



PRESS STATEMENT

**The Hon. Renward R. Wells, M.P.
Minister of Health**

**Ministry of Health
22nd July, 2021
2:00p.m.**

Good Afternoon, Bahamas!

Here is the latest national COVID-19 Report.

On Thursday, 22nd July, 2021, there were **110** newly confirmed cases of COVID-19. This brings the total number of confirmed cases in The Bahamas to **13,957**.

Currently, there are **23** moderately ill COVID-19 patients hospitalized in the Grand Bahama Health Care System, and there are **2** patients currently receiving intensive care in Grand Bahama.

In New Providence, there are **20** hospitalized COVID-19 patients at Doctor's Hospital. **Thirteen** are moderately ill and **7** are currently in the Intensive Care Unit.

There are **7** moderately ill COVID-19 patients being treated at the South Beach Acute Care and Referral Centre.

At Princess Margaret Hospital, there are **39** COVID-19 patients. **Thirty-eight** are moderately ill and **1** patient is receiving care in the ICU.

One person is also moderately ill at the Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre. In all, there are **1351** active cases of COVID-19 in country. **Twenty-four** persons have been recently classified as recovered from COVID-19. This brings the total number of recoveries from COVID-19 to **12,238** persons for a recovery rate of **87.68%**.

My brothers and sisters, unfortunately, a fifty (50) year-old female from New Providence died yesterday. This brings the total number of confirmed COVID-19 deaths to **280** persons. **Twenty-three** deaths remain under investigation. One COVID-19 death to us in the Ministry of Health, as we continue to say, remains one too many. We continue to pray for the families in The Bahamas who have lost loved ones to this awful global COVID-19 pandemic.

A total of **115,959** RT-PCR tests have been carried out for COVID-19 in the country. **434** tests were performed yesterday, with **110** positives and **317** negatives. **Seven** tests were repeated to determine recoveries. There were no inconclusive test results.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Ministry of Health continues to monitor the increase in the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations. On 17th July, 2021, The Bahamas experienced 100 newly confirmed cases. This was a déjà vu not experienced since September of last year at the height of the second wave.

Hospitalizations in this third wave have been much higher than in our second wave for The Bahamas. In fact, on 20th July, 2021, the country experienced a peak in hospitalizations at 92. These excessive numbers have placed our public health system to the test and our gallant and valiant health care workers continue to rise to meet this challenge.

Currently, there are a total of **38** beds available on Grand Bahama for COVID-19 patients. At the Cancer Association of The Bahamas there are 24 beds for COVID-19 patients with mild to moderate illness. At the Isolation Ward, also known as Medical-Surgical 3, there are 14 beds for acute COVID-19 patients.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On the other hand, in New Providence, the situation at Princess Margaret Hospital is much more critical. There are six (6) wards closed to new admissions because of COVID-19 exposures. This has reduced the bed capacity of the PMH by 96. Therefore, there are approximately only 32 beds currently being used for COVID-19 patients –

- 8 beds in the Legacy Unit; and
- 27 beds in the Special Pathogens Unit.

You would recall the Special Pathogens Unit attends to only COVID-19 patients at this time. It consists of the 3 tents with 9 beds that were handed over to The Bahamas Government by Samaritan's Purse in the second wave. With increased numbers of COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 patients, PMH is currently running over its capacity to render our desired level of care and medical attention.

Whilst there are no pediatric patients or children hospitalized with COVID-19 at this time, there is a continuous stream of COVID-19 patients ranging from ages 27 – 86 seeking medical attention. The

majority of these patients are unvaccinated and are inevitably hospitalized. This has caused tremendous strain on our public system.

The situation is compounded by the fact that a number of the nurses who are trained to care for COVID-19 patients have migrated to other countries with more lucrative compensation.

Consequently, PMH has implemented several measures to manage the increase in COVID-19 patients presenting at the Hospital. These include –

- limiting the use of the Emergency Department to emergency cases only;
- suspending out-patient laboratory services, elective surgeries and in-persons appointments at specialty clinics;
- not accepting telephone calls;
- the establishment of a Whatsapp text messaging system to fill prescriptions;
- a drop-off system for items such as drinks non-perishable food and clothing; and

- reduced hours at specified clinics.

On behalf of the Government of The Bahamas, special thanks are extended to all the nurses, doctors, emergency medical services, and other essential healthcare workers who have toiled and labored throughout this pandemic. We know you are exhausted from the effects of the pandemic. Please know this - we appreciate your continued dedication and devotion to caring for COVID-19 patients. Again, you make us proud to know that all front line workers have embraced the collective vision to keep The Bahamas safe.

My fellow Bahamians & Residents,

During this third wave of COVID-19 in The Bahamas, we have experienced a large number of COVID deaths. When the third wave emerged in March, deaths stood at 180. Since then there have been some 100 deaths so that the current death toll again stands at 280 as of yesterday.

The Rand Laboratory commonly referred to as “the morgue” at PMH can house some 73 deceased persons. However, today it holds 225 bodies. That is three times its capacity! Although 2 refrigerated containers are holding demised bodies outside the morgue, PMH no longer has space.

Therefore, we strongly urge the general public to collect their loved ones at the morgue. The increased COVID-19 deaths have exacerbated the problem and placed additional strain on the resources of the PMHs morgue. We entreat you to think of the family who has lost their loved one recently and was not able to immediately entrust their loved one to an undertaker because an autopsy had to be performed. Permit those families the use of the morgue for their loved ones so that they can bury them with dignity.

The public is advised that if the deceased bodies are not claimed promptly, the Government reserves the right to take legal action to remove and inter the unclaimed bodies to provide space for those who have recently passed away.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I know you have COVID fatigue. You are tired of wearing a mask, not hugging a close family member or friend and staying home to prevent contracting the virus. However, we must remain disciplined. This global pandemic is not over as cases continue to rise globally and nationally.

We need to be mindful that health measures are not punishment. They are for the safety and well-being of the Bahamian people. Remember, the goal is to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 in the community.

We want to save lives. The data consistently shows that when we actively apply the preventative measures we slow down the spread of transmission of COVID-19 in our communities.

Again we encourage you to continually stay -

- stay three to six feet away from others;
- use hand sanitizer frequently;
- wash your hands often;

- keep hands away from my eyes, nose and mouth;
- wear a mask; and
- ensure all items purchased outside the home are sanitized before utilizing them.

We must not grow weary in doing well, for in due season we will reap a reward if we do not tire out. We entreat you to protect yourselves and your loved ones by following the public health precautions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The only way out of the pandemic is to be vaccinated. It is widely known that if we are vaccinated we reduce the risk of –

- severe illness from COVID-19;
- hospitalization; and
- death.

Let us be clear, taking the vaccine does not mean that you cannot get COVID-19. To do our part to reduce the rising number of cases, it is

encouraged that persons still wear a mask. Not wearing a mask means that we throw caution to the wind and can possibly infect friends, and loved ones even if we are vaccinated. Again, vaccination reduces the risk of severe illness, hospitalization and death. Interestingly, nearly all COVID-19 deaths in many countries around the world including the United States occur when people are not vaccinated. The same trend is being reflected here in The Bahamas. We can stop the rising number of deaths in the country to practically zero if everyone eligible got vaccinated.

Consequently, great efforts have been made by countries of the world to vaccinate their people. Globally, 29.8 million doses of the vaccine are administered every day. So far, there are 3.76 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines that have been administered globally. 26.8% of the world's population received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. 13.4% of the global population are fully vaccinated. In low-income countries, only 1.1% of the population have received at least one dose.

Locally, as of the 18th July, 2021, there have been some 101,466 vaccines administered. 60,360 have received at least one dose of the vaccine, and 41,106 persons have been fully vaccinated in The Bahamas.

The Government is very pleased with its decision to select the AstraZeneca as the vaccine to assist the Bahamian people to get out of this pandemic. Unlike other vaccines, the AstraZeneca vaccine does not require a booster shot at this time. Recently, the Financial Times reported that if you got 2 doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab, you are likely to be protected against hospitalization with the delta variant. Studies from England indicate that AstraZeneca has a 92% efficacy rate against the delta variant. So we will continue to press on to ensure that our young, elderly and all eligible groups are fully vaccinated in The Bahamas. Remember I've got mine, you get yours, get vaccinated!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To date, three (3) Caribbean countries have donated vaccines to The Bahamas – Antigua and Barbuda, Montserrat and Anguilla. Yesterday, on

21st July, 2021, 3,496 doses of COVID-19 AstraZeneca vaccine were received from the British Overseas territory of Montserrat and Anguilla with the assistance of the United Kingdom High Commissioner Sarah Dickson. These will be used to provide second doses to persons already partially vaccinated.

The Ministry of Health received an update from PAHO that the third tranche of vaccines through the COVAX Facility is now expected to be in-country by the first week in August. This represents some 33, 600 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine. We are in discussion with the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) about additional vaccines. This includes Johnson and Johnson vaccines from the African Medical Supplies Platform and an allocation of Pfizer vaccines from the United States to CARICOM countries, including The Bahamas. We are also expecting to receive the Pfizer vaccines allocated through the COVAX facility. All of these vaccines are expected to begin arriving in-country as early as August with subsequent shipments to be received through to the end of the year.

With the emergence of COVID-19 variants in the United States of America, especially the Delta Variant from India, the question continues to arise, are there COVID-19 variants present in The Bahamas?

My fellow Bahamians and Residents,

Remember, when a variant is of public health concern this means –

- it can affect the transmissibility of the COVID-19 virus; or
- affect the efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccine being administered.

It is confirmed, COVID-19 variants are present in our communities.

The National Reference Laboratory recently received results from 47 samples sent via PAHO to the Fiocruz Laboratory in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil for genetic sequencing. 34 samples collected during the period 13th March – 17th April, 2021, were successfully sequenced. Of these 34 sequenced samples –

- 26 were the UK variant of concern; and
- 1 was the Iota variant of interest.

This sequencing data correlates with the previously performed in-country PCR variant screen done at our National Reference Laboratory. The results confirm that the UK variant was in country and current work is ongoing to determine whether the Delta Variant is also present in our communities. Additional samples have been sent for sequencing.

My brothers and sisters, during this third wave, the National Reference Laboratory has seen an uptick in the volume of COVID-19 samples collected. This has challenged the resources and staff of the NRL. Consequently, resident interns have been called to assist with the increased samples. Following the staff's return from quarantine last week, the lab is completely up to date with all of its samples and is once again processing results within a 24-36 hour time frame.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Based on the recommendations of our health professionals, the Government of The Bahamas has decided to take the following measures which shall come into effect on Monday, 26th July, 2021, at 5:00a.m.

For New Providence, Grand Bahama and North and South Eleuthera (including Harbour Island), a curfew will be implemented between the hours of 10:00p.m. to 5:00a.m.

RT PCR Testing will be required for travel from New Providence Grand Bahama, North and South Eleuthera (including Harbour Island). This applies to persons who are **NOT** fully vaccinated.

For New Providence and Grand Bahama, religious worship will be limited to 33% of the occupancy capacity of the religious facility. Services are to be limited to one hour, and all safety guidelines of the Bahamas Christian Council are to be followed.

In regards to funerals, no funerals or cremation services are permitted indoors, and funerals or burial services are to be held at the graveside only. Cremation services will only be permitted provided that they are held outdoors. A maximum of 30 persons are allowed at funeral services. This excludes the officiant and the funeral workers at the funeral, burial or cremation services. Repasts will not be permitted at this time.

A maximum of 30 persons will be allowed to attend a wedding indoors or outdoors. This number excludes the officiant.

Exercise groups are limited to a maximum of 10 persons. It is recommended that there be no recreational or sporting activities at this time. Groups congregating on the beaches and parks should be no more than 5 persons. Professional athletes can continue to train. Maximum capacities as gyms and movie theatres are now set at 33%.

As regards to restaurants, dining is restricted to outdoor and takeaways services, and it is encouraged that there be no loitering of groups outside restaurants or at fish fries. These restrictions, however, do not apply to hotel properties.

No spas will be opened. This includes massages, waxing, threading and facials.

For all islands of The Bahamas, private gatherings will be restricted to 5 persons provided that the individuals are vaccinated. Lastly, persons who are campaigning, must be fully vaccinated and campaigning teams are restricted to 5 persons.

My brothers and sisters, in appreciation for the sanctity of life, let us continue to adhere to the public health precautions. Wear your masks, continually practice social distancing, avoid large gatherings and do not forget to frequently wash your hands.

We must not let our guards down. We must continue to take the necessary precautions. As we work to limit the spread of this deadly virus through vaccination and national vigilance.

Let us continue to work together to make our country safe from COVID-19. May God Almighty the Lord of life continue to bless and keep this great Commonwealth of The Bahamas. I thank you.

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