



COVID-19

**Statement to
to the Houses of Parliament
81 Duke Street**

**By
The Most Honourable Andrew Holness, ON MP,
Prime Minister**

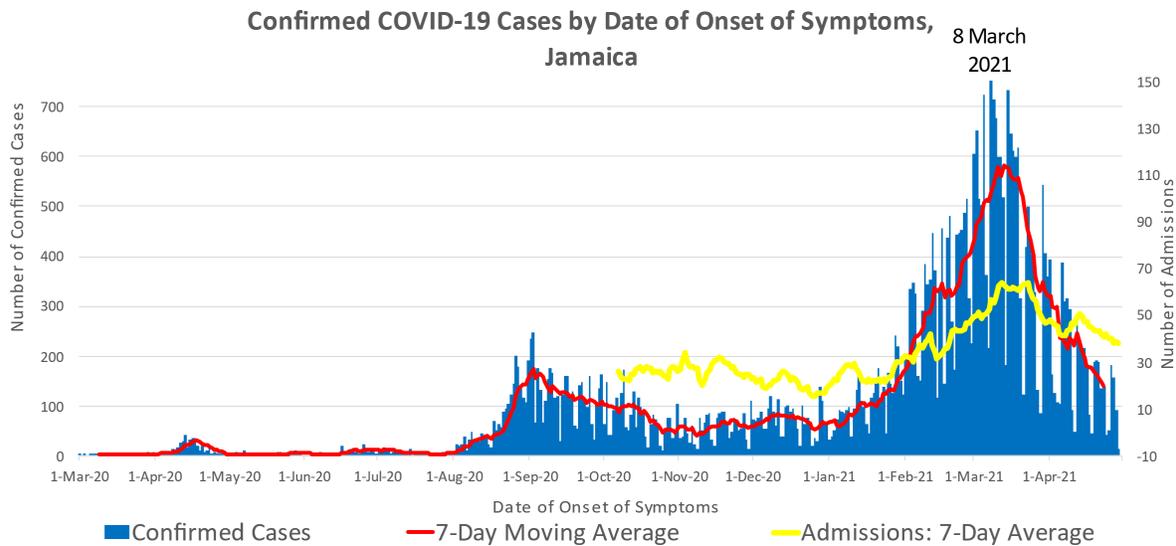
**on
Tuesday, May 4, 2021
at 2:00 pm**

Yesterday, we had 48 positive cases out of 1,172 samples tested which is a test positivity rate of 4.1%. The public sector test positivity rate which is based on the more reliable PCR tests was however 7.7%.

Madam Speaker, based on the latest report from this morning, our cumulative cases of COVID-19 are now 46,087 with 21,646 having recovered. Our recovery rate is therefore now 47%.

Unfortunately, three persons died yesterday bringing to 793 the total number of persons we have lost to the pandemic to date. I extend my deepest sympathies to all Jamaicans who have lost loved ones to this terrible pandemic.

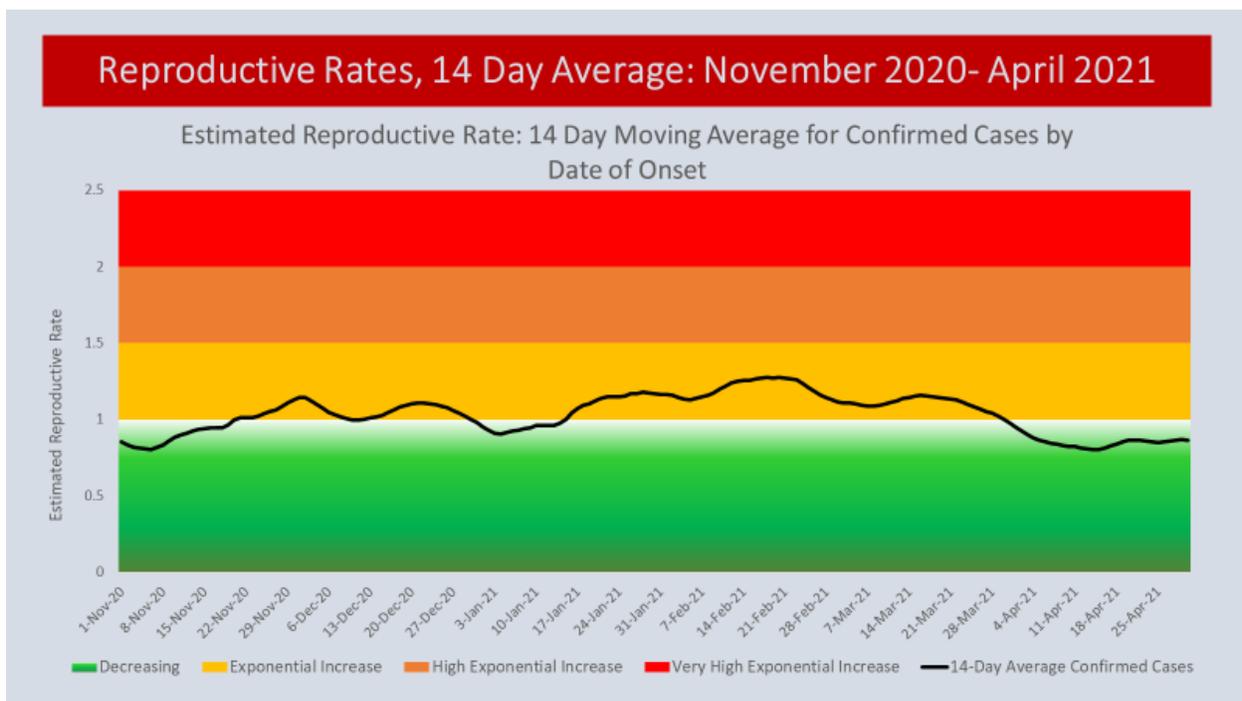
Confirmed Cases by Date of Symptom Onset & Hospital Admission by Date of Admission



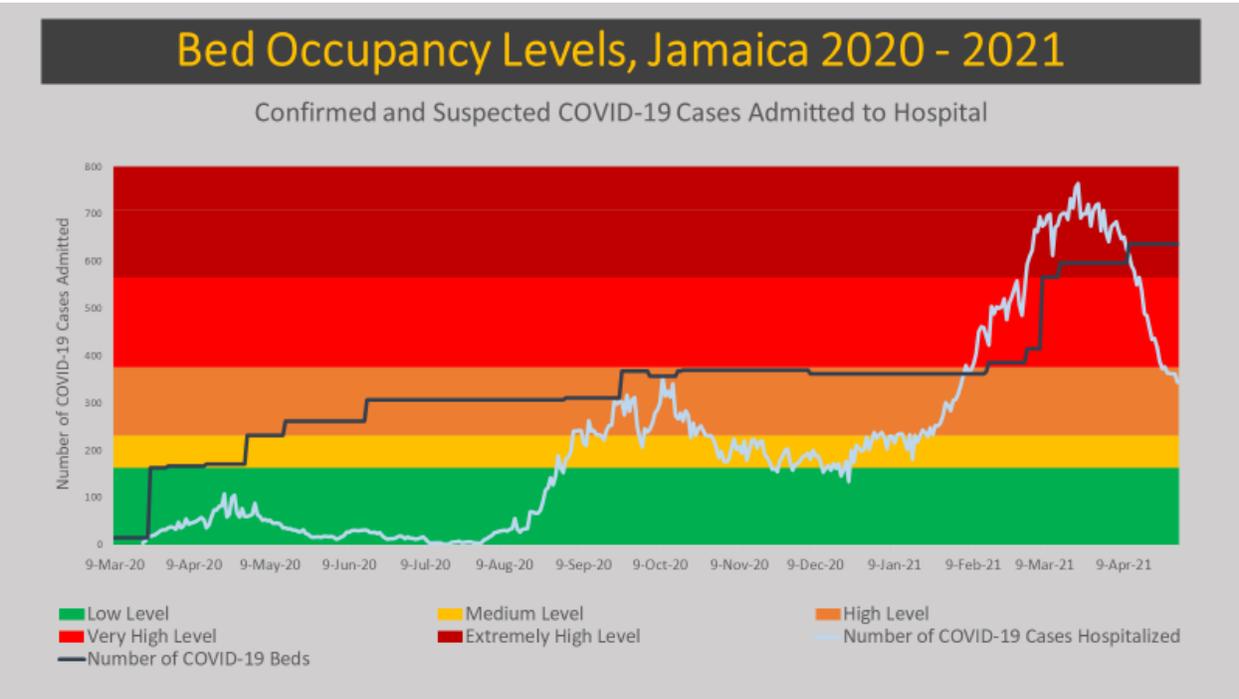
On the graph displayed, the blue bars represent the daily number of new confirmed cases of COVID-19. The red line represents the 7-day moving average of new cases. And the yellow line represents the 7-day moving average of new hospitalisations.

Madam Speaker, both lines are trending downwards with the number of new cases declining faster than new hospitalisations as there is usually a lag between onset of symptoms and hospitalisations.

This demonstrates that the measures implemented since the end of February have been effective in slowing down the spread of the virus.



Madam Speaker, the graph now displayed shows that our Reproductive rate (R_0) has been declining since we implemented the tighter measures a few weeks ago. Our R_0 is now below 1.



Madam Speaker, the graph that is now displayed shows our hospitalisations relative to our bed capacity. The white line shows the number of persons in hospital and the black line shows our hospital bed capacity.

Madam Speaker, the data clearly shows that the tighter measures that were implemented since the last week of February 2021 have been successful in slowing down the spread of the virus. While our hospitalisations are now below our capacity, we are not yet out of the danger zone and need to see a further decline.

In order to bring the spike fully under control, it is critical that we maintain our R_0 at below 1 for at least three (3) incubation cycles, that is 6 weeks.

Madam Speaker, while our numbers are heading in the right direction, we have seen from the experience of other countries the importance of maintaining vigilance and caution in order to avoid a third wave.

As a result, Madam Speaker, the existing measures will largely be extended for another four-week period until June 2, 2021 with the following changes:

Curfew Hours:

Madam Speaker, the curfew hours for normal weekdays (Monday to Friday) will remain at 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. the following morning ending at 5 a.m. on June 3, 2021.

The curfew hours on the weekend will be modified for the next four weekends. The curfew will now begin at 6 p.m. on Saturdays and at 2 p.m. on Sundays and end at 5 a.m. the next morning.

For Labour Day, Monday, May 24, 2021, there will be an all-day curfew. Therefore, on Sunday, May 23, the curfew will begin at 2 p.m. and end on Tuesday, May 25, at 5 a.m.

Schools:

Madam Speaker, the dates for exit examinations are approaching and our students and teachers continue to face significant challenges with preparation.

Madam Speaker, based on the registration data, approximately:

- 39,000 students are registered to do the PEP Ability Test for Grade 6, which is scheduled for May 26, 2021;
- 13,951 students in public schools and 101 private candidates are registered to do CAPE.

45,174 students in public schools and 1,162 private candidates are registered to sit CSEC.

These exams are scheduled for June 14 to July 16, 2021, with orals and practicals scheduled to commence June 1, 2021.

- 24,000 students are registered for City and Guilds exams scheduled for August 10-11, 2021; and
- 16,000 students are registered to sit NCTVET exams scheduled for June 7-11, 2021.

Due to the pandemic, a significant number of the current exam cohort would have lost approximately one year of in-person instruction and guidance. School-based Assessments (SBAs) would normally be over 90% complete in the month of March. However, based on the SBA readiness survey conducted on April 8, only 15% of CSEC schools and 26% of CAPE schools have over 70% of SBAs completed.

Arising from this, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information wrote to CXC requesting a further extension of the deadline for the submission of the SBAs to June 30, 2021, without penalty. This was approved with an agreement for rolling submission up to June 30, 2021 while all project-type SBAs are to be submitted by June 18, 2021 rather than May 31, 2021.

Madam Speaker, face-to-face engagement for students preparing for the 2021 sitting of exit examinations constitutes a timely and necessary intervention to better enable students to adequately prepare. The Cabinet has therefore given approval for the resumption of face-to-face instruction as of Monday, May 10, 2021 for those students sitting the PEP 6 Ability Test, and those in Grades 11-13 to

sit the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC), the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE), City & Guilds and the National Vocational Qualification – Jamaica (NVQ-J).

Madam Speaker, we want to emphasize that the COVID-19 infection prevention and control protocols will be established, enforced and strictly adhered to at the schools. Provisions have been made through the Regional Offices for disbursement of grants for basic equipment and materials needed for sanitization purpose.

A whole day/rotational approach based on resources available (space, staffing etc.) commencing May 10, 2021 will facilitate the inclusion of face-to-face engagement for students sitting the 2021 exit examinations. This means that only a subset of each cohort of students will be at school each day while others will work remotely.

Systems are in place for the teachers involved in face-to-face instruction to be vaccinated as part of the infection, prevention and control measures. Approximately 7,500 teachers have already been vaccinated, and plans are in place for others to be vaccinated commencing May 6, 2021.

The Ministry of Health and Wellness will work to ensure that the pending 355 schools are inspected and approved as satisfactory with respect to compliance with the COVID-19 protocols.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Information will coordinate with parents and local transport providers to ensure the safe movement of students to and from school. Where there is need for transportation support for students/families

who are experiencing severe financial challenges, this should be communicated to the Regional Office for special support. Parents will be asked to visit our website as of Thursday, May 6, 2021 to provide information regarding their transportation routes and distance away from schools. This information will help us to finalise specialised support in tandem with our transport providers including JUTC, Montego Bay Metro, etc.

Madam Speaker, except for students sitting exit examinations as stated earlier, there should be no face-to-face instruction in primary and secondary schools (public and independent). Students are to be instructed using other modalities.

Let me again use this opportunity to thank all in the education sector who continue to go above and beyond in these unprecedented times.

Let me encourage our students to remain focused on their studies and apply creativity, critical thinking and innovativeness in overcoming the challenges the pandemic has created. These are skills that will serve you well in all endeavours including your examinations.

Other Measures

Madam Speaker, all the other measures remain largely unchanged until June 2, 2021. Let me therefore quickly go through some of the measures, noting changes where applicable.

Controlled Entry Protocols:

Madam Speaker, the existing protocols including the requirement for all travellers to present a negative COVID-19 test conducted within three days of travel remain in place as does the requirement to self-quarantine for 14 days after arrival.

I want to emphasise that, even though incoming travellers would have presented a negative COVID-19 test, the 14-day quarantine requirement still applies; including for persons who have been fully vaccinated.

Madam Speaker, we note that some countries have issued different protocols for fully vaccinated persons. For us not to do so could put us at a competitive disadvantage in the tourism market, particularly in the context of large numbers of persons being vaccinated in our major source markets.

The challenge, Madam Speaker, is that while vaccinated persons are themselves protected, they may still be carriers of the virus and be able to transmit it to non-vaccinated persons.

Madam Speaker, this was extensively discussed by the Cabinet and we have asked the Ministry of Health and Wellness to review the scientific data on the risk of vaccinated persons transmitting the virus to non-vaccinated persons and make a recommendation for possible change in our protocols.

Madam Speaker, the travel ban applicable to the United Kingdom came to an end on April 30, 2021 and has not been extended given the significant

proportion of the UK population being vaccinated and the consequent reduction in new cases. While the UK variant remains a concern, it is notable that it is now the dominant strain in the United States.

Following our ongoing review of other countries experiencing a spike in COVID-19 cases; in some cases due to variants; we are extending the travel ban to include India and Trinidad & Tobago effective Wednesday, May 5, 2021 until June 2, 2021.

The travel ban for South American countries (Brazil, Chile, Peru, Colombia, Argentina and Paraguay), is also being extended until June 2, 2021. Of course, we continue to reassess these as circumstances warrant.

Stay at home for Persons of Specified Age

The age limit for the stay-at-home measure remains at 60 until June 2, 2021. Madam Speaker, this was another area of extensive discussion. However, at this time the data remains compelling that we keep this measure at 60 years of age.

Work from home:

Madam Speaker, the existing work from home directive in the public sector is being extended until June 2, 2021. As a reminder, Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Agencies are directed to ensure that only persons who work in critical service delivery and perform job functions report to the office.

For the private sector, employers should allow all persons who can work from home to do so.

Gathering Limit

The public gathering limit will remain at 10 persons until June 2, 2021.

However, public entities may now hold events such as handing-overs, launches, ground-breakings, opening ceremonies or similar events but there should be no more than 15 persons physically present and the requirements to wear masks and maintain physical distance continue to apply.

Markets

For markets and vending in public arcades and public transportation centres, operating hours will be one hour after the end of curfew in the morning to one hour before the start of curfew.

Therefore, when the curfew ends at 5 a.m., markets will open at 6 a.m. When the curfew starts at 8 p.m., markets must close at 7 p.m.

On Saturdays when the curfew starts at 6 p.m. markets close at 5 p.m. Markets remain closed on Sundays and public holidays.

Public Transportation

In terms of public transportation; they will still be allowed to be on the road one hour before and one hour after curfew but there can be no passengers in the vehicles during those periods.

Madam Speaker, all persons in PPVs are reminded to comply with the outlined protocols in the Order.

Funeral Services

Funeral services are not permitted during the period ending June 2, 2021. Madam Speaker, we appreciate the emotional strain that this measure is causing but we have no other option at this time, until we see further improvement in our numbers.

Burials

Burials will continue to be allowed on Mondays to Fridays during the hours of 9 a.m. and 4 p.m.

As a reminder, the time for conducting the burial is limited to 30 minutes and only 15 persons of whom a maximum of ten should be mourners will be allowed.

Worship Services

Madam Speaker, the maximum number of persons who may be physically present to facilitate worship or electronic broadcast (including officiating clergy and technical support personnel) remains at 30.

Weddings

The cap on the number of persons permitted at a marriage ceremony remains at 15.

Beaches and Rivers

Beaches that are not under organized management and control and rivers will remain closed until June 2, 2021.

Zoos, parks, gyms, attractions and bars are subject to the existing restrictions and must close at the designated times until June 2, 2021.

Amusement or gaming arcades not licensed under the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act) must remain closed until June 2, 2021.

Indoor cinemas and establishments that stage theatrical or artistic performances will remain closed until June 2, 2021.

The ban on events such as **concerts, parties, tailgate parties, round robins** will continue until June 2, 2021.

Madam Speaker, effective May 5, 2021 **Annual General Meetings or Extraordinary General Meetings** of companies and general or special meetings of co-operative societies, friendly societies or industrial or provident societies may be held with a maximum of 15 persons present including technical support personnel.

Most importantly, the requirement to always wear a mask to cover your nose and mouth in a public place continues, as well as the requirements to be physically distanced from other persons especially those not in your household and to either wash your hands for at least 20 seconds or sanitize frequently.

Delivery Economy

Madam Speaker, notwithstanding a few teething pains, the Ecommerce National Delivery System (ENDS) pilot has been extremely successful. It has enabled a number of quick serve businesses to continue operating during curfew hours.

The demand has been overwhelming and we will be expanding the pilot programme for registration to businesses islandwide by Thursday, May 6, 2021.

We are moving quickly to further enhance ENDS to prepare for a full launch to be called ENDS 2.0 which will include a redesigned web interface and mobile apps as well as inter-connection with other Government systems to facilitate proper monitoring and enforcement.

Madam Speaker, I want to emphasise that, as has been the case to date, the system will be fully inclusive and enable the smallest vendors to participate.

COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

Madam Speaker, up to the end of April approximately 140,000 persons had received the first dose of the vaccine.

On April 26, 2021, we received an additional 55,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine from the global COVAX facility.

The vaccination programme continues to be targeted at any members of the priority groups who have not yet received their first dose as well as providing the second dose to those who are now due. As a reminder, our priority groups are persons over 60, health care workers, JCF, JDF, PICA, Department of Correctional Services, the Jamaica Fire Brigade and teachers, especially those who instruct students who will be sitting external examinations and will be returning physically to schools as of May 10.

Madam Speaker, the Government continues to pursue all avenues – bilateral, multilateral as well as commercial arrangements with suppliers - to obtain further vaccine supplies.

Conclusion

Madam Speaker, we are starting to see an improvement in our case numbers and hospitalisations. But there is absolutely no room for complacency. The experience of other countries should serve as a warning of how quickly complacency can lead to catastrophe.

While we continue our best efforts to obtain further vaccine supplies in the context of the global supply shortage, we all need to continue to exercise personal responsibility by strictly observing the protocols. Our health professionals continue to go above and beyond the call of duty to keep us safe. All Jamaicans need to do their part.