

Health Ministry Instructed to Rapidly Expand Testing

PRIME MINISTER the Most Hon. Andrew Holness says instructions have been given to the Ministry of Health and Wellness to rapidly expand testing for COVID-19.

"This is why they have rolled out the [mobile units]. They are going to be increasing the number of tests done," Mr. Holness said in a statement to the House of Representatives on April 15.

The Prime Minister noted that during the early phase of the epidemic, tests were conducted on the cases that were presented and persons who came into contact with those individuals.

He noted, however, that as the country moves into a new phase of the outbreak there will be the need to increase testing.

"We are now entering into a different phase where we are likely to be declared now as having community spread. Now, in that phase you definitely need to be testing widely," Mr. Holness said.

"You need to find out whether or not people have had it and have developed the



Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness addresses a sitting of the House of Representatives on April 15.

antibodies, you need to figure out where the clusters are that you didn't pick up, and that helps in the public health approach," he added.

Under the Ministry of Health and Wellness' testing protocols, specimens are collected and tested for COVID-19 for all suspected cases (as per the case definition), all symptomatic contacts of confirmed

COVID-19 cases, and all asymptomatic close contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases. Tests are also done on all severe acute respiratory infection (SARI) cases from all hospitals, all admitted lower respiratory tract infection (LRTI)/pneumonia cases from all hospitals, all influenza-like illness cases, all healthcare workers who have been

assessed to be at risk from exposure to COVID-19 cases, and all symptomatic health-care workers irrespective of contact history.

The Prime Minister told the House that the methodology for testing deployed by the Ministry accurately captures and reflects the true data as it relates to persons who have the COVID-19 disease.

Auditor General to Review Applications, Disbursement under CARE Programme

MINISTER OF Finance and the Public Service, Dr. the Hon. Nigel Clarke, says the Office of the Auditor General (AG) has been asked to review the application and disbursement processes under the Government's COVID-19 Allocation of Resources for Employees (CARE) programme.

"The temporary cash transfer arrangement for which applications opened on April 9, will provide grants and relief packages to businesses and individuals."

He was speaking during a virtual press conference at Jamaica House on April 14 to provide an update on the Government's COVID-19 response.

The temporary cash transfer arrangement, for which applications opened on April 9, will provide grants and relief packages to businesses and individuals, in order to cushion the economic impact from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

"This process is one that will abide by the greatest level of transparency and, as a result, I have requested of the Auditor General [Pamela Munroe Ellis] that she review the application and disbursement processes... on a concurrent basis.

"Concurrent means that we don't want to wait until the programme has ended for such a review to take place. But, for the review to take place [to facilitate payments] while the programme is ongoing," Dr. Clarke said.

He noted that the Ministry is working with the AG's office to "generate a review draft that will be available to us prior to the first payments being made".



Minister of Finance and the Public Service, Dr. the Hon. Nigel Clarke

Transport Authority Extends Deadline for Renewal of Road Licences

THE TRANSPORT Authority will be waiving fees and extending the period for renewal of road licences.

The objective is to continue the movement of the public transport sector as the country deals with the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Speaking in the House of Representatives on April 15, Minister of Transport and Mining, Hon. Robert Montague, said that the deadline for the submission of Public

Passenger Vehicle (PPV) road licence and commercial carrier applications has been extended to May 29, 2020, once applications are made online.

He noted that late fees for online renewals will also be waived up to this time but not for in-office renewals.

Additionally, new road licence applicants will be allowed up to six months (by October 14, 2020) to submit their police records.

"These changes will only be applicable to persons who apply on the Transport Authority's online application portal at www.ta.org.jm. To access the online application portal, customers must have an active email account and either credit, debit or prepaid credit cards to make payment," Mr. Montague said.

In addition, he said that applications for new and renewal of route taxi licences will not attract any late fees

up to May 29, 2020, noting, however, that these applications must be done through an approved route taxi association.

Persons requiring support with their online application can contact the Transport Authority's Customer Centre at 1-888-991-5687 during the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. daily.



Minister of Transport and Mining, Hon. Robert Montague

Cut in Export Fees a Boost for Manufacturers

STATE MINISTER for Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries, Hon. Floyd Green, says the 50 per cent cut in export-related fees and charges will enable more businesses to tap into the export market and boost Jamaica's competitiveness internationally.

The reduction in the fees came into effect on April 1. It was implemented by the Jamaica Agricultural Commodities Regulatory Authority (JACRA) and the Trade Board Limited.

"With the 50 per cent reduction in those fees, a number of our companies will now be in a better position to export," Mr. Green told JIS News.

"More importantly, we're talking about a \$100 million in fees that they would normally be paying that would now be in those companies to go back into other forms of innovation, to ensure that

they continue to be competitive," he said.

"So it is a significant shot in the arm, especially for our manufacturers and our agro processors, and I think this will augur well for our export numbers, especially after we get through this coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis," he added.

Mr. Green pointed out the Government is committed to removing barriers in order to ensure that more local companies can sell goods abroad.

The 50 per cent reduction impacts agricultural commodities, including coffee, cocoa, spice and coconut licensing fees.



State Minister for Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries, Hon. Floyd Green

Security Operations at Mandela Highway Checkpoint in St. Catherine



Members of the Jamaica Defence Force (JDF) and the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) man a checkpoint along the Mandela Highway on April 15. Various checkpoints have been set up throughout St. Catherine, following Prime Minister the Most Hon. Andrew Holness' announcement on April 14 of a lockdown of the parish in a bid to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Unemployment Remains Low

THE STATISTICAL Institute of Jamaica (STATIN) is reporting that the country's unemployment rate remains at an impressive low of 7.3 per cent, based on the January 2020 Labour Force Survey.

Director General, Carol Coy, says the out-turn is 0.7 per cent lower than the rate of eight per cent recorded in January 2019, and just 0.1 per cent above the out-turn for the October 2019 survey.

Additionally, Ms. Coy said the number of persons in jobs, as at January 2020, increased by three per cent, compared to the corresponding period last year.

She was speaking during a STATIN virtual media briefing at the agency's head office in Kingston, on April 16.

"The number of unemployed individuals as at January 2020 declined by 7,100 persons or 6.6 per cent to 100,400, relative to the same period last year."

Ms. Coy said a breakdown of the latest survey shows that the number of unemployed individuals as at January 2020 declined by 7,100 persons or 6.6 per cent to

100,400, relative to the same period last year.

She pointed out that while the overall number of unemployed males remained unchanged at 43,400, the corresponding figure for females fell by 7,000 to 57,000.

The Director General indicated that the out-turn for females represents a 1.3 percentage points decline, from 10.3 to nine per cent, while the rate for males fell from 6.1 to 5.9 per cent.

Ms. Coy also informed that the unemployment rate for youth aged 14 to 24 fell by 2.8 percentage points to 19 per cent in January, relative to 2018.