



STATEMENT TO THE SENATE
BY
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JUNIOR MINISTER OF HEALTH
COVID-19 UPDATE
29th July 2020

Madam President, Senate Colleagues and the listening audience,

I know everyone is aware that the Minister of Health provides daily updates on Bermuda's COVID-19 status. Nevertheless, it pleases me to be able to address this Honourable chamber with some of the key issues that we all need to take note of in our "New Normal".

COVID-19 has changed the world and, with that change, Bermuda has had to adapt.

We are all aware, of course, that Bermuda's testing regime has been extensive. We have conducted over **twenty** thousand tests to date, ranking us 10th in the world on tests per capita.

Over 14,000 individuals have been tested. Prior to the airport reopening we had tested around 12% of the population; however, with the traveller testing regime in place about 23% of all tests are repeat tests.

Madam President, I believe we are all aware that Bermuda has had a total of **156** COVID-19 cases, and that currently there are 6 active cases which are, thankfully, not hospitalized. **All 10 new**

cases we have had this month were imported since the borders re-opened; with 9 imported from Atlanta and 1 from Toronto.

Members of the public may have noticed the number of tests carried out daily by the Ministry of Health continues to rise significantly. This is largely due to the opening of our borders to commercial flights.

This has taken a tremendous amount of planning by teams in Ministries across the Government. Meetings take place daily with a core group of individuals who troubleshoot any issues, identify solutions and keep track of current and future needs; pre-empting any possible issues, misinterpretations or policy tweaks. It is thanks to them that we have been able to successfully action this enormous undertaking.

In particular, I want to recognize our testing teams who have been swabbing and processing over 500 tests a day, with those at the airport, at the various sites and at the Government laboratory testing hundreds of travellers daily. Their energy, enthusiasm and dedication to public health is beyond compare and we must all be

grateful for their efforts – the country owes them all a debt of gratitude as they keep us safe from COVID-19.

As the volume of travellers increases our testing teams and capability is becoming increasingly stretched. Incoming travellers are tested on arrival at their port of entry. They also have to comply with further tests on days 4, 8 and 14 after arriving.

In addition, visitors are required to have a negative COVID test taken 7 days before travelling to Bermuda. They then have to quarantine in their room until a negative arrival test result is received around 8 – 12 hours late.

Residents are not required to have a test before returning home; however, if they come without it, they have to self-quarantine at home until their day-4 test. We encourage residents to test before returning to Bermuda for their own safety and convenience.

Madam President, With the long week-end coming up, it has come to our attention that some persons are trying to get tests locally as a pre-departure test for their return. This is not

permitted. Once you leave Bermuda and enter a jurisdiction with community transmission of COVID-19, you are at risk of being exposed. The pre-departure test needs to be taken in the place with community transmission. A test taken in Bermuda does not count as a pre-departure test for your return to Bermuda. Our enforcement teams will be vigilant of this to ensure adherence to the law and its spirit. Returning residents with a 'pre-departure' test taken before leaving Bermuda will quarantine for 4 days on their return, per the Quarantine (COVID-19) (No.3) Order 2020.

Madam President, the teams have been receiving many enquires made from employers across various sector with regards to staff travelling overseas and then returning to work. The main question being: *When can they safely return to work?*

The answer to this depends on whether the employee works in a high risk setting such as one with medically vulnerable individuals or institutionalized populations, such as a healthcare setting.

If so, then those employees may want to consider avoiding non-essential travel. Of course, this is not always practical and, in those cases where workers have family overseas, an ability to

travel and see loved ones could have a detrimental effect on that individual's mental health. In those cases, we have to ask ourselves *'What is the safest way for these individuals to return to work after travel?'*...

The gold standard is 14 days of quarantine with prescribed testing procedures to provide that extra layer of security. Employers should consider whether an employee could work from home during these 14 days.

If they must return to work (with the requisite traveller testing), determine how they can minimize their contact with others as much as possible. Each employer must decide what this looks like for their employees. However, the Ministry of Health is currently in the process of developing further guidance on this issue, which will be disturbed shortly and posted to the Government website.

Madam President, I want to urge everyone to continue to wash their hands frequently, use hand sanitizer before and after entering any store or public building, shield our medically vulnerable, avoid congregating in large groups, and continue to

wear your mask and keep six feet apart if you are not wearing one.

Physical distancing, mask wearing and hand hygiene are proven protective mechanisms and we need to be constantly on our guard to ensure that we are maintaining these clinical standards for the foreseeable future.

Nobody knows for sure what our future holds and we have to be cautious and safe in how we act today.

It is more important than ever that we not take our collective eyes off the ball, for even a moment. If we do, that could lead to increased numbers of patients requiring hospitalization, critical care and, at worst, more fatalities. We are a tiny island and despite very good healthcare service delivery, it would not take much to overwhelm our health system and the hospital.

Madame President, While COVID did enter some of our care homes, unlike other countries our teams did a phenomenal job containing outbreaks and preventing the sorts of outcomes we saw elsewhere. Yet, despite this, 30% of all cases and 30% of all deaths were related to care homes which are a stark reminder of

the vulnerability of this population. We cannot slacken our standards to protect our seniors.

We all have a huge responsibility to care for each other and to protect our vulnerable community. We are our brother's keeper and have an enormous responsibility to each other, to support and help each other and to protect one another.

In closing **Madame President**, As a Government, I can assure you we are doing all that we possibly can to protect you. However, it is essential that we all remember that, ultimately, it is our individual contributions that will go the furthest in determining how we, our families, and our country fare.

Thank You