



**Parliamentary Statement of the Minister of Health & Wellness**

**Dr. the Hon. Christopher Tufton, M.P.**

**Re: Jamaica's Readiness for the Coronavirus**

**Gordon House - Tuesday, January 28, 2020**

---

Mr. Speaker, I rise to advise this honourable house and the nation on Jamaica's preparedness for the new Coronavirus.

In December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) was alerted to several cases of pneumonia in Wuhan City, China, but the virus did not match any other known viruses.

Subsequently, Mr. Speaker, in January 2020, the Chinese authorities confirmed that it was a new virus, determined to be Coronavirus, similar to the virus that causes the common cold, SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) and MERS (Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome).

The WHO's report of January 26, 2020 indicated that the number of reported confirmed cases of the virus is 2,014, distributed on the Chinese mainland and territories.



In Jamaica, Mr. Speaker, a novel virus is classified as a Class 1 reportable disease. This means that it is of highest priority and healthcare providers must report Class 1 diseases/health events on suspicion to the Medical Officer of Health at their Parish Health Departments immediately.

As a matter of protocol, case definitions for the Coronavirus has been disseminated, by the Ministry, to the public health network to facilitate notification.

Mr. Speaker, let me remind this house, that Jamaica is a part of the WHO's Global Influenza Network, an international network of sentinel stations for influenza surveillance. The network also allows for the monitoring of the severity of disease and the impact on vulnerable groups.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) is supporting Jamaica's National Influenza Centre, located at the Department of Microbiology at the University of the West Indies, in implementing the methodology for the molecular diagnosis of the Coronavirus. This will allow local confirmatory testing for the virus.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry has been vigilant in its efforts to keep the public safe from the Novel Coronavirus. We began the relevant

interventions, including:

1. Activation to alert status, the Fever and Respiratory (Influenza-like) Illness protocols, resulting in the initiation of:
  - A Public education campaign to reinforce good hand-hygiene and with emphasis on respiratory etiquette;
  - Enhanced infection control programmes in hospitals and health facilities for preventing, controlling and investigating communicable diseases;
  - Increased stocks of medication and medical supplies in hospitals and health facilities to respond to increase in the number of persons presenting to the health system;
  - Ensure readiness of isolation facilities;
  - Expansion of the extended opening hours at health centres to provide access to at-risk populations to include the elderly and the children under 5 years; and
  - Continued implementation of the overcrowding management plans for the major hospitals across the island.



Mr. Speaker, we have also been maintaining active communication with international health authorities to ensure that Jamaica remains current on international standards and procedures.

There is also ongoing surveillance of all authorised points of entry into the country to detect ill travelers, with thermal scanners monitored by trained staff and facilities for the identification, quarantine and isolation of persons as necessary. Once persons are identified, a cascade of activities will be triggered.

Mr. Speaker, we have also put in place protocols to isolate persons presenting to health facilities who are suspected to have the Coronavirus, in keeping with internationally aligned infection prevention and control procedures and protocols.

We also have in place ongoing surveillance in Jamaica for acute respiratory infections. The data is regularly reviewed to identify unusual patterns in Severe Acute Respiratory Infections (SARI) or pneumonia cases.

Mr. Speaker, a change in pattern will trigger a national response with international support and notification.



Meanwhile, Mr. Speaker, I and a team from the Ministry of Health and Wellness met this morning with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Chinese Ambassador.

Based on those discussions, the Government of Jamaica will continue its surveillance protocols, which align with international health regulations:

1. Active surveillance will continue at our ports of entry.
2. A travel advisory is being issued.
  - Persons in China who were planning to travel to the island are being asked to defer those plans.
  - For those in Jamaica, who had planned on travelling to China, we are asking that they also defer their plans.
  - For persons in transit to Jamaica, our quarantine protocols will be put in place where persons will either be quarantined in facility or at home, depending on the risk assessment done.
3. For families who are concerned about their relatives and friends who are in China for work or study, our conversation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicates that plans have been put in



place to handle the emergent needs. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will speak more broadly to those plans.

I wish to make a special appeal, Mr. Speaker, to all Jamaicans, to pay attention to the standard infection prevention and control precautions, especially as it relates to viral respiratory illnesses.

Mr. Speaker, travellers should avoid close contact with people suffering from acute respiratory infections and frequently wash hands, especially after direct contact with ill persons or their environment.

Persons with symptoms of acute respiratory infection should practice proper cough etiquette, that is, maintain distance from others, cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or clothing, and also wash hands frequently.

In concluding, Mr. Speaker, I wish the members of this honourable house and the Jamaican public to know that the Ministry of Health and Wellness is working to safeguard the public health interest and urge your and their support in making a success of those efforts.

**Thank you.**