

## 28 May COVID-19 Update

Good afternoon Bermuda.

On the eve of the day in which we celebrate our heritage, our culture and all things Bermudian and a day when many of us would normally be locking in our parade spot and setting up our camps, we recognize this will be a Bermuda Day unlike any other in our recent memory.

Many will experience a virtual Bermuda Day Parade in place our usual floats, majorette bands and gombey. Some will be boating without rafting up, and family gatherings will be smaller and require physical distancing; all things very alien to us as Bermudians but very necessary.

The announcement of more confirmed cases of the coronavirus over the past few days is a reminder that this virus is still a very real threat. With the reopening of the economy and our aggressive testing regime, we expected that more cases would be identified. And while no news of any new cases of the coronavirus could be considered good news, the early identification of these cases means that as a community, we are better placed to contain the transmission of this virus.

Our Real Time Reproductive Number remains below one, and we remain among the world leaders in testing per capita. I expect to receive a presentation on the revised modeling numbers within the next week. As we did previously, we will share the details with the Opposition, Members of Parliament, the Senate and other stakeholders, and we will provide an update to the public at a future press conference.

We currently have the supplies on island to test 12,000 people in Bermuda, which is about a two month supply at our current test rate. Additionally, we have enough testing kits to conduct a further 180,000 tests. We have PPE to cover the needs of all of our essential workers and the hospital has enough beds to avoid being overwhelmed at our current rates of transmission.

However, the numbers announced over the past few days means we must remain alert and continue to follow the physical distancing guidelines. These guidelines apply to the young people in Bermuda, who are socializing without masks. I cannot stress enough the importance of wearing a mask. There are some in our community who do not have symptoms of the coronavirus yet have this virus, and can spread it to others, meaning that you can spread to others, and then infect vulnerable family members. That is why

wearing a mask is crucial, you're protecting those around you, and you are helping to prevent the spread of the virus.

The island is currently in Phase 2, Expansion of Services. As a government and as a people, we do not want to go back. We want to continue progressing with the opening of our island ensuring that more of our fellow Bermudians can get back to work, to safely provide for their families. The Ministry of Health is continuing to monitor this pandemic closely and has developed a set of indicators that can judge how well our country is doing in all the metrics required to keep this virus at bay.

Furthermore, the resources and support of the government, the Opposition, public officers, the private sector, our union partners, and other stakeholders are all tasked with working together to ensure employees can get back to work safely, at the appropriate time, while preserving the health and well-being of everyone on our island.

The trust that you've given us, the support you've provided us, and the responsibilities you've placed with us, are things that we consider sacred, and we will continue to make decisions that will keep each of us safe, as we move forward with the reopening of our economy and getting people back to work.

At today's press conference I'm joined by the Minister of Health, the Minister of National Security, the Minister of Public Works, and the Minister of Finance, who will give various updates on respective issues within their remit.

First we will hear from the Minister of Health, who will update on the latest cases, speak about the importance of shielding our vulnerable in light of the seniors who were recently hospitalized with COVID-19 and the regulations in place for retail establishments. Minister of Health.

#### MINISTER OF HEALTH SPEAKS

Thank you Minister of Health, and congratulations to the team that works in the Department of Communications who put up on the new website, [coronavirus.gov.bm](https://coronavirus.gov.bm), which is easy to follow and you can find the great amount of information is much easier to access now.

I just want to reiterate what the Minister of Health has said on the importance of shielding. If you are a family member of someone who is in a vulnerable population, and you decide to put them at risk by hanging out with persons who are not wearing masks, then that means you are putting them at risk. As has been stated, there has been recent hospitalizations, of vulnerable persons and that has come from the fact that family members, even though these persons are staying at home, bringing this virus into their homes. I cannot stress enough, that if you are out in public with people who are not wearing the masks, you are putting your family members at risk.

Maintain your physical distance and be smart. Because if you are outside with others, that is the same as your vulnerable family member, being outside - we've seen some of these new cases. I cannot stress it enough that if we are not individually responsible, then we will see more vulnerable persons who are staying at home and following the rules, become exposed, due to persons, family members, that are bringing the disease into their household.

The Minister of Public Works, Lt. Col David Burch has been tasked with chairing the Cabinet Committee on the reopening of our economy. Today, he will provide an update on the decisions reached and changes to the regulations that went into effect today and some additional restrictions for our public parks and beaches this holiday weekend to ensure that Bermuda remains safe.

#### MINISTER BURCH SPEAKS

Thank you Minister Burch.

News of businesses having Bermudian workers stay home while employees on work permits were brought back in, is deeply disturbing to us as a Government that is committed to putting Bermudians first, and is unacceptable. We condemn these actions and encourage anyone who knows, or has evidence, of these activities or any other violation of our immigration laws or work permit policies, to report it. Those who choose to break our laws, skirt our work permit policies, act against the best interest of the country, and against the spirit of unity and togetherness displayed across our island will be dealt with under the law.

Today, the Minister of National Security will provide an update on matters related to immigration and matters related to enforcement.

MINISTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY SPEAKS.

Thank you Minister.

As Premier, I'm confident that the Cabinet Committee, under the leadership of Colonel Burch and comprising the Ministers of Health, National Security, Tourism and Transport, and Education, in their ability able to contain the impact of COVID-19 on the health of our community, while safely reopening our economy, so that persons can get back to work and to provide for their families.

I have now turned my attention to working closely with the Minister of Finance to stimulate and reimagine our economy. The Minister of Finance will now provide an update on matters related to the economy, and others in the Ministry of Finance. Minister.

MINISTER OF FINANCE

Thank you Minister of Finance for that update.

Before I move to some questions from members of the public, and my close, I just want to add a note that this afternoon the Government received confirmation that there will be a charter flight, on Air Canada to Bermuda, on the 5 June, from Toronto.

If you are in Canada, and ordinarily residents in Bermuda, and you wish to return home, or if you are a Canadian resident and want to return to Canada, you should email [info@traveledge.bm](mailto:info@traveledge.bm).

There were a couple of questions which came in on my social media where I put out a request for people to send questions for us to answer. A number of ministers have already answered a lot of the questions which have been asked. I do want to touch on two questions before I close.

One question was, “Are we allowed to attach our moorings and sleep out and stay at our mooring, or do we still have to return home by 7pm?” The answer to that is yes, you must be off the water, as the Minister of National Security said, by 7pm.

Another question which was asked, and this is an important one. It says, “What is the goal when it comes to COVID-19. Is there a certain number of COVID cases we are trying to reach, taking into account that the cure could be worse than the virus when it comes to

economic depression, social, physical, sexual, and mental abuse or lack of other medical treatments.”

I thank that member of the public for their question. The Chief Medical Officer is here today, and informs the Advisory Council with the Minister of Health and others, and this was a matter of which we discuss earlier today. The truth is that the Government of Bermuda's policy is not the complete and total elimination of the virus from our shores. Though that would be great, it would require unprecedented economic damage and unprecedented isolation for that to be the case. And it would require our borders to remain closed until there is a vaccine, and for all persons in Bermuda or enough persons in Bermuda to be vaccinated.

That is not the policy of the Government of Bermuda. The policy the Government of Bermuda, is to aggressively test, trace, and isolate cases, and make sure that we enforce physical distancing and the requirements to minimize the transmission of the virus in our shores.

As the Minister of Health indicated during her remarks, next week we will be unveiling a dashboard which will be updated and will show the public in a very simple green, yellow and red on where we stand on the various indicators which are necessary and responsible to either move us to future phases or require us to go back to previous phases. That is the policy of the Government of Bermuda. We are trying to balance it but we are not trying to move forward in a spirit of keeping our economy closed in an attempt to completely eliminate the virus from our shores. You are correct, there are lots of repercussions and in some cases the cure can be worse than the disease.

In closing, we are facing a future that will require creativity, adaptability and delivery by the Government, and by each and every one of us. We all have an important role to play, and we must each step up, step forward, as we collectively raise our game as a country. Whatever we are doing, wherever we are working, we must show up and give that 100%. Delivering a full day's work to make sure that our economy can become stronger; our island's future depends on it.

On the eve of Bermuda Day we must embrace the values, strength and resilience of our people. Those values of strength and resilience that we have displayed throughout our history. Over the centuries, we were built our economy, again and again, and over the centuries we have reinvented ourselves.

We had to be innovative and offer the world, things of value and appeal. Our island of farmers and fishermen groups become sloop builders, whale hunters, pearl divers and then changed to become leaders in tourism and International Business. As a country, we did not

come this far, by saying, "that's not my job", or being unwilling to do what it takes to succeed and make our island home better.

As we continue to move through this pandemic, we recognize every country around the world is facing similar issues. How to rebuild their economy and get their people back to work. We have a lot of advantages here in Bermuda, given the fact that we are small, and we are nimble, and we have the skills and the ability to do things differently.

It's very important that each of us do what we can, where we can contribute to our country in a positive and productive manner.

It is important that as we pause this weekend to celebrate our heritage, it is very important that we look towards the future, and remember that the only persons who can shape the stories which they'll be telling in future heritage days are those of us right now who are living through this pandemic. Before I take questions, I wish everyone a happy and safe Bermuda tomorrow.