



**Parliamentary Statement: World AIDS Day:
“Global Solidarity through our Shared Responsibility”
Delivered by Dr. the Hon. Christopher Tufton, MP
Minister of Health & Wellness
Tuesday, December 1, 2020; 2:00 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, I rise to speak to this Honourable House and the people of Jamaica on a day that is globally recognized as World AIDS Day. Today, we remember and salute persons, who would have died and to the many others, who are living with HIV.

Madam Speaker, the COVID-19 global pandemic has presented a myriad of challenges to the HIV/AIDS response on an international scale. It is heartening to see us coming together under the theme for World AIDS Day 2020 “Global Solidarity through our Shared Responsibility”

Madam speaker, the Government of Jamaica’s response to HIV has continued to cater to the needs of vulnerable and key populations and persons living with HIV. The support of the global community and the commitment of our local stakeholders has enabled our national programme to continue to offer services at all levels. We are



extremely grateful for the support of our partners here in Jamaica and around the world.

Madam Speaker, the number of persons becoming newly HIV infected each year is too high. There were some 700 new cases diagnosed in Jamaica for 2019:

- As many as 4,500 or 14% persons living with HIV in Jamaica are unaware of their status.
- Madam Speaker, only 14,297 or 44% of those diagnosed are on antiretroviral treatment.

And

- Only 66% of those on treatment are virally suppressed.

During this pandemic the National HIV Programme has continued to offer services, including the development of a response team with partners and our Civil Society Organizations to ensure that:

- Supply chain is maintained
- Prevention activities were implemented in a safe and respectful way to all populations
- Service delivery was maintained within the country for persons living with HIV
- The continued provision of social services
- Development of protocols to engage clients within this setting



- Mechanisms to continue health system strengthening
- And
- Mechanisms to ensure that Human Rights are maintained

Dispensing of Multi-months of Antiretrovirals

Madam Speaker, from 2018 the Ministry mandated the dispensing of multi-months of antiretrovirals. With the onset of COVID-19, there was disruption of global supply chains, from sourcing of base products to manufacturing and logistics in air freight. This was compounded with the lock down of India, the major manufacturer of ARVs worldwide.

Despite this threat, Jamaica, through monitoring and proactive interventions, has been able to maintain an uninterrupted supply of ARVs to PLHIVs for the past 3 years. Madam Speaker, through collaborations with private pharmacies across the island, increased locations to access ARVs have also been provided.

Our work is not done, Madam Speaker and we acknowledge, the concerns expressed by the PLHIV community and we are reinforcing our commitment to providing access to medication and monitoring supplies. This will ensure the standard of service



delivery is maintained and each PLHIV is able to achieve viral suppression and live their best life.

I challenge us, Madam Speaker, to work together and continue to do all that is required to safeguard the health and wellness of our mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and children living with or affected by HIV and AIDS whilst also paying respect to those who lost their lives to the disease. Together we can achieve "global solidarity, through shared responsibility".

COVID-19 Committees

Madam Speaker, I wish also to speak on the matter of our continued management of this global pandemic, which as of yesterday, November 30, saw some 62, 195,274 cases globally, according to the World Health Organization. The number of confirmed deaths, across the world continues to increase and as at the same period reached 1,453,355.



Locally, our total confirmed cases has surpassed the 10,000 mark and as at November 30 stood at 10, 810 confirmed cases, with 258 deaths. The country is currently managing 4,040 active cases across the island.

COVID-19 is a still clear and present danger, and it cannot be said enough, that as a country, we must continue to be vigilant, as we continue life in the new normal. I again, invite all our stakeholders, including members of the public to adhere to the guidelines provided by Cabinet and this honourable House with the technical support of the Ministry of Health & Wellness.

In keeping with the need to have COVID-19 at the forefront of our activities, as policy makers, I have notified the Prime Minister and the Leader of Government Business to recommend members of this honourable House to reestablish the Special Select Committee on COVID-19. This committee will have specific responsibility for oversight of Jamaica's COVID-19 Response and a second committee dedicated to looking at the introduction of a vaccine.

Let me take the opportunity to thank members of the previous Special Select Committee of this honourable house, who made significant contributions to our COVID-19 response.



In the same vein members of the new special select committee members will deliberate on matters relating to the overall management of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, with news that a new COVID-19 vaccine may shortly become available, it is also important that a committee be named to oversee the introduction of the COVID-19 Vaccine Plan. The need for this committee is even more urgent, given the pace at which the various pharmaceutical companies are working to get the vaccines to market and the need to address concerns over the efficacy of the process.

Vaccination has proven an undeniable success in the public health toolkit to reduce the burden of infectious disease and already Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Health & Wellness has in draft, a plan to manage the introduction of the COVID-19 vaccine into the country. The tenants of which include public education, distribution and clinical management.

The committee will see the involvement of clinical expert within the Ministry of Health & Wellness and the private settings. It will also have the participation of logistics planning experts and social behavior expert to manage the behavior change intervention that must accompany the implementation



Let me remind, this honorable house, Madam Speaker, that Jamaica is among the CARICOM member states on whose behalf a down payment has been made by the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) for equitable access to a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine through the COVID-19 Global Access Facility (COVAX Facility).

Madam Speaker, in closing, I wish also to remind members of the public, especially members of our vulnerable population, that this time of year and into January is also the time of year when we see increases in respiratory and influenza-like illnesses. Every effort must be made to remain safe during the holiday season. There must be strict adherence to infection prevention and control measures:

- Wearing of Masks;
- Washing Hands;
- Keeping your physical distance from others; and
- Sticking to quarantine and/or isolation as required.

Thank you.