



## **PRESS STATEMENT**

**The Minister of Health**

**The Honourable Kim N. Wilson, JP, MP**

**Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2020, 5.45pm**

**at Berkeley Institute**

Good Afternoon,

Today there were 362 test results received by the Ministry of Health; and none were positive for COVID-19.

Bermuda now has 153 total confirmed positive cases. Their status is as follows:

- there are 5 active cases, who are
- all under active public health monitoring, and
- none is hospitalized or in critical care;
- a total of 139 have recovered, and
- the total deceased remains 9.

The average age of all of our confirmed positive cases is 59 and the age range of all of our positive cases is from 18 to 101 years.

Overall, 54% of all cases are Black, 41% are white and 4% are other or unknown.

The source of all local cases is as follows:

- 49 are Imported
- 85 are Local transmission, with known contact
- 19 are Local transmission with an unknown contact, and
- none are under investigation

Bermuda's country status remains "Sporadic Cases". The seven-day average of our real time reproduction number is less than 1.

I know there have been many questions about the results we reported as pending last weekend. These were ultimately confirmed to not have been cases and I want to assure the public that this is simply part of our stringent protocols to control COVID-19.

As part of routine quality control measures, results are considered in terms of the present medical history and epidemiological pattern and, if there is any doubt, we isolate and re-test.

Our regime uses highly sensitive tests which can pick up transient positives in asymptomatic individuals. These may have a viral load that is sufficient to be detected but warrants further investigation. Upon the re-testing of these cases, originally flagged as positive, we were able to confirm that these persons were not active carriers of the virus.

Affected individuals were informed and released from isolation and quarantine. However, I totally understand the distress this caused individuals who had to be pre-emptively isolated. While not pleasant, this is course of action is better than the alternative – having potentially positive persons freely interacting with others inadvertently spreading COVID in the community.

I have to applaud the Public Health Emergency Response Team at the Ministry of Health together with the Bermuda Hospitals Board, who took immediate action to identify and isolate all risks. Not only is our testing regime exceedingly rigorous, but our ability to rapidly take public health action to isolate cases and prevent spread truly showed its muster with this incident.

The handling of this situation is a testament to the rigour of our testing system and the efficiency of our public health capacity.

In addition, I'm delighted that BHB has now developed COVID-19 testing capability as well. This added capacity is very welcome as we gear up anticipating to be doing around 1,000 tests a day as of August with the increased flight volume and our stringent testing regime. BHB has been working on this for a couple of months so it could not have come at a better time!

Members of the public may have noticed the number of tests carried out daily by the Ministry of Health continues to rise significantly; due, in part, to the implementation of pop-up testing and, more recently, with the opening of our borders to commercial flights.

This has taken a tremendous amount of planning by teams in Ministries across the Government. Meetings take place daily with a core group of individuals who troubleshoot any issues, identify solutions and keep track of current and future needs; pre-empting any possible issues, misinterpretations or policy tweaks. It is thanks to them that we have been able to successfully action this enormous undertaking.

In particular, I want to give a massive shout out to our testing teams who have been swabbing and processing over 500 tests a day, with those at the airport and at the pop-ups testing hundreds of travellers in just a couple of hours. Their energy, enthusiasm and dedication to public health is beyond compare and I want them to know I deeply appreciate their efforts – the country owes you a debt of gratitude as you help to keep us safe from COVID-19.

As always, I want to urge residents to continue to wash your hands frequently, use hand sanitizer before and after entering any store or public building, shield our medically vulnerable,

avoid congregating in large groups, and continue to wear your mask and keep six feet apart if you are not wearing one.

It is more important than ever that we not take our collective eyes off the ball, for even a moment. If we do, that could lead to increased numbers of patients requiring hospitalization, critical care and, at worst, more fatalities. We are a tiny island and despite very good healthcare service delivery, it would not take much to overwhelm our health system and the hospital.

While COVID did enter some of our care homes, unlike other countries our teams did a phenomenal job containing outbreaks and preventing the sorts of outcomes we saw elsewhere. Yet, despite this, 30% of all cases and 30% of all deaths were related to care homes which is a stark reminder of the vulnerability of this population. We cannot slacken our standards to protect our seniors.

We all have a huge responsibility to care for each other and to protect our vulnerable community. We are our brother's keeper and have an enormous responsibility to each other, to support and help each other and to protect one another.

Physical distancing, mask wearing and hand hygiene are proven protective mechanisms and we need to be constantly on our guard to ensure that we are maintaining these clinical standards for the foreseeable future.

Nobody knows for sure what our future holds and we have to be cautious and safe in how we act today.

As a Government, I can assure you we are doing all that we possibly can to protect you. However, it is essential that we all remember that, ultimately, it is our individual contributions that will go the furthest in determining how we, our families, and our country fare.

Thank You