



**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
TO THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
BY THE HONOURABLE KIM N. WILSON, JP, MP
MINISTER OF HEALTH
UPDATE ON THE MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19
26 November 2021**

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

This time last year, I provided this House with an update on COVID-19 public health guidance. At the time, we had about 270 confirmed positive cases and one or two people in hospital. That was the beginning of our second wave.

As I speak to you today, with our fourth wave dwindling, we have had 5730 confirmed cases of COVID-19, more than 300 hospitalisations and, sadly, 106 COVID-10 related deaths in the community.

While the fourth wave exacted a toll on us all, we in the Ministry of Health are convinced it would have been worse if not for the level

of vaccination in the community. Vaccines do work. Our island data proves this.

Mr Speaker,

The next step for all of us in Bermuda is to learn how to live with COVID-19. The pandemic is not over, so we must continue to follow public health guidelines to keep ourselves, our families and friends safe.

As I have stated in this House before – and this is well worth repeating - success in dealing with COVID-19 requires a community effort. It is a community effort because this is one of the few situations where an individual's decision to adhere to public health measures – or not – impacts all of us. In this pandemic, individual choices can and do have island-wide consequences.

In keeping with the decrease in levels of community transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19, the Government is making the following changes to the Public Health (COVID-19 Emergency Powers) (Phased Re-opening) Regulations 2021:

- the size of large groups will increase from 30 to 50, and this includes weddings and funerals, as well as Island Boats in respect of the use of SafeKey, ,
- in, restaurants, members clubs and bars, tables no longer need to be spaced 6ft apart, however, for the time being, these establishments will still be restricted to seated service only.
- with respect to recreational boating, raft-ups are permitted once again, and,
- students enrolled in a school testing programme will be able to use a “Student 7-day Pass” (issued after a negative test result) to dine indoors with their parents or guardians who have SafeKeys and attend youth sporting and recreational activity that requires a SafeKey.

Mr Speaker,

Having a school student testing programme in Bermuda’s public and private schools has provided a great opportunity for flexibility when it comes to dining. It applies to students that are 11 years old and under. For young children, who are 4 years old and under, they will be able to dine indoors at a restaurant as long as their parent or guardian has a SafeKey.

We will be working with the schools to implement the “Student 7-day Pass” as early as next week.

Additional public health guidance will be amended to state that remote working is no longer strongly recommended. Offices can be open with proper public health measures in place. Also, movie theatres, galleries, museums are to be allowed physical distancing of 3ft with masks being worn at all times indoors.

The legislative and guidance changes will take effect from Monday, 29 November.

Mr Speaker,

I cannot over-emphasise the importance of continuing with good public health measures: wear a mask, wash your hands and maintain a physical distance of 6ft from others in crowded indoor and outdoor settings and, particularly if you do not know the vaccination status of the people you are with.

Again, to repeat myself: this is not the same as choosing not to wear a helmet or choosing not to use your seatbelt, where the

person you are most likely to harm is yourself. Failure to follow public health measures has a far more significant impact, as the virus spreads quickly throughout our island home, affecting families, schools, businesses and more.

Mr Speaker,

In addition to assessing and making changes to the Emergency Powers Regulations, the Government is reviewing the island's travel protocols as well.

Taking into consideration vaccination levels within countries where the majority of our travelers are coming from, and vaccination levels here in Bermuda, we are looking at amending our requirements to ensure we are competitive. We will be changing the pre-arrival test requirement to accept antigen tests, which are less expensive and easier for travelers to Bermuda to acquire, as well as PCR tests. We are also reviewing the follow up testing once on island.

The changes are aimed at allowing vaccinated visitors to begin enjoying Bermuda quickly without an extended period of quarantine upon arrival.

Finally, we are making adjustments to enable residents who travel abroad for less than 72 hours to use their pre-departure test obtained in Bermuda, as their pre-arrival test upon their return. This will facility quick trips overseas.

These changes will require amendments to the Quarantine (COVID-19) (No. 3) Order 2020, and will be finalized shortly.

Mr Speaker,

Visitors to the island support hotels, restaurants, bars and taxis. They participate in a variety of experiences and visit the diverse attractions the island has to offer. They rent minicars and mopeds and, in general, provide an invaluable boost to our local economy. In short, visitors support jobs.

As we put in place protocols and policies which will support our economic recovery, it is only natural to consider our border controls and traveler testing regime.

Mr Speaker,

The Ministry has learned a lot about this particular virus and how to cope in a pandemic over the past, almost two years. The learning curve was steep, and the impacts of COVID-19 on the island and the world were unprecedented in our lifetime.

As Christmas gets closer, I would like to take this opportunity to provide public health advice on how to manage as we live with COVID-19. And learn to live with it; we must. The Government has worked to strike a balance between risk mitigation and the economic impact of taking precautions. With 70% of the total population fully vaccinated – and 79% of the eligible population vaccinated – the emphasis shifts to economic recovery.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

You will be aware that one of the most important steps an individual can take to ‘stop the spread’ is to simply wear a mask. That remains! And it applies whether or not you are vaccinated.

Masks should be worn by:

- workers at all workplace premises;

- people using public transport or taxis;
- any person visiting any indoor establishment, such as a grocery store, shop, bank, office, etc., unless otherwise allowed by specific guidance such as that which applies to bars, restaurants and gyms; and,
- in crowded outdoor settings when other persons are present, and a 6 feet distance cannot be maintained.

Also, **Mr Speaker,**

As we attend Christmas parties in the coming weeks, please be aware that social mixing is identified, through contact tracing investigations, as a primary means by which COVID-19 transmission occurs. Social mixing can lead to a less robust adherence to public health protocols, so I strongly encourage everyone to be careful and responsible.

Mr Speaker,

Above all, vaccination is key to living with COVID-19. It reduces the severity of COVID-19 if you get infected, and it reduces hospitalisations and deaths.

As reported yesterday, the booster vaccine is now available to anyone 18 years of age or older who has had their second COVID vaccination dose a minimum of 6 months ago.

You can book an appointment on gov.bm by selecting 'Book a Booster Vaccine Appointment'. Alternatively, individuals can call the Vaccination Hotline at [444-2498](tel:444-2498) (option #2) or email vaccine@gov.bm.

For those who are 65 and older, they can walk into Pier 6, Monday to Friday, for a booster.

Mr Speaker,

In closing, I would like to say this Government is very aware of just how difficult it is to effect an economic recovery whilst still in the midst of a global pandemic. At this stage, it is critically important for personal responsibility to come to the forefront.

Wear a mask, practice good hand hygiene, keep physically distanced from others, particularly in indoor settings and crowded outdoor settings, download the WeHealth app and avoid the three “Cs” of crowded places, closed spaces and close-contact settings.

Mr Speaker,

We have worked hard and worked together to reach this point in the pandemic. Our continued commitment to robust public health protocols is critical, and I want to thank the entire Bermuda community for its efforts.

Thank you, **Mr Speaker.**