

PRESS STATEMENT
Premier
The Hon E. David Burt, JP, MP
Tuesday 16 February 2021, 5.45 pm

Good Evening Bermuda,

Tonight I am joined by the Minister of Health, the Hon. Kim Wilson, who will provide you with an update on the latest vaccination statistics, rule changes for immunized persons, and further updates from her Ministry.

Following the minister of Health, I will update the country on the COVID-19 regulations approved by the Cabinet earlier today which will be in effect for the next two weeks, matters surrounding Bermuda's tourism economy, and preview the House of Assembly which resumes on Friday.

I am overjoyed to be joined again today by the Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Ayo Oyinloye, who will assist with any technical or medical questions from the media.

First, we will hear from the Minister of Health...

Thank you Minister of Health, four active cases is great news. I thank you and your team for your incredible work through all phases of the pandemic. Thanks largely to the work of the Ministry of Health team, we are among the world's leading countries in managing the coronavirus, particularly in regards to testing and vaccine doses administered.

Including the vaccine doses administered yesterday, Bermuda is now #7 in the world in the number of vaccine doses administered relative to population size. We are #5 in the world for testing per capita - and we would be higher if we included our saliva PCR tests in that figure. Through this work, we have managed the spread of the coronavirus, and therefore, we can further ease public health measures for Bermuda.

Today, in line with recommendations from the Ministry of Health and with the support of the COVID-19 Cabinet Committee, the Cabinet has agreed that all public health regulations remain in place as follows:

- Indoor funerals can hold up to 25% of the maximum capacity for the venue in which they are held.
- Outdoor funerals can be attended by up to 50 persons.
- Table size in restaurants, bars, and nightclubs remains at ten persons.
- The maximum size for group gatherings in a private or public setting remains at 25 persons.
- Boating curfew remains at 8 pm.

The Cabinet has approved the changes to the following regulations.

- The 12 am - 5 am curfew, will come to an end and the last night of curfew will be on Wednesday Night.
- All liquor licensed establishments will now be allowed to remain open until 12 midnight, giving them an additional hour of operations as they have previously been required to close at 11 pm. The reasoning for this is similar to the rationale I provided two weeks ago for keeping a curfew in place. It is still critical to keep social mixing at a safe level, especially in situations where alcohol is consumed.
- Businesses will no longer be required to close at 11 pm, and as long as they are not a liquor licensed establishment, they can remain open. The means that you can get your late night food again.

These changes will come into effect on Thursday, February 18th, at 6 am. Until these measures officially change, please continue to adhere to the curfew as it stands now - as the enforcement of the law will continue until Thursday morning. All measures will be reviewed by the Cabinet in two weeks.

The Government is pleased to announce the end of the curfew and has no desire to reimpose such measures again. However, it is crucial for everyone to understand that the Government will not hesitate to take action and reimplement regulations should this become necessary to stop another outbreak.

It would be understandable that members of the public will ask what the Government is doing to help ensure that ending curfew now does not lead to a rise in cases later. The Minister of Health stated at our press conference two weeks ago; saliva screening has been ongoing since September of last year for Bermuda Hospitals Board staff, long-term care staff and residents and select essential and hospitality workers.

In order to be proactive and ensure we remain able to manage any spread of the virus, enhanced community and occupational saliva screening will start this weekend, beginning with local sports teams.

This screening programme will then expand to include other groups that the Ministry of Health identifies as necessary to screen.

The Government is keen to get sports to Return to Play in full, and we appreciate everyone's patience as the country battled the pandemic and got the latest outbreak under control. Contact sports can be a high risk setting when it comes to COVID transmission, so we have to be cautious in allowing return to play in case there are any latent cases in the community that we have not detected which could lead to renewed outbreaks.

Saliva testing to participate in close-contact training will commence this week, starting with the sports with the largest proportion of registrants. On Thursday and Friday, we will be testing the football national team players, and domestic clubs next week. Volleyball, which has 100% registration, will test on Saturday and Sunday. Next week further sports will be rolled out.

The Government encourages all close-contact sports athletes aged 11 years or older, wishing to participate in Stage 3 training to register for saliva COVID testing as soon as possible so that a testing date can be set up for your sport.

While we had initially contemplated commencing Stage 4 of sports this week, due to the slow take-up of testing registrations and logistical delays in rolling out the testing, we will have to wait a little longer for Stage 4 (contact sports competitive play) to begin.

Realistically we can't safely allow a contact sport to go to Stage 4 with only a small proportion of athletes testing, so I encourage all contact sport players aged 11 and older to register today. Your sporting body has been sent the link for your registration, and it is a very quick and easy process.

The Government is determined to ensure that we do not hastily remove the legislative mechanisms that helped us successfully navigate this pandemic until we are confident that the coronavirus no longer requires Bermuda to be in a state of a Public Health Emergency. This Friday, February 19th, the House of Assembly will reconvene and will debate an extension to the Public Health Emergency Order upon the recommendation by the Minister of Health.

This Friday the Government will also debate cannabis legislation that was tabled in the House of Assembly by the Attorney General in December. This legislation is in keeping with the Government's election platform pledge to develop a regulated domestic cannabis industry in Bermuda that will create new economic opportunities for Bermudian entrepreneurs while enhancing protections for young persons in our community.

I look forward to this debate, and I encourage all persons to tune into the debate on 105.1 FM, www.parliament.bm, or on www.bernews.com.

As Bermuda and other countries progress with vaccinations, we must also consider how we will safely increase visitor arrivals to support Bermudians who are in the hospitality business. Supporting tourism is good for our economy.

As the Minister of Health announced, the rules for vaccinated travellers will change effective Monday March 1st. This is an early step that we can take as we look to increase safe tourism to Bermuda. It is the Government's hope that our reputation as a COVID-19 safe destination, our reliable testing regime and our top 10 global ranking vaccination statistics will encourage vaccinated travellers to visit our island in the coming months.

As we prepare to welcome vaccinated tourists to our shores, we need to step up our tourism marketing. The BTA is looking to capture more sports tourism and wedding business in Bermuda. To ensure that we can effectively market to this segment, a task force has been set up to streamline the process for large event approvals for both our local entrepreneurs and tourists who may wish to host events in Bermuda. This task force consists of representatives from the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of National Security, the Bermuda Tourism Authority, and the Ministry of Youth, Culture & Sport.

I will also assure all Bermudians that our focus will not solely be on our borders and tourism. The Government is aware that domestically there is work to be done, to improve the everyday lives of Bermudians, and we will continue to execute plans to stimulate our domestic economy.

Phase 1 of the Ministry of Public Works Economic Stimulus Program has over 100 applicants. This program offers small and medium-sized contractors the opportunity to work on infrastructure construction projects. The Ministry estimates that projects will provide work for 243 people. I am thrilled that so many companies applied to be a part of this program and I want

to commend the Minister of Public works and the team at the BEDC for ensuring such wide participation of entrepreneurs.

As I wrap up, we know that many in our community may need extra emotional support. If you need someone to talk with, call the Emotional Wellbeing Hotline. The phone number is 543-1111. The line is operated Monday to Saturday, from 5 pm - 9 pm.

This help is available if you need someone to talk with, whether you are:

- feeling anxious;
- feeling isolated;
- or if you are not feeling yourself.

Again, the phone number is 543-1111. Please call as help is available.

To get accurate, reliable and timely information sign up for the Government's WhatsApp service. Add the phone number 504-6045 to your contacts and send us a simple message saying 'hi', and you will receive WhatsApp updates from the Government.

Additionally, you can get Government updates by downloading the Treefrog app - go to the App Store or Google Play, in the search bar, type in Treefrog Bermuda and download the free app today.

In closing; Bermuda, we are close to coming to a place where we can end this perpetual reality of living under a public health emergency. It is up to all of us, as a community, to stay committed to actions that will help move us forward. We must continue to wear our masks, maintain physical distance, practice good hand hygiene, download the WeHealth Bermuda app and adhere to the Public Health Regulations that remain in place.

When it is your turn, please register to get the COVID-19 vaccine. As I have stated in the past, the Government's goal is to vaccinate 19,000 people by March 31st. Including vaccines administered yesterday, we have now successfully administered over 13,155 doses. We must all work together so that our energy, time and resources can be devoted to rebuilding our island, diversifying our economy, and getting more Bermudians back to work.

It has been a blessing to be able to speak to you tonight about the future, rather than solely discussing restrictions and regulations. While the pandemic is not over, we have all worked hard to limit its impact on our daily lives here in Bermuda. We are an excellent example to the world and the sacrifices that those who call Bermuda home have not been in vain. We are 7th in the world in vaccinations, and 5th in the world in coronavirus testing; these are statistics that should make us proud. We have done this by working together so I ask that we all continue to work together so that we can end this public health emergency and hopefully have a summer that Bermudians and vaccinated travellers can enjoy.

Thank you.