



**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
TO THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
BY THE HONOURABLE KIM N. WILSON, JP, MP
MINISTER OF HEALTH
CORONAVIRUS UPDATE
31st January 2020**

Mr Speaker and Honourable Members,

I rise today to share the most up to date information and guidance for residents regarding the coronavirus.

First of all, I can assure you that as of this morning, there are no cases in Bermuda or known suspect cases. The Ministry of Health's Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit is in constant liaison with international public health authorities including, the World Health Organization, and in step with them when the coronavirus outbreak was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern Travel last night.

Travel advice revisions are being considered accordingly and the Ministry of Health will continue to keep the public abreast of developments. Any situation posing a risk to the safety of the public will be communicated through official Ministry of Health channels.

Mr Speaker, the World Health Organization (WHO) has stated that in China the risk of the coronavirus is very high, and the risk to all other countries is consequently also high, due to extensive global travel. We are a hyper-connected world now-a-days which raises the likelihood and speed at which communicable diseases can spread between countries.

Accordingly, the Ministry of Health's Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit (ESU) are treating the local threat level as "Elevated" and are in a state of heightened preparedness for a Public Health Emergency.

This means that the Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit is working closely with all relevant stakeholders from different disciplines and sectors of society to plan and prepare for the possible introduction of the Coronavirus.

Mr Speaker, This work includes very close collaboration with airport Customs, Immigration, and Skyport to enhance screening of arriving travellers and direct those with a travel history risk for further monitoring and assessment.

That is, arriving travellers will be asked about their travel in the past 21 days and about current illness. Those who have spent time in jurisdictions considered at very high risk will be given health instructions for follow up and advice on self-monitoring for illness for 14 days.

Mr Speaker, I reiterate for the benefit of the listening public: there are no cases or known suspect cases currently in Bermuda (as of this morning). To be classified as a "suspect case", the WHO has defined specific criteria that an individual must have. This includes a relevant travel history risk or contact risk.

Our medical teams who liaise directly with international public health agencies advise us that the 2019-nCoV, or novel coronavirus, has not been fully characterized in terms of its origin, mode of transmission and how it makes individuals ill. Much of this information is just being gathered in clinical research settings worldwide.

What we do know is that it appears to be transmitted from infected animals or humans to other humans; takes between 2-10 days to incubate before making an infected

individual ill with fever, cough, and difficulty breathing. A high percentage of those infected become seriously ill and a smaller percentage die from the infection. To date, most fatalities have been in individuals with other serious medical conditions (co-morbidities) such as heart, lung, kidney or liver disease.

The situation is extremely dynamic, changing every few hours as information is gathered and shared by public health authorities. Therefore, information available to the public is accumulating rapidly and the public must stay abreast of changes and developments through trusted sources only. The World Health Organization website and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are trusted sources of up to the moment global information.

Mr Speaker, It is critical for the public to turn their attention only to established, trusted sources of health information, particularly in today's environment which is rife with fake news via social media. The public is urged to rely on credible information sources, in particular: the Bermuda Government website, its Facebook, Twitter, Instagram feeds, and the Tree Frog app are the official sources of Ministry of Health information.

These will be updated continuously as information is received and confirmed. If a case of coronavirus is confirmed in Bermuda, contact tracing will begin immediately and relevant individuals will be contacted by Ministry of Health staff. Any situation posing a risk to the safety of the general public will be communicated through official Ministry of Health channels.

The public is urged to follow the advice of public health authorities:

- If you have not had a seasonal influenza shot get one from your healthcare provider or the Department of Health Clinic
- Avoid visits to the Emergency Department unless there is an emergency.
- If you are ill with an infectious disease, stay home from work and social gatherings until you no longer have a fever or cough, or vomiting and diarrhoea.

- Always cover coughs with tissues or sleeves and wash your hands for at least 20 seconds.
- Restrict non-essential travel to areas known to be affected with coronavirus. These areas are updated on the WHO website.

Keeping Bermuda safe will need cooperation from the whole community. Bermuda pulls together in the face of emergencies, **Mr Speaker**. In this case we must also pull together to prevent it.

Ends