



National Address

**The Most Hon. Dr. Hubert Minnis
Prime Minister and Minister of Finance**

Nassau, Bahamas

Monday, August 9, 2021

8:00 P.M.

Bahamians everywhere, residents and visitors. Good evening.

Thank you for the opportunity to once again to share with you a number of developments and measures as we continue to battle the worst period of the COVID-19 pandemic in The Bahamas.

A year-and-a-half into this pandemic the world is facing what appears to be the worst variant of the SARS-COV-2 coronavirus.

We do not yet have official confirmation that the more contagious delta variant is here.

But out of an abundance of great caution we must assume that our recent surge is part of the same battle being faced in other countries.

As in many other countries, including regional neighbors, we are now experiencing historic numbers in this pandemic.

Yesterday, August 8th, The Bahamas recorded 169 new confirmed cases, of COVID-19.

This includes: 134 on New Providence, 13 on Grand Bahama, 11 on Abaco, 4 on Eleuthera and 7 on Exuma.

This brings the total number of COVID-19 cases recorded in The Bahamas to 15,794.

According to the latest available report from the Ministry of Health, there are 129 people in hospital due to COVID-19.

This includes 15 in the intensive care unit.

Sadly, three additional COVID-19 related deaths were reported, bringing the total number of deaths recorded to 307.

Another 38 deaths are currently under investigation.

Seniors and elders in their 90s, have died.

Younger people are dying too.

Some are in their 20s, with the youngest death being a five-month-old baby in June.

Sadly, we are continuing to lose loved ones to this terrible and dangerous disease.

You have heard the personal testimony of family, friends, and colleagues, and the increasing number of stories of fellow-Bahamians, who became infected, and then quite ill.

In the past few weeks, we have experienced a significant increase in cases, hospitalizations, and deaths.

More of us know someone sick with COVID-19.

More of us know someone battling for his or her life in hospital.

Sadly, more of us know someone who has died from the disease.

This is a difficult and painful time for so many families.

This surge has taken our public healthcare system, to its limit.

There is some comfort that many who struggled for their lives are slowly getting better though they have a long road to recovery.

Please join with me at this very moment with your hearts and prayers for all of those who have lost loved ones.

We offer our condolences and our love.

We pray for healing, during this time of great pain, and great loss.

Let us pray for those who are sick, including those who are at home and in hospital.

Let us pray together for God's anointing, of those who need His Grace and for His anointing of the nation for healing and for recovery.

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Last week Tuesday, August 3rd, with the assistance of the Pan American Health Organization, The Bahamas received the third batch of COVID-19 vaccines, pre-paid through the COVAX Facility.

This batch consisted of 33,600 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine.

The administration of the first and second doses resumed in The Bahamas on Thursday, the 5th of August.

A total of 833 doses, were administered on that Thursday, on New Providence.

On Friday, the 6th of August, 717 doses were administered.

Over a period of two days, a total of 1,550 doses were administered.

Of that number, 65 percent of all shots administered were first dose shots.

A total of 1,110 doses, of the vaccine were administered on New Providence and Grand Bahama today, of which 75 percent were first doses.

This is great news.

Today, Monday, August 9th, an additional vaccination center opened on New Providence at the Church of God of Prophecy on East Street.

Over the next two days we are ramping up our vaccination program, with the opening of more centers across New Providence.

Tomorrow, the vaccination center at Baha Mar, now located in the lobby of the Melia Hotel, will open.

On Wednesday, another center will open at St. Anselm's Church Hall, on Bernard Rd.

By Wednesday of this week, with four vaccination centers opened on New Providence, and the Susan J. Wallace Community Center on Grand Bahama, we will have the capacity to administer, 2,050 doses of the vaccine per day.

I have been informed that appointments are being taken up as soon as they become available.

I encourage you to book your appointment on vax.gov.bs or visit one of the walk-up sites.

As a reminder, those booking their second dose should wait at least seven weeks, before booking their appointment, or visiting a walk-up center.

To date, The Bahamas has received a total of 129,296 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Just as with many other countries, The Bahamas has had difficulty in sourcing and securing vaccines.

We are fortunate to have received the vaccines that we have.

The Government continues to explore every avenue to source approved and safe vaccines that meet rigorous approval requirements.

We will only accept vaccines, that have received emergency use approval, from the World Health Organization, or other stringent regulatory authorities recognized by the Caribbean Regulatory System (CRS).

Our national COVID-19 vaccination program, started in mid-March.

As of today, the 9th of August, The Bahamas has administered a total of 109,616 doses of the vaccine.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am pleased to announce tonight that we have concluded negotiations to bring in a substantial number of new vaccines.

Along with these new doses and the vaccine supply we already received, over the next few months we will have the capacity to vaccinate all Bahamians and residents who wish to receive the vaccine.

But let me be clear: COVID-19 will not just disappear.

What our vaccine supply will do is allow us to give a significant percentage of our population protection.

This will in time lessen the likelihood that we will have large-scale surges that cause extremely high hospitalizations.

In the coming days, I will have more to say about the expansion of our vaccination program.

As I have said to you before this fight against COVID-19 is a partnership between citizens and government.

We are bringing in the vaccines needed to protect Bahamians.

We need each unvaccinated individual to come forward quickly to take the shots.

In this recent wave you have seen how COVID-19 can harm or kill people of all ages.

We are losing young, middle aged and older Bahamians to this virus.

Young, middle aged, and older Bahamians are in hospital fighting for their lives.

With more vaccines about to be available to vaccinate a significant portion of our population I need you to get the shots so we can end the emergency phase of this pandemic together.

As health officials have already pointed out, this virus continues to change.

We are seeing younger people getting ill with the virus and dying.

Medical professionals have stated that the vast majority of those hospitalized and dying from COVID-19 are the unvaccinated.

If you are fully vaccinated, there is a lower risk that you may still get the virus, but it is very unlikely that you will become seriously ill and have to be hospitalized.

Even if you are fully vaccinated it is important that you continue to follow these important health protocols.

We know that the vaccines work!

We know that they save lives!

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

When I last spoke with you I noted that we were going to increase the capacity at the Princess Margaret Hospital.

Since then, we have added 18 hospital beds with the assistance of the Samaritan's Purse aid organization.

I am now advised that there are two patient care clinical renovations at the Princess Margaret Hospital, nearing completion.

These include: the Male Surgical 1 Ward and the Medical Surgical Unit East.

Once completed, Male Surgical 1 will be able to accommodate 14 patients.

The Medical Surgical Unit East will be able to accommodate 19 patients.

Together, this will mean, an additional 33 beds.

Both wards will have the capacity to care for COVID-19-positive patients.

As I previously reported to you: my Administration is bringing on additional staff at the hospital, field hospital tents have been erected, and more than \$7 million, is being spent on support and resources.

Yesterday I delivered brief remarks to new UWI medical school graduates.

I told them that we intend to engage as many of them as quickly as possible to help us battle this current surge of the pandemic.

We are expanding contact tracing.

And we have expanded testing requirements for international and domestic travel.

The Minister of Health, the Hon. Renward Wells, will provide a full update on the Ministry's COVID-19

response when the House of Assembly meets on Wednesday, 11 August at 10:00 a.m.

I wish to also note that in the coming weeks, the Minister of Education, the Hon. Jeffrey Lloyd will advise the country, on the plan for the upcoming school year.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

To help combat the spread of the virus, I wish to announce, on the advice of health officials, that effective Wednesday, the 11th of August 2021, new curfew hours will be as follows:

On the Exuma mainland, the curfew will be from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m.

On the Abaco mainland, curfew hours will be from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m.

On New Providence and Paradise Island, the curfew hours will be from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m.

On Grand Bahama the curfew hours will be from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m.

The curfew on North and South Eleuthera, including Harbour Island, will continue to be from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m.

I wish to note that the curfews will be strictly enforced and that enforcement is being increased.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Getting vaccinated is key to us fully opening our economy.

The Bahamas has seen significant economic growth in recent months.

Business activity is returning.

Our hotels are full.

The cruise ships are returning.

Significant investment is flowing in.

To unlock even more dynamic and sustained growth we need to vaccinate as many of our citizens and residents as possible.

This would allow us to be fully open with responsible health rules, such as masking in public places.

If we take the vaccines quickly and fully open our economy, I believe that The Bahamas could have the biggest growth in its economy in a generation.

There would be more opportunities for entrepreneurs to start new businesses, including many more small businesses.

There would be more jobs for those out of work.

The Bahamian people have it in their power, to significantly expand this economy by getting vaccinated.

As I have said to you before, we can only do this together.

The Government cannot do it alone.

I cannot do this alone.

I am asking for your help once again.

Fellow Bahamians:

In most democratic countries national constitutions provide for emergency powers.

Wisely, our Founding Fathers did likewise.

They recognized there would be emergency periods when such measures were needed to protect the Bahamian people.

My Government has used these legal measures in the pandemic to create public health rules and social measures, to protect, and to save Bahamian lives and livelihoods.

It was the intention of my Government, that depending on the state of the pandemic, we would move toward concluding the use of the Emergency Orders this month, and to transition to a new legislative framework as more Bahamians were vaccinated.

The surge in new cases, hospitalizations and deaths, has required us to temporarily adjust our plans in order to immediately save Bahamian lives and to protect our economy.

My Government has set a plan to further combat this wave and to transition the country to a new post-Emergency Orders regime after this deadly surge subsides.

As a result of the arrival soon of new vaccine supplies, we will be able to begin the transition process away from the Emergency Orders.

Tonight I wish to announce that my Government will seek the approval of Parliament for one final extension of the Emergency Orders.

This will be the last extension of these Orders.

After approval by Parliament, I can announce, that the Emergency Orders will end, at the very latest, November 13th, 2021.

Tomorrow, I will table in the House of Assembly for consultation, the new proposed legal regime for The Bahamas, with the end of the Emergency Orders.

We will table for widespread public consultation, the Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Management Bill, 2021.

Let me emphasize, that this is only a draft.

It is not the final Bill.

We will table it for consultation because we want your advice, and your feedback.

We seek the advice of the Official Opposition.

We would like the input of the religious community, businesses, NGOs, labor unions, other organizations and individuals, so we can make the legislation more representative before final passage and enactment.

Again, I emphasize that the Bill is being tabled for consultation.

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

I would like each vaccinated Bahamian tonight, to speak with two friends or relatives who are not vaccinated.

Encourage them to take the shots.

Explain to them how the process worked for you.

Answer any questions they may have.

Do not argue or row.

Do not fuss.

Be supportive and reassuring.

Each of us must work with those we love to help them on their journey to being protected from this virus.

As part of our new plans to expand our vaccination program and to transition away from the Emergency Powers, I want to make a very clear statement:

My Government will not make vaccinations mandatory.

We understand that some Bahamians still have questions.

Some Bahamians still are doing research.

Some are still uncertain.

We will continue to work day in and day out to make vaccines available to everyone who wants to be vaccinated.

We will continue to provide medical and scientific information to help you make your decision.

But be assured that my Government will not force Bahamians to be vaccinated.

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

This remains a difficult time for our country and for the world.

With cases remaining high let us all commit to following the public health rules to beat back this wave.

If you do not need to be out, please stay at home.

When out, please wear your mask properly over your nose and mouth.

Please wash or sanitize your hands regularly.

Please, stay physically distant from others when out.

Please, avoid mass gatherings.

The more disciplined we are over the next few weeks,
the quicker we can reduce the spread of the virus.

We have beaten back waves before.

We can and will do so again.

Dear Fellow Bahamians:

Last week, our country was filled with pride, with joy, and with enthusiasm when we celebrated Shaunae Miller Uibo and Steven Gardiner winning gold at the Tokyo Olympics.

I congratulate them and all our athletes once again.

All of our athletes including our gold medalists, demonstrated to the world, that Bahamians have more than the will and the determination to survive.

We have the willpower to overcome.

We have the endurance, the stamina and the willpower, to triumph, in the face of adversity.

Our athletes, like our Bahamas during this pandemic, endured many trials, setback, doubts, and sometimes difficult nights and days.

But they summoned their resilience and their courage.

They summoned their fortitude and they were victorious.

We are more than proud of them. They have given us renewed inspiration, especially at this moment.

Someone else who would have been very proud of our athletes, was the Hon. Arthur Dion Hanna, one of our Founding Fathers and former Governors General, who passed away last week.

I again offer the condolences of the Bahamian people and the Government of The Bahamas to his family,

including my parliamentary colleague, the Hon. Glenys Hanna Martin and her siblings.

Arthur Dion Hanna believed in the Bahamian people, with all of his heart and soul.

He was constant, in his unshakeable faith in Bahamians.

At this hour we draw on his spirit and on his faith.

And we draw on the spirit and example of our world champion athletes that we will overcome, that we will triumph in our battle against this disease.

After her race, Shaunae spoke to The Bahamas and to the world about her faith in Almighty God.

I want to now borrow her words and her prayer, “I thank God, I thank God.”

Let us thank our God for one another and for how far He has brought us.

Let us continue to call on His holy name.

Please stay safe.

May the God of all blessings continue to guide and
to protect our Bahamas.

Thank you for listening.

Good evening.

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