



NATIONAL STATEMENT: COVID-19

Delivered by Dr. the Hon. Christopher Tufton

Minister of Health and Wellness

10 March 2020

Ladies and gentlemen of the press,
Representatives of the Ministry of Health and Wellness,
Other stakeholders.
Good afternoon.

Thank you for joining us this afternoon for what is an important development with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

Jamaica today confirmed its first imported case of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) here in Kingston.

The patient is a Jamaican female who had travelled from the United Kingdom, which has cases of COVID-19. She arrived in the island on March 4, presented to the public health system on March 9 and has been in isolation since then.

Based on the patient's travel history and symptoms, health professionals suspected COVID-19. A clinical sample was collected and sent to the National Influenza Centre, where laboratory tests confirmed the diagnosis today at approximately 11:00 am. The patient and family members have been informed.



The patient's infection was travel-related. However, steps are being taken to prevent the risk of community spread.

These measures include:

- The dispatch of a health team to the home of the patient for assessment and initiation of public health measures.
- The identification and contact tracing for all possible exposed persons.
- Meeting of Ministry officials with members of staff at the hospital and the necessary interventions put in place.

In addition, imposed travel restrictions remain in place. In fact, three countries have been added to the list of five (China, Italy, South Korea, Singapore, and Iran) that was previously made public. They are Spain, France and Germany.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade and I met this morning with the ambassadors of those countries, together with the ambassador for the EU and have informed them that based on the risk assessment of community spread of the virus in those countries that travel restrictions would be imposed.

Further, I would like to advise that:

- Public gatherings are discouraged.
- Non-essential travel is discouraged.
- We continue to patrol irregular border crossings.
- Sensitisation of key personnel at all air and sea ports is ongoing.
- We have designated FOUR (4) quarantine facilities and others will be identified.



- We are finalising the retrofitting of isolation facilities in each of the island’s public hospitals.

On the readiness of the island’s health system, the Ministry has:

- Developed the local capacity to test for the virus, thanks to training provided by the Pan-American Health Organization. It is on that capacity that we relied for this test result.
- Assessed the readiness of our health facilities to meet the anticipated increase in demand on services.
- Continue to address existing gaps, including with respect of additional supplies and equipment, though, at the present time, we have enough personal protective equipment in the island for our health facilities. We also have adequate stores of respiratory medicine for the next three months.
- Trained and continue to train health care providers.

These efforts are supported by a communications campaign to keep each member of the population updated on the virus and its impacts and with oversight is provided by Prime Minister Andrew Holness-led National Disaster Risk Management Council.

I have also named a COVID-19 Response Advisory team that will support the Ministry of Health and Wellness’ planning and coordination with respect of this public health challenge. The members include:

- Mr. Howard Mitchel, former president of the Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica;
- Mr. Christopher Zacca, CEO, Sagicor;



- Mr. Owen Ellington, former Commissioner of Police;
- Rev. Devon Dick, Jamaica Baptist Union;
- Dr. Marina Ramkisoon, Deputy Associate Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, UWI;
- Commander Wenyss Gorman, JDF;
- Lieutenant Colonel Sydney Powell, JDF; and
- ACP Calvin Allen, JCF.

The Ministry is also urging the public to adhere to infection prevention and control measures, notably to:

- Maintain a distance of at least one metre from persons who are coughing or sneezing.
- Frequently perform hand hygiene by washing hands thoroughly with soap and water or using a hand sanitizer if hands are not visibly soiled.
- Cover our mouths and noses with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, and then discarding it.
- And resist the habit to touch our faces.

For additional information, the public is encouraged to contact 888-ONE-LOVE (663-5683).

I want to use this opportunity to appeal to the public to remain calm and to implement all the advisories relating to personal hygiene, social distancing, and overall infection prevention control. The Government of Jamaica will continue to keep the public informed as we manage this public health challenge.



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