



GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA
Department of Communications

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

27 April, COVID-19 Update

Today we joined in mourning with family and friends of those who have lost their lives to COVID-19. Yesterday's news of the passing of a resident of Westmeath, is disheartening, and our prayers go out to the family and friends of the Bermudian whose life came to an end, yesterday, to become Bermuda's sixth victim of COVID-19.

At our press conferences, we announce the numbers of cases, the numbers of hospitalized and the numbers recovered. But behind every number is a family, a family with hopes and dreams just like ours. And unfortunately, six families who weren't ready to say goodbye to someone, they love.

We're deeply sorry, and saddened by your loss and call on all of Bermuda to extend their prayers and best wishes to everyone who has been impacted and continues to be impacted by this virus.

It has been the Government's position that enhanced testing capability is a necessity and a priority. We believe this because that would better position the Government to protect the health and safety of Bermuda, and make informed policy decisions about how we operate during this pandemic and allow us to open our economy.

With today's new results that keep Bermuda, as a leading jurisdiction in the Caribbean, when it comes to tests, and also gives me the optimism that we will be able to start a very slow, and I repeat slow, rolling back of our economic restriction next week.

I am satisfied that the testing regime and criteria is reflective of the nature of this pandemic. And today, we have the testing capacity and the supplies that we need, and it is noted that we are also making sure logistically, we can handle this increased amount of tests. In fact, it is

important to note that on Saturday and Sunday, 380 tests were performed through our new drive thru facility. This increase in testing has enabled us to provide many of our essential and critical workers with the reassurance that while they have been on the front lines they have not contracted COVID-19, and I'm grateful for that outcome and for their service and sacrifice.

Given the model that we have used for this testing, where we are running it through a government owned lab with 667 tests, which have already been processed, or in process at the government lab, this is saving the country money. If this was done via the traditional method, via doctor's referrals and through insurance companies, the bill to the country for these tests would have been in excess of \$200,000. But, with the model that we have chosen these tests to date, have cost the government less than \$20,000, which is a great savings to the country, at a time when it is certainly needed. There is no denying the importance of testing, and this government will spare no effort to address this threat to our community with a rigorous approach to providing the invaluable knowledge, these results bring. And now for an update on today's testing results, and additional matters for the Ministry of Health. I will turn it over to the Minister of Health, the Honorable Kim Wilson.

The Minister of Health reads her remarks.

Thank you Minister Wilson. And now the Minister of National Security will give an update on matters relating to his ministry.

The Minister of National Security reads his remarks.

Thank you very much Minister.

Shelter in Place is a health measure that was put in place to flatten the curve, which means reduce the number of persons who get the disease at any one time. It is effective in suppressing the spread of COVID-19 and it saves lives and prevents our healthcare system from being overwhelmed. So far this measure has succeeded and our test results today are showing that. But, we must continue to make sure that our actions do not increase the spread of this disease. However, it is unquestionable that Shelter in Place has impacted the emotional, psychological and economic well-being of many members of our community and this weighs heavily on the decisions that the Government makes.

To address an aspect of the economic impact and how the government has addressed it, Minister Foggo will provide an update on the COVID-19 Unemployment Benefit, which was put in place as a bridge, before financial assistance, and as the Minister of National Security has made clear, unlike financial assistance, it is made available to those persons who are non-Bermudian here on work permits, and who are unable to leave the country due to the restrictions that are in place.

Minister Foggo reads her remarks.

Thank you very much Minister Foggo.

Just to reiterate what Minister Foggo said, those persons who qualify and have not been paid yet, the Government will process those payments tomorrow and the money will be in your account tomorrow or they may go into your account overnight and be there on Wednesday.

As I read this statement this evening, a number of committees are working on ideas and putting plans in place to rebuild our economy and to improve people's lives. We have reached out to the public seeking for feedback and ideas. If you haven't already submitted your ideas, please visit forum.gov.bm. Over 100 persons to date have submitted their ideas. I want persons to go there and join the conversation. Vote for the projects or the ideas which you think make the most sense, so that we can actually have a conversation in a place where the persons who are going to be making the decisions, on how we are going to move forward, will be able to see these items in one place.

Our Ministers have reached out to the Opposition seeking their feedback and ideas and earlier today I had a productive meeting with the Opposition Leader on how we can work together even better. We believe that no matter how talented, educated, or experienced we may be, during this unprecedented crisis, we are stronger working together, thinking together and planning together to make sure that collectively we can build that better future.

Tomorrow the Cabinet will meet and with the advice of the technical officers in the Ministry of Health we will determine the next steps post Shelter in Place. We have observed the lessons of countries that opened too far and too wide, too soon and, we will not make those mistakes. Our solution must fit Bermuda, fit the cases of COVID-19 on our shores and ensure that the health and safety of everyone is protected. That will always be at the forefront of all of the decisions we make.

We will be examining how far we are able to go to get people back to work and back to their regular lives without jeopardizing the health and safety of our community. Let me be clear, we will not return to life as we knew it before COVID-19 for the foreseeable future. We must maintain social distancing and balance that with the opening of our economy and our community.

The conversation in Cabinet tomorrow will not only be about how we will reopen our economy but also how we can transform it. How together we can shape a Bermuda that will work for everyone.

We do not have to be constrained by the limits of the past, and as is seen in the way that we are implementing testing, which is saving the Government a tremendous amount of money, we can do things differently and make sure that as we go forward, we take different approaches to our traditional problems.

There are many in the community who have donated to those who are in need, and there are those who continue to assist our vulnerable. We are indeed all our brothers' keeper and our sisters' keeper and I want to thank you each of you for your hard work and dedication.

We will emerge at 6am on Saturday May 2 into a different Bermuda. Yet, I am of the firm belief that if we work together, we will be able to survive and thrive in the post COVID-19 world.

I will end today on a personal note. This weekend we saw the passing of the former Speaker of the House, the Hon. Stanley Lowe, OBE. As I said in my tribute to him yesterday, he was a man for all seasons. I appreciated the time I spent with him, learning about his work and also the significant contributions he made to Bermuda. I extend the heartfelt condolence of the Government and people of Bermuda to his family.

COVID-19 has changed the way which we do everything, even how we say goodbye to our loved ones. Instead of the customary condolence book, which would have been at the Cabinet Building for Bermuda's first black Speaker of the House, and the longest serving Progressive Labour Party member of the House of Assembly. We have created an online version. Those who wish to share fond memories and words of comfort for the family should go to www.remembr.com/stanleylowe.obe.jp, and I will make sure that that link is posted to the government website so you don't have to write the long link you can just go to www.gov.bm.

Finally, I would just like to give a few thank yous this evening. I would like to thank, in addition to Dr. Weldon, I would like to thank Dr. Kyjuan Brown, Dr. Amne Osseyran-Foggo, and Dr. Cindy Morris. The Public Works team led by the Minister of Public Works, the Hon. Col. Burch and happy birthday Colonel Burch, the Permanent Secretary, Randy Rochester, and to all of the nurses, and students that have been working at the testing facility at Southside for the past four days.

They have put in long hours to make sure that Bermuda's essential and critical workers were tested over the weekend. 600 tests in three days is an incredible feat, and I've just got a report that there's been 240 additional samples, which have been collected today, thus far. You are showing that determined Bermudians, working together will get the job done and get it done successfully every time.

If you are an essential and critical worker, I encourage you to get tested, and the link can be found on the government website.

I would like to also express my appreciation to the team at Workforce Development. Minister Lovitta Foggo, the Permanent Secretary, the acting director, staff and all Public Officers across the Public Service, who stepped forward to form the Unemployment Benefit Project Team.

As I've said many times the government is not closed, the Department of Workforce Development does not have 97 employees, but there's 97 members of the Public Service who have pitched in to that effort to make sure that it's happened. It has been a project that we started from the very beginning, but we have been able to deliver this relief, which is going to be much needed for many of our families during this time.

What I will say is, while there is sadness in our community, we must also be able to celebrate our successes. The success of getting a program up like that running, the success of us moving forward so that we can have drive-through testing in this country, so we can continue to maintain our leadership, are successes and it's showing that not just the government, but all sectors of the community are pulling together to work together to ensure that Bermuda can be successful. With that, I'm happy to take questions from members of the media.