

# PM Calls on Jamaicans to Maintain Social Distancing

**P**RIME MINISTER the Most Hon. Andrew Holness has reiterated calls for Jamaicans to maintain the new rules regarding social distancing, in an effort to prevent the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19).

The Prime Minister's call came during a COVID-19 Digital Town Hall, hosted at Jamaica House on March 26.

"What we ask of the public is to listen closely to what the Government is saying, follow the advice that is given from credible sources and make the necessary behaviour change," the Prime Minister said.

He emphasised that Jamaicans, especially those who go into business establishments for essential services, must maintain distances of no less than three feet apart.

"For supermarkets and other establishments of that nature, markets and food establishments, what we have said is that they must maintain the rules around social distancing. Put in place



Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness addresses the nation during a COVID-19 Digital Town Hall, at Jamaica House on March 26.

sanitisation, [so] that there is a sanitisation station at the entrance. These kinds of measures must be in place," Mr. Holness said.

The Prime Minister also reiterated calls for persons

primarily in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector, to practise social distancing, given that they have to work in groups.

"The BPO sector must maintain the hygiene require-

ments, and social distancing requirement. Don't take it for a joke...It is these kinds of social behaviour change that will flatten the curve [of persons who become infected with COVID-19]," he added.

## More Hospital Beds Being Prepared for COVID-19 Patients

MINISTER OF Health and Wellness, Dr. the Hon. Christopher Tufton, says the Government continues to prepare hospital facilities to accommodate more patients, should there be an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases.

"In terms of hospital readiness, we continue to expand on our readiness to deal with any potential increase in the numbers for the island's critical hospitals," he noted at a digital press conference at the Ministry's offices in New Kingston on March 25.

Capacity is being provided at the Kingston Public Hospital, Port Antonio Hospital, Mandeville Regional Hospital, Cornwall Regional Hospital, St. Ann's Bay Hospital, the University Hospital of the West Indies,

Bustamante Children's Hospital and National Chest Hospital.

"We are currently operating at an isolation capacity of some 150 across the island but with the capability to accommodate up to 326 persons, should the need arise," Dr. Tufton said.

Meanwhile, the Government has received material to do about 3,000 COVID-19 tests from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

Chief Medical Officer in the Ministry Dr. Jacqueline Bisasor McKenzie, said "in the event of a spike" in COVID-19 cases, Jamaica's testing methodology will change, and the Government will be able to double the number of tests that they are able to do.



Minister of Health and Wellness, Dr. the Hon. Christopher Tufton.

## BOJ Holds Policy Rate at 0.50 Per Cent

BANK OF Jamaica (BOJ) Governor, Richard Byles, says the policy rate offered on overnight placements by deposit-taking institutions (DTIs) will remain unchanged at 0.50 per cent.

Addressing journalists during a virtual press conference on March 26, Mr. Byles said that the economy could potentially contract by an estimated three per cent, if the domestic and external responses to COVID-19 have to

be sustained for most of the 2020/21 fiscal year.

He noted that the outlook is characterised by significant uncertainty relating to the spread of the virus and the consequent depth and duration of the economic impact.

"In the near term, some upward price pressures can be expected due to supply chain disruptions and weather related increases in agricultural prices. However, these will be offset by a sharp decline in oil

prices and weaker consumer spending power, given the expected decline in economic activity," he said.

In this regard, Mr. Byles said inflation is expected to be at the lower end of the four per cent to six per cent range over the 2020/21 fiscal year, as well as the ensuing eight quarters.

He pointed out that while the outlook reflects significant challenges and heightened uncertainty due to COVID-19,

"the Jamaican economy came into this challenging period on a relatively strong footing in the context of our ongoing economic reform programme".

"I think it is important to emphasise that Jamaica's financial system remains sound, well capitalised and its current holdings of Jamaica dollar liquid balances remain adequate," he noted.



Bank of Jamaica (BOJ) Governor, Richard Byles (right), and Deputy Governor, Dr. Wayne Robinson, at a recent media briefing at the BOJ in downtown Kingston.

## Gov't to Assist Persons in the Informal Sector

MARKET VENDORS, taxi-men, barbers and hairdressers, among others in the informal sector, who are hard hit by the coronavirus (COVID-19), are to benefit from financial support.

Minister of Finance and the Public Service, Dr. the Hon. Nigel Clarke, said that Government is working on a programme, which will provide financial assistance for persons, who may not be formally employed, but are

incurring losses due to the virus.

He was speaking at a COVID-19 Digital Town Hall on March 26.

Dr. Clarke said "the Government recognises that there are several persons in Jamaica, who are informally employed in the craft market, for instance, who have no business now. We know that bars are shut, hairdressers and barbers have less business, and taxi-men have less

people to transport, so, we're working on a programme for this broad group of persons."

He added "we have reserved a sum that we will be transferring to address this segment and a sum that we can supplement with reallocation of expenditure."

Dr. Clarke informed that the Government will provide a grant to persons in these categories, who can be verified through registration authorities.

He noted for example, that market vendors are required to pay a fee to their municipal authority, and all persons up-to-date with their fees, will be able to make an application for the grant, with details provided on their trade and stall numbers.

After those are matched with what their respective municipal authority provides, a payment will be prepared. "We will do a similar thing with craft vendors," he said.



Minister of Finance and the Public Service, Dr. the Hon. Nigel Clarke, addressing a COVID-19 Digital Town Hall on Thursday March 26.



## REDUCE YOUR RISK OF CORONAVIRUS INFECTION



Clean hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub

Cover nose and mouth when coughing with tissue



Avoid close contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms

Thoroughly cook meat and eggs



Adapted from the World Health Organization

#ProtectYourselfFromCoronavirus #StayCoronavirusFree #KeepHealthy

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