

**STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER
MOST HON. PORTIA SIMPSON MILLER ON, MP
MEETING TO UPDATE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND MAYORS
ON GOVERNMENT ACTION RELATED TO HEALTH EMERGENCIES
JAMAICA HOUSE, OCTOBER 14, 2014**

I thank you for responding positively at short notice to my invitation to attend this meeting to be updated on the measures being taken by the Government to respond to the current public health emergencies as a result of:

1. The continuing spread of the Chikungunya Virus; and
2. The global threat of the Ebola Virus.

CHIKV RESPONSE

I want to stress that we are in a NATIONAL emergency. I have therefore, assumed a lead role in mobilising the nation and national resources.

This is not a task for Government alone. All stakeholders have a vital role to play.

I have already made public the fact that two weeks ago I activated the National Response Mechanism in an effort to channel more resources – both human and financial – to dealing with the ChikV outbreak.

I sympathise with those persons across Jamaica who have come down with this painful illness. I understand that some MPs even as we speak, are out with the Virus.

I want to commend MPs, Mayors and Councillors who have been active in encouraging your constituents to get involved in the only sustainable way to control and reduce the epidemic – which is, to destroy and reduce mosquito breeding sites. I know some MPs have themselves been active in their communities leading the effort.

I have made a call to the nation for persons to take personal responsibility for removing containers, and clearing areas in which water settles, and where mosquitoes can lay eggs and multiply.

We have called on State resources to provide \$500 million to address some critical areas of the national health emergency response. The objective is to reduce mosquito breeding sites starting with the worst affected areas as indicated by the mapping that has been done by the Ministry of Health.

The allocation is as follows:

- \$150 million to meet some critical emergency needs of the Ministry of Health;
- \$70 million for Parish Councils – \$5 million per parish;
- \$126 million for activities led by Members of Parliament - \$2 million per constituency; and
- The remaining 154 million dollars will be utilized for additional clean-up and vector control activities based on reports from the Ministry of Health in consultation with other stakeholders.

In addition, 131 million dollars was already provided from the Consolidated Fund to the National Solid Waste Management Authority to deal with the backlog in the collection of garbage.

The programme of emergency clean-up is coordinated by a team involving: the Ministry of Health; the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management; the Jamaica Defence Force (JDF); the JEEP Secretariat; the Ministry of Finance and Planning. Logistics Coordination is led by Colonel Daniel Pryce of the JDF. Administrative arrangements, including project registration and payments, are being anchored by Mrs. Lucille Brodber of the JEEP Secretariat.

By virtue of the JEEP Secretariat being located in the Ministry of Transport, Works and Housing, Minister Omar Davies is the Minister with line responsibility for the clean-up exercise. Minister Fenton Ferguson continues to lead the health response.

I have asked Minister Sandra Falconer of the OPM to chair the monitoring group and to report directly to me as well as to the country on a regular basis on the efforts.

EBOLA PREVENTION & EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANNING

We are all aware of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa and more recently of the cases closer to our shores in Texas, USA; as well as in Spain and Germany.

The Government of Jamaica is on high alert and is closely monitoring developments to learn lessons from the emergency management of cases.

Where Ebola is concerned, we simply cannot afford any divisiveness of any kind. We need to be speaking with one voice on this matter. If we don't stop it from coming to our shores and effectively manage it if it does, we all stand to lose. We will suffer. Our people will suffer. Our beloved country will suffer.

As we have seen this, is something that kills, kills quickly and can kill in large numbers.

I know that all Jamaicans are understandably very concerned about the global situation involving the Ebola Virus.

The Government appreciates the need to increase the level of public confidence and trust in our public health system. A National Response to this national health threat requires a comprehensive integrated approach.

Following several weeks of planning, extensive consultations, preparation, and detailed discussions with the senior team at the Ministry of Health, we are putting in place an integrated National Coordinating Team headed by the Ministry of Health and the Jamaica Defence Force, to lead the country's heightened preparations.

This Team will work within the framework of the country's Emergency Response and Management Mechanism now being activated for the Ebola prevention and planning involving all emergency responders.

We will draw on our National Emergency Management Mechanism including resources from the Jamaica Defence Force, Jamaica Constabulary Force, Jamaica Fire Brigade, and other key stakeholders to prepare and respond to this threat.

We have made a request to one foreign government for assistance with our preparations and specifically, the training of our health care professionals.

A detailed Action Plan is being developed with a clear command structure. The action plan will have details for various scenarios, what is to be done, by whom, by when, and with what resources.

We will continue to train and sensitise key stakeholders in the coming weeks including our:

- Political representatives;
- All health workers and their associations in the public and private sectors;
- Trade unions;
- Immigration and Customs; other airport and seaport management and staff;
- Management and staff of all hospitals and health centres – private and public;
- Churches and other community-based organisations;
- The private sector;
- The Media;
- The JDF; Police; ODPEM; The Jamaica Fire Brigade
- Operators of funeral homes
- And others.

A robust National Communication Strategy and Programme is being developed and implemented through private and public sector collaboration.

The public education campaign will rely on proven methods of communication and social mobilisation including the use of mainstream and social media; community networks such as churches, the SDC, Parish Councils, MPs; engagement of trade unions and employers etc. Everybody has a role and a responsibility in this effort. I call on the media, political operatives and all Jamaicans to be responsible in this period.

I know that there are real concerns among the population. Let us discuss those concerns. There is nothing to be gained from inciting panic and fear.

The national plans are being activated and the best possible arrangements are being put in place. The necessary resources are being mobilised.

There has been an initial offer of assistance for funding and other resource mobilisation from some private sector representatives. This gesture is accepted and appreciated. We will continue to engage them as critical stakeholders in this process.

The training of health care professionals has started and is to be increased. We must practise, practise, practise. Immigration, Customs and other airport and seaport staff are being trained.

Training of health professionals commenced in August and is still well underway. Yesterday, Senior Medical Officers and Heads of Departments at our major health facilities islandwide were trained as part of our preparedness exercise. Immigration personnel at Norman Manley International Airport received training last week Monday and their counterparts at Sangster International Airport were trained on Wednesday last week.

These training exercises will continue. There is more to be done. Training will be provided to all key stakeholder groups to ensure full understanding of the protocols and instructions for implementation.

All required emergency protocols and procedures will be rehearsed several times, over and over again, to reinforce skills and reduce the risk of breaches. Simulation exercises are also being planned. Importantly, follow-up will be done to confirm understanding and ensure achievement of training objectives.

A lot of effort has been expended in preparing the necessary protocols and guidance documents to train our key stakeholders in the preparation for and management of any possible Ebola incident. These protocols have been customised by Ministry of Health and are specific to ensure relevance to each stakeholder.

Surveillance at the ports of entry is being increased. Equipment such as hand held laser temperature machines are being acquired through emergency arrangements. Protective gear is in stock at the Ministry of Health with minimal numbers being deployed to health facilities and emergency response teams at the outset. Additional gear is available from local suppliers and

emergency procurement arrangements are in place to access these supplies at short notice. Additional supplies are available overseas with arrangements in place for 24 hour delivery should they be needed.

Isolation rooms are being established at airports and hospitals. A central isolation facility equipped to treat possible Ebola patients has been identified, and is being equipped and staff trained.

The emergency health team is fully equipped to answer the questions that are of concern to Jamaicans and to provide all the information that is available.

We will be increasing our communication. I have instructed the team planning, preparing and monitoring the Ebola threat led by the JDF and the Ministry of Health to be thorough and efficient in their operations. They are to be accessible, upfront, honest, open and clear with the people of Jamaica in all their communication.

Let all of us, as leaders, be guided by the agreed scientific facts and not speculate or express casual opinions which can cause panic and demoralise our front line workers.

Jamaicans are being encouraged to take action as part of our personal responsibility in this situation. Avoid travelling to Ebola affected countries and regions, and truthfully declare your travel history when arriving and departing the island.

We have to join the health professionals in encouraging all Jamaicans to develop healthy practices like regular and thorough hand washing at all times.

Conclusion

Colleague Parliamentarians, I thought I would take the time to bring you, as vital stakeholders, up to date with the ongoing response and planning in relation to the current health emergencies. I continue to enlist your vital support at this time of critical national emergency.

This is our country. We all have a stake and a vested interest in protecting it and in keeping our people safe and healthy.