

COVID-19 Press Conference

August 19, 2021

Unofficial Transcription

Based on the latest report from this morning, Jamaica recorded 555 new cases of COVID-19 and a test positivity rate of 41.9%. Three additional persons died yesterday from the pandemic. I offer my sincere condolences to all who have lost a loved one.

Yesterday, we also had official confirmation of the presence of the delta variant in Jamaica. This is of course not a surprise as all indications had been pointing in that direction.

Our case numbers are unacceptably high and rising and the rate of hospitalisations is beyond the capacity of our health system to cope.

I will now ask the Minister of Health and Wellness and the CMO to give some further details and then I will outline the new measures.

Over the past few weeks, we have been gradually tightening the measures and have been cautioning that, if there was no significant improvement in

our case numbers and hospitalisations, we would have to introduce tighter measures.

The COVID-19 sub-committee of Cabinet met earlier today and decided on the following new measures, effective from tomorrow, Friday, August 20 until September 7, 2021.

Curfew Hours:

After careful consideration and the need to restrict movement except for essential activities even further, the following changes will be effected:

- There will be seven (7) no-movement days:
 - Sunday, August 22nd
 - Monday, August 23rd
 - Tuesday, August 24th
 - Sunday, August 29th
 - Monday, August 30th
 - Tuesday, August 31st , and
 - Sunday, September 5th

- The normal curfew hours, with the exception of no-movement days, will be 7 pm nightly until 5 am the following morning on Mondays – Fridays and 6 pm on Saturdays.

However, in order to allow persons to prepare for the three consecutive no-movement days on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday (August 22 – 24), we will start the curfew later tomorrow, Friday, August 20 and Saturday, August 21.

- Tomorrow, Friday, August 20th, the curfew will begin at 9 pm and on Saturday, August 21st, the curfew will begin at 8 pm.
- So to be clear what this means – On Saturday, August 21st, the curfew will begin at 8 pm and continue through the rest of Saturday, the entire day on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday and end at 5 a.m. on Wednesday, August 25th. This will be repeated the following week starting at 6 pm on Saturday, August 28th.
- Also, to allow persons to prepare for the three consecutive no-movement days, tomorrow Friday, August 20th and on Friday, August 27th, workplaces / businesses will be required to close at midday.

The workplaces / businesses which will NOT have to close at midday are:

1. The Courts

2. Establishments providing the following services:

- Security
- Finance
- Transportation
- Health (including pharmacies, optical and dental establishments)
- Water
- Electricity,
- Oil-refining, loading, distribution or retail of petroleum fuel, liquefied natural gas or any renewable energy source,
- Public works or sanitation
- Firefighting
- Civil aviation
- Telecommunications
- Food (including supermarkets, wholesale stores, restaurants, corner shops),
- The loading and unloading of ships, storage and delivery of goods at docks, wharves and warehouses, and
- Those critical to the operations of the Government including TAJ, Jamaica Customs Agency, PICA, Jamaica Printing Services Ltd
- Funeral homes
- Farm stores, and

- The BPO sector
- Despite the extended curfew hours, we want the vaccination programme to continue. Certain vaccination sites will remain open during curfew hours and on no movement days. Persons with appointments to receive a vaccine will be allowed to do so during curfew hours.
- Persons will be required to present evidence of the appointment (text message or email) to the police.

Also, students who will be going to schools to get vaccinated on no-movement days should have the messages that their schools would have sent and their school ID.

- To be clear, on no movement days, persons will be allowed to seek urgent medical care and those who have overseas travel plans can make their way to or from the airport. Essential services will still be operational (and in this group I include our fisherfolk, farmers, factories, BPOs and those involved in the maintenance of infrastructure of financial services and the media) but I remind those persons employed to essential services who must move on the no movement days to ensure you have your work ID to present to the

police. Even in this group, those persons who can work from home should do so and only travel if necessary.

Work from home:

The existing work from home directive in the public sector is being extended until September 7, 2021. Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Agencies are directed to strictly ensure that only persons who work in critical service delivery and the nature of the work requires that the job functions be performed at the physical location at the office.

For the private sector, I am issuing a strong appeal to employers to ensure only persons who cannot work from home come to the workplace.

Places of Worship

On Sunday, August 29 and Sunday, September 5, places of worship will be allowed to have 20 persons physically present in church. Persons who leave home on these two Sundays will have to carry on their person, an authorisation form issued by their place of worship. This will be similar to the Gazetted Form that was used earlier this year, in March-April.

Please note the Sunday movement for worshippers will not be allowed on this Sunday, August 22 as we are trying to enforce a strict three-day lockdown

Gathering Limit

- The general public gathering limit remains at 10 persons.
- Places of worship will be restricted to having no more than 20 persons attend. No crusades, conferences or conventions will be permitted.
- No more than 20 persons will be permitted to physically attend a wedding.
- Persons physically attending Annual or Extraordinary General Meetings will be restricted to 20 persons.
- No physical attendance at an event hosted by a public entity will be allowed. Only virtual events will be permitted.

Funeral Services

No funeral services will be allowed during the period August 25 - September 7, 2021.

Burials

For the period August 25 – September 7, 2021, a maximum of 15 persons will be allowed at a burial including mourners, officiating clergy, grave diggers and undertakers. As a reminder, burials will be allowed Mondays to Fridays only (excluding no-movement days) during the hours of 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. The time for conducting the burial is not to be longer than 30 minutes.

Conclusion

The tighter measures we have introduced are necessary because our rising case numbers and hospitalisations are beyond the capacity of our public health system.

I urge all Jamaicans to co-operate and to do their part. We all need to work together to get this third wave under control so that we can start opening schools in mid-late September.

We now have sufficient vaccine supplies with the commitment of further supplies to come. The sooner we bring the infection rate down, the sooner we will be able to lift some of the restrictions. Conversely, if our numbers continue to spike through lack of compliance, we will have no choice but

to introduce further measures to restrict movement which will inevitably have an adverse impact on the economy and our livelihoods.

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