



GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA  
**Department of Communications**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**23 July COVID-19 Update**

Good afternoon, Bermuda.

Today, I am joined by the Minister of Health, the Hon. Kim Wilson, the Minister of National Security, the Hon. Renee Ming, and the Minister of Labour, the Hon. Jason Hayward. I welcome Minister Ming to her first press conference.

I'm pleased to join you again today as we continue to update Bermuda on the matters surrounding your government's response to the coronavirus pandemic and the work that we are undertaking to ensure that we can repair the harm to our economy that this once in a century event has caused.

We will start this evening with an update from the Minister of Health. Minister.

Minister reads her statement.

Thank you Minister of Health.

It cannot be understated how well the country has responded to the threat that this pandemic has posed. I would again like to thank the teams at the Ministry of Health, who have worked flat out for the last six months.

The reopening of our borders have meant more testing. A few months ago we set a target for 200 tests a day. For the last week we're now averaging 450 tests a day. As the airport has more flights that will be more testing is required.

It has been an incredible effort that has been mobilized to keep our country safe. We should all be proud of the work that is being done from our port health workers, to the testers, to lab technicians, to contact tracers, and the team at the Department of Health.

We are proving to the world that you can reopen your borders with strict controls, while keeping your country safe. While we see the pictures about other countries who have long lines for testing or read the news stories of other places in the world where they are going back into stricter control measures, such as lockdowns and curfews, Bermuda has and continues to do well.

It is important that we keep our guard up. I've been asked many times on social media about the number of tourists being tested versus the number of Bermuda residents. Currently, the system is not set up to quickly separate that information. However, the Minister and the team at the information technology office inside of the Government of Bermuda are working on upgrades the system which will enable us to report those results.

I now invite the Minister of National Security to give an update from her ministry. Minister Ming.

Minister reads her statement.

Thank you Minister Ming.

I know you've had to hit the ground running, but I'm confident that Bermuda will heed the advice which you've given to ensure that as we lead up to our annual holiday, the country will remain safe.

Now, I will ask Minister Hayward to give an update on the activity taking place within his ministry, including the details of the extension of the unemployment benefit.

Minister Hayward.

Minister reads his statement.

Thank you Minister Hayward.

Last week, during the swearing in ceremony of Ministers Ming and Tyrrell, I indicated the responsibility for tourism would move to the Office of the Premier and has been added to my existing responsibility for economic development. I must restate, the need for the growth of tourism is more complex than ever and demands a renewed focus on the economic potential it represents for Bermuda. Bermuda, as a tourism destination, must become relevant again.

Next month commercial airlift capacity to the island more than doubles. 5,000 airline seats in July jumps to about 12,000 available seats in August. On August 1, new direct service resumes on JetBlue from New York's John F Kennedy International Airport and Boston's Logan International Airport.

Meanwhile,

- British Airways **increases** its frequency from London by one day which means there will be three flights a week;
- Delta **decreases** it's daily service by one day to six flights a week; and
- Air Canada **continues** to operate its weekly flight out of Toronto.

Tourism volumes this August are projected to be about 10% of what they were last year. The Bermuda Tourism Authority has been working on an inside-out marketing campaign to generate spending in the tourism industry from residents, while at the same time inspiring travellers to think about Bermuda and then turn that thought into action.

One such promotion is taking place now. The Bermuda Independent Retailer Month, which began July 1, is promoting the Bermuda-inspired retail sector to consumers around the world via the BTA's digital channels. Last week, 27 local retailers who offer click and ship operations, were profiled on the BTA's social media.

Earlier today, an e-mail marketing promotion reaching more than 250,000 customers led with a push to Bermuda retailers in a further drive to stimulate their retail sales.

Between now and the end of the year, there will be additional promotions to stimulate spending in various sectors of the tourism economy including boating, restaurants, spas and tennis. Additionally the Bermuda Tourism Authority will commence the promotion of staycations here on island, where they will profile the deals that are available and the hotels which are currently offering rates for locals.

The BTA and the Bermuda Business Development Agency (BDA) have worked closely with the Minister of Labour, to get the message out about the one-year residency certificate, perfectly suited for remote workers, what I call digital nomads, and post-secondary students.

Minister Hayward announced the policy changes last week and gave some additional clarifications. Since then, the BTA and BDA have worked to have the news story carried in key US media, starting with Bloomberg and then quickly spreading to others, including CBS news.

The form will go live on 1 August, the BTA and BDA will continue to promote Bermuda as a location from which to work. This government's view is that if you can work remotely, which many people have been doing, why not work from Bermuda for the next year.

As I had said in an interview with one of the news agencies, it might be nice to live in a place where you don't have to get into a fight at the supermarket because someone is not wearing a mask, as we are happily a universal masking jurisdiction.

I will also give a brief update on international mail service which although does not fall under the Office of the Premier, falls under the Cabinet Office.

The Bermuda Post Office reports with the increase in flights to and from the UK, mail, parcels and EMS are being sent to the UK, starting with this evening's flight. Likewise, we started to receive mail from the UK on July 17.

There is still no mail between Bermuda and the US and at this point in time, we are not expecting mail to be transported until mid-September when American Airlines starts flying between Bermuda and New York and Bermuda and Miami.

However the Bermuda Post Office continues to explore all avenues for mail delivery between the United States and Bermuda.

Mail from Canada will start arriving in August.

There is another update that I'd like to give, and I'd like to commend the Deputy Premier for working with the Department of Planning which is under his responsibility. Last year, there was a clear drive to make sure that we make government processes more efficient, and one of those places where it was felt that government processes were not efficient were inside of the Department of Planning.

The Deputy Premier will soon be announcing that during May and June, a total of 53 planning applications are received and 81 were approved, resulting in a total estimated construction value of \$46 million, while a total of 154 building permit applications were received and 114 building permits were issued, resulting in a total estimated construction value of \$68 million.

What is important is that the Department of Planning continued to work during the period of restrictions, and it is key to note that planning application times in the Department of Planning have now been cut in half. They've gone from ten weeks to four to five weeks. And this is something that will certainly aid us as we look to continue to stimulate our economy, as we move forward to get more and more persons back to work.

So thank you, Deputy Premier for your work and thank you to the team at the Department of Planning for executing the government's policy of making government more efficient.

On Monday at 7:30pm, the Minister for Community Affairs and Sports, the Hon. Lovitta Foggo and I will participate in a Cup Match Conversation hosted by Sean Tucker, the New Voice of Summer. It will be aired on Government's Facebook page and on CITV. Sean will interview current and past Cup Match players together with Captains and Club Presidents. You can send your questions for the guests to Government's Facebook page.

Before I will end tonight's press conference I would like to speak about a letter that was sent me earlier this week.

*Dear Premier Burt,*

*I want to let you know that there are two heroes working at the COVID-19 hotline, their names are Shirmelle Gomes and Tamisha Archibald. They are the most incredibly helpful, kind, patient and lovely ladies working at the call center, who went above and beyond to assist me this weekend with getting a travel authorization updated in the system when a dear friend couldn't get her COVID-19 negative test result in time for the BA flight on Friday.*

*These two ladies were so patient and helpful with getting the new arrival date updated in the system, I am so grateful for their help and I thought you should know what an incredible team you have working under you.*

*Also, we think you and your team are simply AMAZING and you have done a remarkable job protecting our country, THANK YOU we love you!!!*

Shirmelle and Tamisha are both Government Public Officers who have been assigned to the Helpline. As always, I extend my sincere appreciation to all those persons who are working on the Helpline. That Helpline which continues to be manned and that number is 444 2498.

I also want to express my appreciation to the emergency and essential workers throughout our country. Those as we already mentioned that are involved in our testing, but also those that continue to serve our people at the hospital and our essential workers. Especially to our first responders who are firefighters.

Minister Ming and had an opportunity to meet with the new executive at the Fire Services Association today and I can say the entire country owes them a debt of gratitude. They have been working long hours and they are always the first ones on scene, to make sure that they save lives and keep us safe. So to all of the men and women that are working in the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service I want to say thank you from the Government of Bermuda. You are doing an excellent job and you are being represented incredibly well by your new executive.

Tomorrow the House of Assembly will meet, with 16 items up for debate in our last session before the Cup Match holiday. There are a number of items that are there to stimulate our tourism market with amendments to the Tourism Investment Act, and two Tourism Investment

Orders. One for the St George's Club property, which will enable that property to renovate, and to reopen. And also Rosewood Tucker's Point to enable additional development which is taking place at that property.

There will also be a number of social issues and changes, which will be brought to the fore and passed, including the expungment of cannabis convictions for simple possession of cannabis, the modification of our jury selection regime to make sure that it is more fair and also the addition of luring as an offense under the Criminal Code. Which completes a suite of amendments and changes that the Progressive Labor Party has made in the area of child sex abuse, and also to make sure that we have mandatory rehabilitation for sex offenders.

Persons are able to tune in on parliament.bm, listen on 105.1, or you can also catch the House of Assembly on bernews.com.

Though, we as a country has done well. It is vitally important to remember that this virus can still impact our lives. Though, as the Minister of Health says, we only have five active cases, and those we think that we have caught them at our borders, we must stick to Public Health guidance that we have been given over the last few months.

We cannot, and we must not lower our guard. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of continuing to wear your mask, especially when you are indoors and you are unable to social distance when you are outdoors.

This together with exercising proper hand hygiene and physical distancing will allow us to continue to enjoy the freedoms we do now, while countries and islands around us are going backwards. Let us keep it up to move forward.

Next week is Cup Match week, and therefore we will not be here next week Thursday. However, your government ministers will giving you a final briefing before the Cup Match holiday next week Tuesday.

Before I take questions, I'd like to thank the wonderful Miss Carolann Simmons for this beautiful red and blue mask when she is supplied to me, which I'm wearing even though I'm looking out into a sea of blue and blue mask everywhere. With that, I'm happy to take questions from members of the media.