



MINISTERIAL STATEMENT TO THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

BY THE HONOURABLE KIM N. WILSON, JP, MP

MINISTER OF HEALTH

UPDATE ON THE TRAVEL AUTHORIZATION PROCESS

15 July 2022

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

In early June I announced changes to the Travel Authorization that improved the process for travelers, and we continue to see travelers having better experiences due to those changes. The improvements included:

- All travelers can start the TA process up to 30 days before their departure date. They can go online, fill out the form, and pay \$40 early rather than waiting until just prior to their travel date. We continue to encourage applying for a TA as early as possible to prevent the TA becoming an urgent matter when that situation can be avoided.

- All travellers receive a 'pending review' response, and then, later, an email is sent closer to their travel date reminding them to upload their negative test result. The TA review is completed once the test is uploaded, and at that point the traveller receives a final response.
- Residents who do not intend to upload a pre-arrival test, receive an approved TA based on their vaccination certificate, and they are tested on arrival at the LF Wade International Airport.
- Cruise passengers with Norwegian, Royal Caribbean and Carnival Cruise Lines – who are the majority of our cruise visitors – get an approved TA based on their vaccination certificates. Their negative test result is checked at the pier when they board the ship, and they do not need to upload it.
- TAs continue to be prioritised as follows: for air arrivals, by arrival date; for sea arrivals, by departure date.

That was June.

Mr Speaker,

Starting last Sunday July 10, 2022, another set of improvements to the Travel Authorization (TA) form launched successfully. There are additional upgrades in progress and being completed which will provide an enhanced travel experience, which I will now explain.

First, **Mr Speaker,**

The TA application form has been simplified to exclude questions that are no longer relevant given the current status of the COVID pandemic such as asking travelers to provide a list of the countries visited prior to arriving in Bermuda, and how many family members are travelling in their party. The answers to these questions were relied upon to guide our travel surveillance policy but, at this time, that information is not required.

Second, **Mr Speaker,**

Repeat travelers to Bermuda can automatically complete their TA based on past applications. This very key improvement allows the repeat traveler to avoid duplication of effort.

To explain, **Mr Speaker** -

- At the beginning of the application process, repeat travelers will be asked to provide their email address.
- A one-time verification code will be sent to that email address. Once that code is entered into the application form, it will bring up a list of traveler names who have submitted previous travel authorization applications linked to that email address. The relevant name or a family member's name can then be selected, and all general information from their previous application will automatically load into a new application form. General information includes the traveller's name, contact details, and passport details.
- The verification process ensures that travelers will not see TAs for anyone not tied to their email address, to protect privacy.
- As a security measure, the one-time code will only be valid for 10 minutes.
- Travelers will only have to complete new information pertaining to their new trip, that is the flight or cruise details. All the information is editable except for the name and birthdate.

Mr Speaker, there is a third improvement -

Vaccinated residents previously needed to upload their vaccination certificate to the TA each time they completed the application. I am pleased to say that the TA system and the island's vaccination data are now linked. Locally vaccinated residents, residents who have been vaccinated overseas and have added their overseas doses to their Bermuda vaccine record, and repeat visitors will no longer have to upload their vaccine documentation. Again, this is another significant improvement using technology that will assist in ensuring a smoother traveling journey for visitors and residents alike.

Also, **Mr Speaker**,

The TA process used to require the traveller to read and acknowledge legal disclaimers and confirm the accuracy of the information they provided by initialing in two places: on the application form and on the approved TA waiver. This has now been condensed, and the traveller provides initials only on the approved TA waiver.

Mr Speaker,

As I said, these upgrades and enhancements were introduced last Sunday – and the call centre has received numerous compliments about them – but it does not stop there. We continue to further refine the system to create, as best as possible, a stress-free TA experience for the traveler.

Mr Speaker,

Future travel authorization improvements will include:

- A faster application review process by automating the review of vaccine and test documents, to confirm they meet Bermuda's entry requirements. This feature will expedite the review process which is currently largely manual.
- Additional features to ease the application process for families and groups travelling together are in development. Now that families can auto-complete their family's TAs based on previous applications, the next step is to group those family applications together so that they can be reviewed and approved simultaneously to avoid the current mix of approval times for families travelling together.
- The ability for travelers to check on the status of their TA application is another feature that is anticipated in the near future.

- The ability for travelers to change the travel date on a TA application if travel plans have changed will soon be an option for the traveler as well. Currently, when travelers' plans change and they need to revise their travel date, they must contact the call centre to have the changes made.

Mr Speaker,

As I have noted previously, there are three key things to remember about Travel Authorisations:

- They are there to protect our borders, to ensure, to the extent possible, we can prevent cases of Covid from being imported. This protects both our visitors and residents.
- The TA scheme is vital to help fund the island's Covid-19 response. The TAs pay for the pandemic support they provide; testing at the borders, community testing for those that are unable to pay for testing, case management for those who test positive and the associated administration.

- The TA form also captures information used by the Bermuda Tourism Authority, the Department of Immigration and HM Customs.

The Ministry of Health continues to work with all our stakeholders to provide a Travel Authorization process that is streamlined for travellers and that contributes to a safe Bermuda community for us all.

Thank you, **Mr Speaker**.