



GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA  
Cabinet Office

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**Department of Communications**

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Coronavirus Update - 19 September 2021**

The Government of Bermuda is tonight releasing an interim coronavirus update, to keep residents fully informed of all aspects of our current situation. Following tonight's interim update, a full update will be provided tomorrow evening from the Ministry of Health as scheduled.

Regrettably, the Ministry of Health reports that since the last update on Friday, sadly there have been four (4) additional coronavirus-related deaths.

#### **Coronavirus Statistics:**

Since the last update, the Ministry of Health received 6,521 additional test results since the last update on Friday, and 259 were positive for the coronavirus, giving a test positivity rate of 4%.

These new results are from testing done on:

- Wednesday, September 15: 165 positive out of 3,306 tests (positivity of 5.0%)
- Thursday, September 16: 94 positive out of 3,215 tests (positivity of 2.9%)

Additionally, since the last update, there have been 66 recoveries and sadly four Coronavirus-related deaths.

There are currently 1427 active cases, of which 1376 are under public health monitoring.

Earlier this afternoon the Bermuda Hospitals Board confirmed a total of 51 Coronavirus Disease (COVID) cases in the Hospital with 12 persons currently in intensive care. The BHB reported 3 new COVID discharges and 2 new COVID admissions.

### **Coronavirus Testing Update:**

The Bermuda Molecular Diagnostic Laboratory (MDL) has processed an extraordinary amount of tests over the past 2 weeks. The team has worked tirelessly, around the clock to get results out as quickly as they can. However, the increasing number of positive results have led to delays, as they require further verification before issuance.

MDL has now completed testing for all of Friday's samples and will expect to have the results from Saturday's testing complete this evening. The Government thanks the staff at MDL, the staff at the private labs, and all of the testing teams who have also had to manage increased demand for testing over the last few weeks.

Bermuda does not have a shortage of testing supplies, but to be sure that we can maintain the reliability of our testing regime, community testing will be scaled back to enable the timely reporting of results.

Priority for testing will be testing at the border, symptomatic cases & close contacts, exit from quarantine testing, and vulnerable/essential population surveillance (rest homes, students, prisons, healthcare workers). Asymptomatic casual contacts and SafeKey testing will be de-prioritised for the next 2 weeks as we aim to focus our testing resources on the testing required to end this outbreak.

To reduce the number of tests that go to MDL, for destinations that accept rapid antigen tests for outbound tests (all flights except flights to Boston and Canada) the Ministry of Health will transition to these tests for outbound flights later this week. Further details will be announced in the coming days.

### **Comments from the Minister of Health:**

"My heart goes out to the families and loved ones of the deceased. As a community, we are again harshly reminded of the fatal nature of this virus.

"Due to the increase in testing volumes and increased positive results, our teams have experienced delays in testing and processing results. Currently, our testing priorities are symptomatic cases, close contacts, arriving passengers, and long-term care facilities.

“Several of our long-term care facilities have COVID-19 outbreaks involving staff and patients. The Ministry of Health has instituted enhanced surveillance in the affected facilities. Those long-term care facilities that do not currently have outbreaks should ensure that they have an appropriate outbreak control plan in place to protect their staff and patients. They must also continue to follow all public health guidelines according to best practices. Many of the long-term care facilities are experiencing critical staff shortages and the Government is supporting long-term care facilities with necessary support staff, equipment, and supplies.

“Bermuda’s COVID-19 testing volume remains high, and we are no longer accepting walk-ins at any of our testing locations. As a reminder, those people who require time-sensitive outbound travel tests should use the services of one of the private labs, Helix Genetic and Scientific Solutions ([helixbermuda.bm](https://helixbermuda.bm)), or C & S West Limited ([cswest.bm](https://cswest.bm)). Both of these labs are certified to carry out COVID-19 testing and diagnostics. As MDL is processing thousands of tests each day, a private lab may be a quicker option at this time for those who must travel.

“Everyone in our community has an individual responsibility to help stop the spread of the coronavirus. We are all in this together, and we must all work together to ensure our community is safe. The Delta variant has caused significant infections in our community. I urge those who have not been vaccinated to speak to their doctor about getting vaccinated. The COVID-19 vaccines work to prevent severe illness, which sadly in some cases can be fatal.”

#### **Comments from the Premier:**

“I extend sincere condolences to the families of the four members of our community who have very sadly lost their lives to this virus. Beyond the case, numbers and statistics are real people. People who are suffering from Covid, families of those who have sadly passed away and still others who are concerned about how this virus may impact them as a close contact.” Premier David Burt stated today as the Island continues to deal with the latest outbreak of the Coronavirus.

Premier Burt continued: “The sheer number of positive results is compliments of our aggressive testing regime. In some countries close contacts, especially in household settings, are not tested. We aim to test as widely as possible because we want everyone to know their status and have the ability to protect others or themselves. The amount of testing we have done has taxed the MDL Lab significantly and so we have worked this last week to build in desperately needed redundancy so that its 24hr operation can be sustained. We have a reliable and professional testing regime, and it remains a critical part of pandemic management.”

On the call for more or stricter regulations, the Premier said: “Restricting personal freedoms is never the first choice. When we imposed shelter-in-place, we did not have other things

available to protect the public. Now that all residents have had the opportunity to get vaccinated, we cannot resort to lockdowns as the first response. The vaccine provides us with a means to avoid blanket actions that can cause economic and social harm even while necessary in certain circumstances to deal with public health concerns. Due to our high level of vaccination, we do not have to stop everything in the midst of this outbreak, but we expect rigorous enforcement of existing Public Health Regulations that will change the trajectory of this outbreak.”

“We have seen an increase in registrations for vaccination and to ensure that the demand can be met I have made a request through the Governor for additional vaccine doses from the UK and the expectation is that we will see them arrive before the end of the month. Now is the time for people who have been hesitant to get vaccinated to speak with their doctors; this is especially important for those whose employment is in a high-risk setting. Healthcare workers, caregivers for the elderly, and teachers should speak to their doctor about getting vaccinated.”

The Premier concluded: “Right now our principal concern is the healthcare system and especially the hospital. The scale of this outbreak has stretched their resources and the key to allowing them to continue to provide the standard of care necessary for the sick is to provide needed relief for the staff. My office is coordinating an effort to source relief staff from other jurisdictions to ease the demands on our nursing staff in particular. This journey will be long for some patients battling the coronavirus and not only must we be concerned about their care, but the hospital must also be able to attend to the acute care needs of others.

**Please note updates below on various public services:**

**New Automated Contact Tracing Form:**

On Friday the Government announced a new form to allow persons who have tested positive for the Coronavirus to share their close contacts so they can be automatically notified. Earlier today, the Government was alerted to an issue with this new online Contact Tracing form. The form was taken offline in order to investigate and rectify the issue. The form was put back online at 2:45 PM this afternoon and is available for use.

#### Public Bus Service Update:

The Department of Public Transport (DPT) advised that there will be no bus service on Monday, 20 September 2021. On Friday evening, DPT confirmed that the bus service had been interrupted due to industrial action taken by the Bus Operators. The operators raised concerns regarding health and safety standards in the workplace.

The DPT remains fully committed to ensuring the safest possible environment for all DPT staff and will continue the sanitisation practices and safety measures required by the Ministry of Health, including daily deep cleaning of all busses.

Discussions were held over the weekend, and tomorrow the DPT management will meet again with the BIU to address concerns raised by the staff with the hope that the public bus service may resume on Tuesday.

#### Public Education Update:

Students and teachers will return to in-person learning once it is safe to do so and the data supports it. Each school will be assessed individually, and the data that is being reviewed includes the percentage of students that have consented to the Saliva Screening Programme, COVID-19 testing results, and staffing availability. The Ministry of Education will be sending a detailed release this evening on matters related to education.

#### Government Cashier Services:

The Accountant-General cashiers, on the ground floor of the Government Administration Building, will be closed this week. All taxpayers are encouraged to make payments through the E-tax system or online banking. You can gain access and register on the E-Tax system 24/7 via the Government Portal or directly at [www.etax.gov.bm](http://www.etax.gov.bm).

Support will be provided to those who require assistance in setting up and using the E-tax system to make their payments to the Government. For those persons who require the services of the cashiers for tax payments, the Office of the Tax Commissioner will be flexible with deadlines and penalties during the period when the Cashiers' desks are closed.

Persons who need to meet statutory deadlines for payment of stamp duty can submit their documents to the Office of the Tax Commissioner, to be stamped once the Cashiers office re-opens.

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