normality will not be as effective this year. This current period of restrictions is evidence that we must adjust our strategy in order to end the merry-go-round of restrictions and ensure that Bermuda is once again an example to the world.

In order to move beyond the pandemic, we must act decisively to reduce the possibility that another dangerous variant is introduced into our community.

The Government will implement stricter border control measures designed to minimize the likelihood that any individual arriving in this country can, through their actions, unwind our collective progress and our collective sacrifice. I recognize that different treatment at the border for those who are immunized and non-immunised may cause alarm, but strong leadership requires making difficult decisions. This is also not a new method of protecting public health, as prior to this pandemic many other jurisdictions prevented entry to travelers without the required immunizations as a way to reduce transmission of communicable diseases. Bermuda has not gone so far as to require immunizations; however, non-immunized travelers will be subject to a different regime upon arrival.

To that end, tonight I am announcing the following changes to our policy at our borders.


With immediate effect:

- no flight originating in Brazil, India or South Africa will be landed in Bermuda;
- any arriving passenger who has travelled to those countries within the previous 14 days will be mandatorily quarantined for 14 days subject to electronic monitoring to ensure compliance.

We know that coronavirus variants will continue to originate from other countries, and we must also take proactive steps to protect our community from those to come. Therefore, as of Sunday, May 2, all non-immunised travelers entering Bermuda will be required to quarantine for 4 days, pending a negative Day 4 test. This is in line with the current policy for travellers arriving from the United Kingdom.

These measures however will not be enough, and further steps are needed to ensure that we keep new dangerous variants out of Bermuda. Therefore, effective June 6th, the following changes will come into effect:

- The time period for a pre-test required for visitors to obtain a travel authorisation will move from 5 days to 3 days in line with the global standard.
- All non-immunised travellers entering Bermuda will be subject to supervised quarantine for 14 days in a designated facility at their own expense.
- All immunised travellers entering Bermuda, with a negative pre-test, will not be required to quarantine after their negative arrival test, but they will still be required to test on day 4, 8 and 14.
- Immunised residents entering Bermuda without a negative pre-test will be required to quarantine until their day 4 negative test result.



There will be appropriate exceptions from supervised quarantine for minors and the medically vulnerable. All other persons will be required to enter supervised quarantine so that we can protect our island from the introduction of new variants.

This change in policy is significant, but the Government has determined that it is the best way to prevent us from repeating the experience of these past few months. This is how the Government will minimise the future risk of having to make the painful decision to tell Bermudians you cannot go to work, or you cannot go to school, or you cannot open your business, or you cannot visit your loved ones in the hospital, or attend their funeral.

How vaccinations will assist in reaching our goals

Despite the pronounced debate around vaccines, I am proud of the vaccination effort here in Bermuda which ranks among the top 10 in the world. Tonight, I am pleased to announce that more than 50% of our population has received at least one dose of the COVID vaccine which is an excellent milestone. However, we must keep going in order to reach our goal of community protection which is considered to be achieved when 70% of the population have received both doses of the vaccine.


Reaching this goal is essential on our journey back to normality. Getting vaccinated is a personal choice, and I urge you to speak to your doctor to discuss whether the vaccine is medically safe for you to take. Those considering whether or not to take it should also be aware that while yes, you can still get a coronavirus infection - as I did - the vaccine teaches your immune system to fight the virus, thus preventing moderate or severe disease that can lead to hospitalisation or death. Early evidence also shows that persons who are immunised are less likely to spread the virus if they have been infected - something I can speak to directly as none of my family tested positive. Those that are not vaccinated are more likely to test positive for a coronavirus infection and are more likely to spread that infection to others, therefore our changes at the border will ensure that we minimise that risk as much as possible.

Why have I said community protection instead of herd immunity? It is because Bermuda is a community of people and not a herd of animals. As a community our objective must be to protect one another. The more persons that receive the vaccine, the more protection is provided to our community as a whole. Community protection is especially important for those who cannot be vaccinated due to a pre-existing medical condition. Many of those persons are hopeful that their fellow Bermudians can help to offer them indirect protection by having enough of those around them fully immunized.

The pathway to end the Public Health Emergency

Our ultimate goal as a country is to ensure long-lasting protection from the coronavirus and to see an end to the public health restrictions that we have endured.

Until we achieve community protection or until we eliminate local transmission we will need to remain under some form of restrictions to protect the health of our island and protect our essential services. These restrictions will be necessary to ensure that our students can attend classes in person, and our citizens can work and provide for their families without future interruption.



Though our path to move beyond the pandemic will specify dates that we expect to move through the next phases, the Government will be guided by the data when making the decisions. The criteria that will be considered to advance to the next phase is a test positivity rate of less than 1%, an average of no more than 7 unlinked locally transmitted cases per day over a 2 week period, and our 7 day average of our Real Time Reproductive number must remain below 1.

There are just under nine weeks left until the current Public Health Emergency expires on June 24th. The Government's hope is for the Public Health Emergency to end on that date, bringing an end to 15 months of a state of emergency in Bermuda. However, for that to happen, we must eliminate local transmission of this virus. If we do not end local transmission we will not be able to end restrictions, get rid of our masks, or see the end of curfew.

Following the 7 day Stay at Home Order, this past Tuesday we commenced Phase 1 of 3 on our Roadmap to Reopening. This current phase, when combined with 7 day stay at home order, will be for a total of four weeks. If the data allows, it is envisioned Phase 2 can commence on Sunday May 9th, Mother's Day.

Phase 2 will see the end of restrictions on household mixing, as well as reopening of schools, leisure facilities, churches, gyms, outdoor dining and limited personal care services. Due to our desire to eliminate local transmission, there will be continued restrictions on activities, gathering sizes and a curfew will remain in place during this time. The Government will continue to provide financial support to businesses and individuals who are directly affected by the restrictions.

Provided that we are successful in continuing to reduce local transmission, and all of the data metrics allow, after four weeks in Phase 2 we would be able to progress to Phase 3 on June 6th. This will permit the re-opening of all other businesses which were not opened in the previous phase. A determination on the need to continue the curfew and other restrictions such as gathering sizes will be based on the data at that time. June 6th will also be the date that the 14 day supervised quarantine for all non-immunised travellers comes into place.

If all goes well following the commencement of Phase 3, and we are successful in eliminating local case transmission through compliance with restrictions and increased vaccinations, the Public Health emergency will be allowed to expire on June 24. But the end of the Public Health Emergency in Bermuda is up to all of us as a community.

Everyone in Bermuda has a role to play

Bermuda, this battle is not the government -vs- the people, it is not neighbor against neighbor, blogger against blogger, or cousin against cousin. The nature of our discourse in recent months has turned some of us against each other. I fully accept that the Government can do better in this regard, but I will also ask for all of us as citizens to also do better and commit to the unity required for us all to move past the Pandemic.

We are in a war against this virus, and though we may disagree on some measures enacted to fight this war, one thing we all can agree on is that we wish to win this war and to see an end to restrictions. To achieve that community aim, we all have an individual role to play. Here is how you can do your part:

- Get tested! Testing is easily accessible to anyone who wants or needs it. There is no wait for testing in Bermuda. If you are able to go to work, we recommend that you get tested to protect your family and to protect your coworkers. Testing is no longer uncomfortable or intrusive. Saliva testing is available five days a week and is a quick and painless alternative to help us to end restrictions.
- Employers, ensure that your workplace is safe by encouraging staff to be tested. The contagious nature of the UK variant makes it likely that a single case could close your business down for 14 days due to quarantine.
- Everyone should download the WeHealth App. It is free, and runs in the background of your phone and can anonymously alert you of a potential exposure. If entire workplaces are using WeHealth, it can prevent all persons from being quarantined if there is a single positive case.
- For those who haven't been vaccinated yet, speak to your doctor to discuss if it is right for you. If it is, register and get vaccinated. The more residents that are vaccinated, the better the protection for our community against ongoing local transmission.
- For those of you who do not support vaccinations, you also have an important role to play as well. Obey the public health guidelines to ensure that you are not contributing to the spread, get tested on a regular basis, and do what you can to boost your own immune system. We cannot end the restrictions unless we end local transmission. Vaccinations will help us do that, but it is just as important that those who chose not to get vaccinated do their part by following the guidelines.

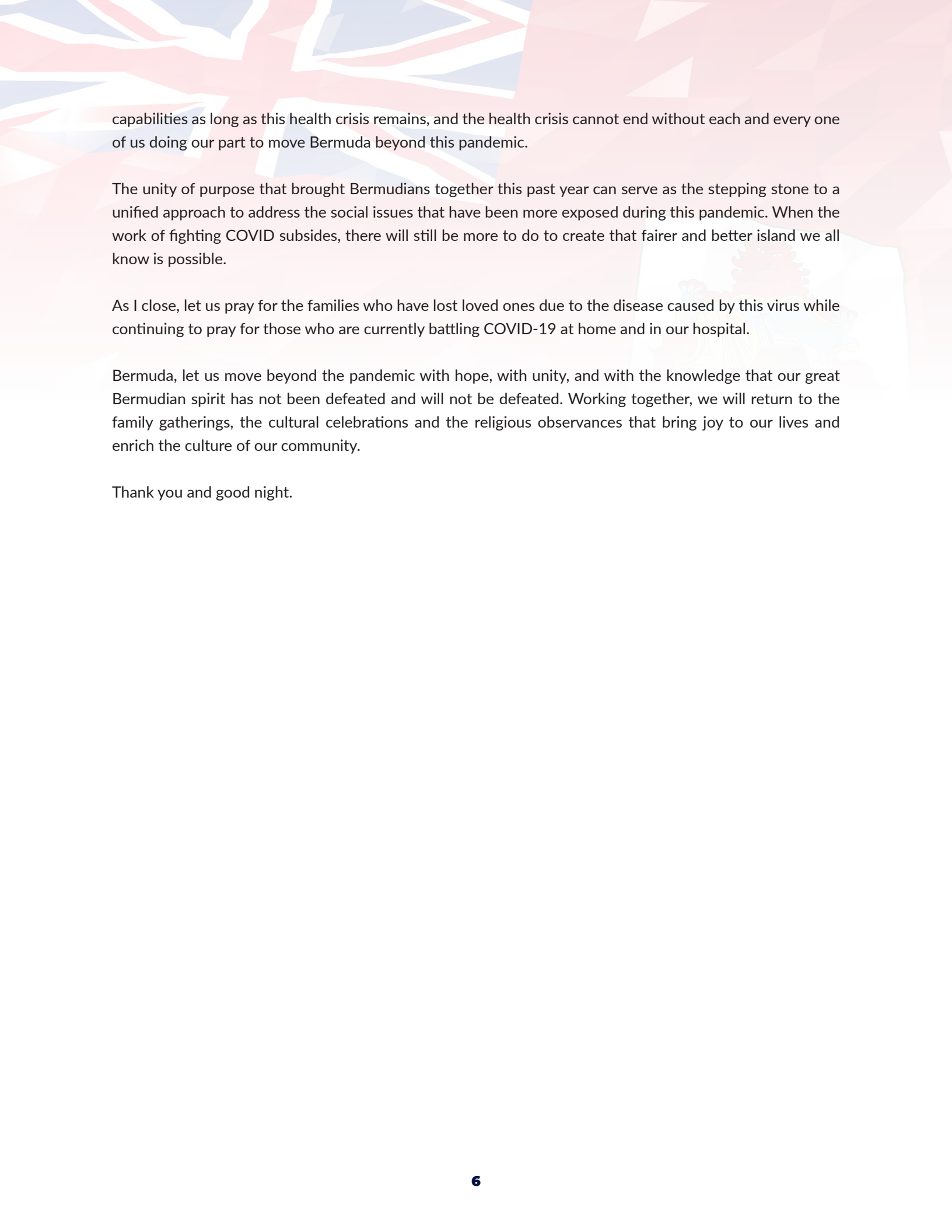
Conclusion

We must achieve long-term safety for Bermuda so that the dignity of work can be restored to our people. We must achieve long-lasting protection from the virus and its variants so that our healthcare system can turn its attention to much-needed reform. Most importantly, we must create a Bermuda where we do not have to discourage people from shaking hands, hugging one another or visiting each other for fun, food and fellowship. The isolation of this period has been unbearable for most of us and I am personally committed to leading Bermuda to a place that makes physical distancing and mask wearing the exception, and no longer the rule.

To all of Bermuda I thank you for your support, for your understanding, for your constructive criticism and most of all for your perseverance through all we have endured.

To all the members of the political leadership of this country, whether Cabinet, backbench, or opposition, thank you for playing your part in helping to guide our beloved island home through the last year.

When I assumed this office in the summer of 2017, I would never have expected this Government's tenure to be defined by a global pandemic. The promises we made have been deferred by the Covid-19 Pandemic, but they will not be denied. Like you, we are anxious to win the war against this virus so that our attention can return more fully to the work that we were elected to do, such as economic recovery and addressing important social issues. The Government has laid out a comprehensive Economic Recovery plan, and we are eager to devote our time and our energy to continuing to rebuild our infrastructure, support job creation, and diversify our economy while delivering on our election promises. However, we cannot do this to our full



capabilities as long as this health crisis remains, and the health crisis cannot end without each and every one of us doing our part to move Bermuda beyond this pandemic.

The unity of purpose that brought Bermudians together this past year can serve as the stepping stone to a unified approach to address the social issues that have been more exposed during this pandemic. When the work of fighting COVID subsides, there will still be more to do to create that fairer and better island we all know is possible.

As I close, let us pray for the families who have lost loved ones due to the disease caused by this virus while continuing to pray for those who are currently battling COVID-19 at home and in our hospital.

Bermuda, let us move beyond the pandemic with hope, with unity, and with the knowledge that our great Bermudian spirit has not been defeated and will not be defeated. Working together, we will return to the family gatherings, the cultural celebrations and the religious observances that bring joy to our lives and enrich the culture of our community.

Thank you and good night.

