



GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA
Department of Communications

PRESS STATEMENT

The Minister of Health

The Honourable Kim N. Wilson, JP, MP

Wednesday 4th March 2020, 10am

COVID-19 Information for Businesses

Good Morning,

I am holding this press conference today to update you on some of the enhanced protection measures currently being put in place to safeguard Bermuda against the threat of COVID-19 (the novel corona virus) and to provide you with an update regarding where we are with our preparation efforts.

Protecting the health of Bermuda's residents is the Government's top priority. This includes taking steps which are internationally recommended to ensure the protection of the public from serious health risks including COVID-19.

As we have already shared with you previously, arriving travellers will undergo a travel risk assessment upon entry into Bermuda and could have their health monitored and movement on island restricted for up to 14 days.

Those who have spent time in jurisdictions considered at very high risk will be given health instructions for follow-up and monitoring for 14 days. There are government officers at all

ports of entry to assist with managing the situation and port officials are in continuous communication with the Ministry of Health's Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit (ESU).

Following on from those efforts, we are currently looking at ways to enhance the reliability of customs information from travellers entering Bermuda. We want to ensure that all customs officers will ask the same, appropriate questions of all arriving passengers. Consequently, we are in the process of finalizing travel forms for arriving passengers requesting specific travel details such as where you've travelled and when.

An incomplete disclosure of travel history could lead to a potential health risk for our community and therefore we want to appeal to every traveller to please be truthful when you fill in these forms and when a Customs Officer asks you about your travel history.

Additionally, we are already in the process of creating publically-displayed information for healthcare facilities which can be used to protect those facilities from illness...such as posters encouraging people to call ahead prior to entering that facility if they feel unwell with respiratory symptoms.

Yesterday, I announced that the Government is actively resourcing extra supplies of hand sanitizer for the island. Once on-island, they will be available at government offices and will be distributed throughout the community, starting with at-risk segments of the population such as seniors. Additionally, Government will waive customs duty on hand sanitizer and other supplies as deemed necessary, in the fight against influenza and COVID-19.

Washing hands and using antibacterial wipes and hand sanitizer may seem like overly simple things to do to combat serious respiratory illnesses but they are, in fact, two of the most effective methods.

On the topic of procuring supplies, there have been many questions asked about the supply of N95 masks on the island. It is accepted that these masks are in global short supply. However, I want to assure the public that we are working to acquire these masks as

quickly as possible and have placed a request for more to Public Health England (PHE) which has been assisting us throughout.

Additionally, it should be noted that the use of face masks during outbreaks of viral illnesses such as COVID-19 has only been shown in scientific studies to be effective for protecting healthcare workers and to reduce the risk of sick patients spreading the disease. Based on that evidence, the World Health Organization recommends the use of face masks by:

- People who have respiratory symptoms such as coughing, sneezing or difficulty breathing;
- People who are providing care to individuals with respiratory symptoms; and
- Healthcare workers, when entering a room with patients or treating an individual with respiratory symptoms.

It should be stressed that wearing a face mask alone is not guaranteed to stop infections in any of these circumstances and should be combined with other personal protective measures, such as hand hygiene and keeping your distance from people with symptoms.

Another question we have been hearing a lot relates to the availability of test kits on-island for COVID-19. These kits are not commercially-available anywhere in the Americas, except in research settings. For Bermuda, testing is currently available only in WHO Collaborative Centers and in the CARPHA laboratory. Four to five days is the standard turnaround time to get a result and so far Bermuda has done three tests to date – all negative. We are exploring additional testing options through Public Health England and the World Health Organization and can give full assurance that Government will obtain the necessary equipment as soon as it is available so that tests can be conducted locally. However, it is vital for the public to understand that medically reliable test kits are not commercially available anywhere. Investment in research kits that miss real cases and give false positives would not do any good.

I can also inform you that Government have assembled a team focused on several matters, including:

- Ensuring signage at all ports of entry is robust and clear;
- Planning for cruise ship season against the threat of COVID-19;

- Confirming an appropriate quarantine facility(s);
- Added assistance at ports of entry; specifically at cruise ship terminals;
- Ensuring there are plans in place to deal with mass gatherings such as large sporting events, should an outbreak occur;
- And the national procurement of Personal Protective Equipment for healthcare personnel.

To that end, staff have been seconded to the Ministry of Health from elsewhere in Government to provide the additional manpower to meet these objectives.

I now want to talk about the hospital's readiness to deal with a potential seriously ill and critically ill COVID19 patients in Bermuda.

I want to reassure the public that BHB has escalation plans in place, which identify options for Emergency, Intensive Care Unit and Acute Care Wards to cope with an influx of patients in the event of a pandemic.

The number of beds available at any one time can change based on the day. However, there are actions that can be taken to increase capacity, such as postponing elective surgeries, discharging stable patients, and using additional beds in other areas.

There are negative pressure rooms in Emergency and on each floor of the Acute Care Wing. They also have an entire floor – 30 beds– with an independent air filtration system which can potentially be used for cases, should that need arise.

BHB's negative pressure rooms stop the air flowing out of patient rooms, keeping the rest of the hospital safe. It will be critical for people who can be cared for at home to stay there, so that hospital services can focus on those most in need. Most importantly, no one should turn up at the hospital or other healthcare providers without calling ahead first to inform healthcare personnel of their symptoms and receive advice on next steps. The hospital has more seniors and people with existing medical conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and hypertension in waiting rooms and our long term care facility.

While there are many unknowns about COVID-19, experience to date indicates that about 80% of people only have mild to no symptoms and will not need hospital care at all. Of the rest, a portion will be able to receive medical care at home; and a small percentage may need critical care services with intensive medical management. Therefore, we do not anticipate a situation with COVID-19 that would require the entire patient population to be relocated.

I want to just add that the government is prepared to provide any additional necessary funding required to prevent, treat and contain a COVID-19 outbreak, should one occur, including any additional hospital expenses to handle an extraordinary situation.

I want to urge the public to rely on official sources of information to prevent damaging rumours from creating false narratives and diverting public health resources away from situations posing an actual threat.

Travel advice is updated daily on the Government's website www.gov.bm/health-information. Travel advice is currently as follows: Travellers from affected areas are being monitored. Affected areas include: China, Iran, Northern Italy, South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, Macau, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam.

Travelers who have been in affected areas should be prepared to self-quarantine until a risk assessment is completed by a public health officer. A public health officer will then assess what public health measures should be implemented based on the travellers' risk level.

Public health measures may include active monitoring or supervision of self-monitoring by public health authorities, or the application of movement restrictions, including isolation and quarantine, when needed to prevent the possible spread of COVID-19 in Bermuda.

Any traveller that has been to an affected area and develops fever, cough or shortness of breath, should inform their health care provider of their travel history prior to attending for medical care.

You can stay up-to-date by visiting trustworthy scientific websites such as the CDC or WHO. For local updates visit our Health Information Page at www.gov.bm/health-information and follow the Government of Bermuda on Facebook and Twitter.

Stay informed to stay well.

Thank you.