



GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA
Department of Communications

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

20 August COVID-19 Update

Good afternoon members of the media, and members of the public who are watching at home.

Today, I am joined by the Minister of Health and the Minister of Finance who will provide information from their respective ministries. The Minister of National Security is also joining us this evening and is able to answer questions members of the media may have.

We will begin our press conference tonight with an update from the Minister of Health. Minister.

Minister of Health reads her statement.

Thank you Minister of Health.

I would like to reiterate your message of the simple steps that we can all take to reduce the risk of additional spread of the virus. Wear your mask. Stop shaking hands. Be careful with your interactions and keep the physical distance. Remember many people, who are carriers of this virus are asymptomatic. That means they don't have a fever, they are not coughing, they literally have no symptoms and they feel perfectly fine. If you are asymptomatic and you are at a funeral, unmasked (which is against the law) hugging senior citizens, after a weekend of partying on the water, you could be unknowingly transmitting the virus.

Remember this virus requires a host – us humans. If it cannot jump from one human to another it will not spread. I know how boring it is to keep your physical distance. I know how tedious it is to make sure you follow the rules and to wear a mask. We have all heard

the stories from overseas of family dinners and outings that ended with multiple family members being lost to the virus.

Let's not let our guard down, we can still enjoy ourselves – but we must be smart and keep each other safe. Rest assured as we have done for the last five months we will continue to protect Bermuda and its residents.

You have heard me, others, and even overseas media state that Bermuda's COVID-19 testing regime for arriving passengers is the most stringent in the world. The new measures that will be introduced by the Government effective next Tuesday, will ensure that persons who do not have a pre-departure test are subject to more strict requirements.

There have been some who have asked why do we not just require a 14 day mandatory quarantine for all arriving passengers. A mandatory fourteen day quarantine for all arriving passengers would effectively shut our tourism industry and close our hotels, putting over a thousand Bermudians out of work.

One of the recommendations of the Economic Advisory Committee was to reopen our tourism industry with effective protections through aggressive testing and use of technology. The government has done that and we will continue to strike the right balance between keeping our country safe and rebuilding our economy.

The Minister of Finance will now speak more on the steps the Government is taking to ensure a strong and broad-based economic recovery. Minister of Finance.

Minister of Finance reads his statement.

Thank you Minister of Finance and congratulations on the most recent debt offering from the Government of Bermuda. Although the figure is large, it is noticeable that the Government of Bermuda will pay less cost on interest on an annual basis, after this debt raise than we did before. So that is \$6 million that will be saved due to the reduction of interest which can be either saved or used for other priority items. So I want to congratulate you Minister of Finance for that excellent work, which you managed to accomplish and I just reiterate as I say to all persons inside of Bermuda that the country is fortunate to have you as our Minister of Finance.

As the Minister of Finance has stated, we are setting the stage for economic recovery, by ensuring the Government can support the development of new industries, by providing funding and other measures at the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation, by making sure we keep the business that we have and expand the business that we have and continuing to meet with stakeholders to ensure Bermuda has all hands on deck to continue the work that we've already started to rebuild our COVID-affected economy.

Wearing my Tourism hat, the Government of Bermuda continues to work with stakeholders to ensure that we can get more Bermudians back to work in hospitality.

It is noticeable that there will be more hotels scheduled to open in the coming days and weeks and this is certainly going to be a relief to workers who are looking to get back to providing for their families and off of Government assistance.

To support the Public Health Offices at the airport, the Bermuda Tourism Authority has introduced a Tourism Ambassadors programme to answer general questions about Bermuda for travellers. They provide details about tourist attractions, restaurants, operating hours, etc.

The Tourism Ambassadors, appropriately attired, are stationed at the airport greeting tourists, thanking them for coming to Bermuda, and answering queries they may have. The Ambassadors will continue to serve throughout this time, and as the numbers of arriving tourists increase, so will the number of Ambassadors, ensuring hospitality and great customer service as they arrive.

I have been asked to relay a message by the Minister of Education. So I will relay that now.

Representatives from the Ministry of Education and the Bermuda Union of Teachers (BUT) have been meeting during the past few weeks to discuss the reopening of our Public School System in September 2020.

There was extensive discussions about the entry to exit safety and health protocols for the various school levels, staffing, school hygiene supplies, the hybrid learning model, the cleaning of schools, and the first week of school.

Recognizing the safety and health of students and school staff is paramount, the Ministry of Education and the Bermuda Union of Teachers both came to the agreement that it would be best to delay the return of students by three school days until Monday, 14 September to afford staff the time to learn and take on board the numerous safety and health protocols to ensure a safe environment for staff and students.

School staff will still return on 1 September. The additional three days will allow full professional development for staff to focus on safety and health protocols for: entry to exit of school buildings, isolating sick staff and students, special services programmes, school evacuations and the requirements for food services, as developed by the Department of Health.

Before I close, I want to speak about the Government's online forum for the post COVID-19 economic recovery.

First, I want to thank, as the Minister of Finance has thanked, the persons who have taken the time to share their ideas. Most of the respondents were imaginative, thoughtful, creative, and pioneering. I wish to remind persons that it is not too late to submit an idea and continue to engage on the forum.

The ideas covered everything from tax reform to repealing the Spirits Act; a law that made it illegal to distill alcohol but legal to brew beer.

There were people who wanted a totally pedestrianised City, and people who wanted to be allowed to use their pensions to invest in local businesses whose plans had been approved.

Some of the ideas which have been submitted have already been put into place. But the vast majority of the submissions were also about how we in Bermuda could be more innovation than what we have.

In the past it was said that necessity is the mother of invention. Meaning that when push comes to shove, or a want becomes a need, that is when people invent. After 2020, people may come to say, COVID-19 is the Mother of Innovation.

That has to continue to be Bermuda's story. We must continue to be innovators. It is the innovation that we have seen that has made Bermuda one of the best testing jurisdictions on the planet earning plaudits around the world. It is innovation that was driven by Bermudian scientists, Bermuda technology companies and Bermudian ingenuity and hard work.

It is the same innovation that has seen businesses evolve their models and showing more and more delivery services and others who have adapted to the new times and the new normal. We've also seen it in the retailers who are adopting their business models so they can better service not only locals but also visitors. And then there are those in our tourism industry who are modifying how they are servicing customers in the middle of a pandemic – and in some cases not even waiting for airlift but developing their own so they can make sure to keep Bermudians employed.

This is the ingenuity the country must continue to have as we move forward during this economic recovery. What I can state is to date we have done a good job and we have certainly managed to while keeping our testing regime in a very strong place that it has certainly helped us but we must continue to advance.

Before I take questions from the media, I will let you know that next week will be the last weekly press conference.

With schools reopening, this wonderful location will transition back to the use of The Berkeley Institute. What I will let you know is that individual ministers will continue to hold regular press conferences at the A B Place Media Room. However the A B Place Media Room will not be large enough for effective social distancing for all ministers to be in one place at the same time. So we will have these press conferences on a regular basis and I will also make myself available as it is important that we continue to answer the questions from the public via the media that you may have.

I am pleased to now take questions from the media for any of the ministers who are here in attendance.