



9 July 2020

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **9 July COVID-19 Update**

Good afternoon Bermuda.

Joining me for today's press conference are the Minister of Health, the Hon. Kim Wilson and the Minister for Public Works, the Hon. Lt. Col. David Burch.

I will start this evening by expressing the condolences of the Government of Bermuda to the family of Mr. Amon Brown who was killed this week during a domestic related incident. Our prayers and best wishes go out to Mr. Brown's family, friends and colleagues.

There has been intense speculation and heightened media attention in the circumstances surrounding the event, which took place at Blu Restaurant. Some persons think that my decisions were harsh. Some think they were justified. Others think they did not go far enough. This job requires me to make tough decisions every day. And over the past four months, the tough decisions have been like ants at a summer picnic. Numerous.

However, it is a responsibility that I take seriously, and my oath requires me to execute them without fear or favor. That much being said, there seems to be a new effort to extract political advantage, while looking to besmirch the names of persons with headlines and rumour.

My wife had asked me to take a few days off this week, and so the Deputy Premier was expected or supposed to be here today. However, I've come in to answer questions that members of the media may have, so that we can draw a line under this saga and return to the important issues that our country is facing during a pandemic that will continue to affect our island home, both healthwise, and our economy.

Beyond the public face of politics which is played out in press conferences, in the House, Senate or on the doorstep, there is a personal connection that is formed between those of us who choose to serve our country in this way. Inviting two committed and dedicated Ministers of the Government to resign gave me no pleasure.

As I said in my statement on Monday evening, I am immensely disappointed in the events that led to this. However, as a country, we have worked too long and too hard over the past few months to contain the spread of COVID-19 in Bermuda and our demands for public compliance with rules and regulations mean nothing if we are not prepared to live by them ourselves.

I have spoken to both MP Caines and DeSilva and I am satisfied that they understand and accept my decision. Both men worked tirelessly during the months of the pandemic response to keep Bermudians and Bermuda safe and to support our economic recovery. Their energy and zeal demonstrated a genuine care and concern for the people of Bermuda. I will remain forever grateful for their contributions. Because few know how difficult it has been for those of us in leadership over the past few months, but they know what it feels like.

I have asked the Minister of Education, Diallo Rabain to serve as the Acting Minister of National Security and the Minister for the Cabinet Office, Wayne Furbert to serve as Acting Minister for Tourism and Transport.

It is my expectation to ask the Governor to make new appointments to the Cabinet next week Wednesday. With those introductory remarks, I will now ask the Minister of Health, the Hon. Kim Wilson to address the country. Minister Wilson.

Minister reads her statement.

Thank you Minister Wilson.

With the new imported cases, I have received repeated questions as to whether or not this is the right time to open Bermuda to the outside world or should we have waited longer?

The decision to open the airport to scheduled commercial flights is not about putting profits or the economy over public health. It is about making sure that people in this country have the opportunity to get safely back to work, to provide for their families. Since we have opened the airport to scheduled commercial flights on 1 July, there have been six flights to Bermuda. Most recently, two flights arriving this afternoon. As the airlines add Bermuda to their schedule will see more Bermudians is returning home, and more visitors to our island.

It is important to remember that Bermuda's testing regime, at our border, is the most stringent regime in the world. There is no country that requires the amount of testing that Bermuda requires in order to keep our country safe.

The Minister of Health has reported that since we opened the airport three travelers have tested positive. This testing is in place precisely for this reason, to identify and isolate anyone who has the virus. We were able to

test and get the results back quickly, in order to inform those who are confirmed positive to ensure that they are quickly isolated.

As the Minister of Health has made very clear, a visitor that does not have clearance will not be boarded, and therefore will not be allowed to come to Bermuda. We also recognize that it is difficult for Bermuda residents to access testing whilst overseas, and we cannot legally deny residents entry into their own country.

However, if the situation in the United States continues on its current trajectory, we may need to change rules to require residents who are traveling to the United States to require pre departure tests before their return.

We will continue to look at all issues and as the Minister of Health has said update our procedures based upon the risks that present themselves. I however, want to ensure that Bermuda remains an example to the world on how you can manage the various risks that this virus presents appropriately balances risks to ensure that our economy can recover, while we keep the virus in check.

And the key to that is testing. And as I said, we have the most aggressive test regime when it comes to travelers on the planet, and we are confident that this will help to keep our country safe.

With that, I now invite, Col. Burch, the Minister of Public Works to give an update on the work of the Cabinet committee tasked with safely reopening Bermuda. Minister Burch.

Minister Burch reads his statement.

Thank you Col. Burch.

As more Bermudians are returning to work, I want to reiterate what the Minister of Finance stated last week. If you have received money through the Unemployment Benefit programme, companies and individuals must notify the Government that they returned to work. You can do this by visiting [www.bermudajobboard.com](http://www.bermudajobboard.com), follow the link at the top for COVID-19 Unemployment Application, then click on the Back to Work form.

As we prepare for another weekend, we must remember all we have learned the last few months about containing COVID-19. We are in the midst of summer activities which includes spending time with family and friends, enjoying the beach, boating, and other outdoor activities.

Inevitably, many of these activities include alcohol. If you plan to drink, please don't drink and drive. Remember to maintain physical distancing, wear a mask and wash your hands with soap and water. When soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizers. It is a simple refrain. I know that I sound like a broken record, but the truth is that this is the most effective way to ensure that we continue to keep this virus at bay.

The responsibility for helping to keep the COVID-19 confirmed cases low lies with each of us, and is especially important now as we have reopened our borders, and we have a few imported cases which we believe are

appropriately managed, but we have to make sure that we are extra cautious. With that, I'm happy to take any questions that members of the media may have.