



PRESS CONFERENCE REMARKS BY
The Minister of Health
The Hon. Kim Wilson, JP, MP,
BERMUDA'S STRATEGY ON VACCINATION HESITANCY
Wednesday, 12 June 2019, 12:30 p.m.
Hamilton Health Centre

Good morning

In April I announced during Vaccine Week in the Americas that The Ministry of Health had outlined plans to address the low vaccination coverage for children at six months of age. Today I am pleased to share the results of our initial investigation of the state of Vaccine Hesitancy (VH), which is defined as the delay or refusal of vaccinations.

Bermuda, like many countries worldwide, is experiencing a growing public health concern regarding low vaccination coverage which increases our vulnerability to re-emerging vaccine preventable diseases, such as measles.

In addition, Bermuda is a major travel destination, and is at increased risk for importation of many of the vaccine preventable diseases such as diphtheria and pertussis (whooping cough).

This is very concerning for Bermuda and poses significant implications and risk from vaccine preventable diseases.

Research of possible approaches to address vaccine hesitancy led to the World Health Organization European Regional Offices' "Tailoring Immunization

Programmes” (TIP) guide. This is an effective tailored, evidence-based, people-centered approach and the best way forward for Bermuda. The aim of the strategy is to increase Bermuda’s vaccination coverage by 10%, by the year 2021.

Preliminary ground work in Bermuda has been done by a working group including school executive PTAs, health officials and physicians to investigate and identify local concerns. The group helped to identify five major stumbling blocks that lead to refusal or reluctance to be vaccinated: trust, education, service delivery, effectiveness of vaccines and legislation/policy.

Further, it was determined that the four major target groups to whom access to Bermuda’s immunization programme is crucial are parents and infants, adults, seniors, travelers, and healthcare professionals.

The Department of Health will now be engaged in an action plan to address underlying barriers that contribute to low rates of vaccination.

The Department of Health will:

- Implement a client exit survey initiative to understand the delivery of vaccination services
- Develop a phone application to provide the public with reliable information on vaccines, clinic services, child growth, and real-time news updates where needed.
- Organize the annual flu drive for staff in the fall. The Department will organize “Take the Lead” which was piloted last year in November 2018.
- Create opportunities for platforms for the public to express concerns about vaccination, including public forums similar to the forum held last month with a representative from the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia

To accomplish this we need the help of all Bermuda residents to join us in our effort to protect our community from vaccine preventable diseases. We are asking residents to ensure:

- With the help of parents, children are vaccinated according to the recommended schedule to increase rates of MMR vaccination
- Travelers have the appropriate vaccinations before travel and be alert of their health when returning home
- Seniors obtain the vaccinations they need to live well
- Healthcare professionals take the lead in being vaccinated
- Persons in occupations at higher risk of exposure to vaccine preventable diseases are aware of their vaccination status.

The highest quality research has proven that vaccines are safe and effective. The evidence available makes it clear that the complications from these diseases can be life threatening.

We look forward to the public feedback and input as we continue to collaborate and make Bermuda Healthier.

ENDS