

Situation in The Bahamas & Turks and Caicos Islands 4th March 2021.

On 30th January 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) a public health emergency of international concern. As of 4th March 2021, there were 115,027,292 cases and 2,560,150 deaths reported globally. The Region of the Americas accounted for 51,158,352 confirmed cases and 1,227,085 deaths.

On 15th March 2020, the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was reported in The Bahamas. On 23rd March 2020, the first confirmed case was reported in The Turks and Caicos Islands.

HIGHLIGHTS The Bahamas

Since 25th February 2021, there were 90 newly confirmed cases.

Among the new cases:

- Thirty-seven percent (37%) were from New Providence, twenty-nine percent (29%) were from Grand Bahama and twenty percent (20%) were from Abaco;
- 43 (48%) males and 47 (52%) females;
- 5 (6%) cases (all from New Providence) were travel-related.

Among total confirmed cases:

- 69,592 real time PCR (RT-PCR) tests have been conducted to date.

Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI)

Since 25th February 2021, there were 73 newly confirmed cases.

Among the new cases:

- Fifty-nine percent (59%) were from Providenciales and thirty-three percent were from Grand Turk;

Among total confirmed cases:

- 979 (47.3%) males, 1071 (57.1%) females and 20 (1%) unknown gender (data to 3rd March 2021);
- The age distribution of all cases (data to 3rd March 2021) is 0-5 (1.9%), 6-19 (9.6%), 20-29 (18.5%), 30-39 (24.3%), 40-49 (21.1%), 50-59 (13.7%), 60-79 (7.7%), 80 and over (0.7%), and unknown (2.4%);
- 680 persons are quarantined/home isolation;
- 17,163 real time PCR (RT-PCR) tests have been conducted to date.

The Bahamas

| Island | Confirmed cases | Deaths |
|----------------|-----------------|------------|
| New Providence | 6179 | 141 |
| Grand Bahama | 1248 | 24 |
| Abaco | 264 | 4 |
| Eleuthera | 167 | 1 |
| Exuma | 122 | 1 |
| Bimini/Cat Cay | 107 | 2 |
| Berry Islands | 52 | 1 |
| Inagua | 19 | 0 |
| Andros | 46 | 0 |
| Long Island | 11 | 0 |
| Cat Island | 8 | 0 |
| Acklins | 7 | 0 |
| San Salvador | 10 | 0 |
| Crooked Island | 6 | 0 |
| Mayaguana | 3 | 0 |
| Pending | 360 | 7 |
| TOTAL | 8609 | 181 |

Turks and Caicos Islands

| Island | Confirmed cases | Deaths |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------|
| Providenciales | 1759 | 11 |
| North Caicos | 92 | 0 |
| Parrot Cay | 13 | 0 |
| Grand Turk | 247 | 3 |
| South Caicos | 23 | 0 |
| Middle Caicos | 26 | 0 |
| Ambergris Cay | 1 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 2161 | 14 |

SITUATION IN NUMBERS

TOTAL CASES

8609 Bahamas
2161 Turks & Caicos
Confirmed

921 Bahamas
168 Turks & Caicos
Active Cases

7453 Bahamas
1976 Turks & Caicos
Recovered

17 Bahamas
6 Turks & Caicos
Hospitalized

1 Turks & Caicos
Positive Cases that Left Country

181 Bahamas
14 Turks & Caicos
COVID-related Deaths

39 Bahamas
1 Turks and Caicos
Non-COVID-related Deaths

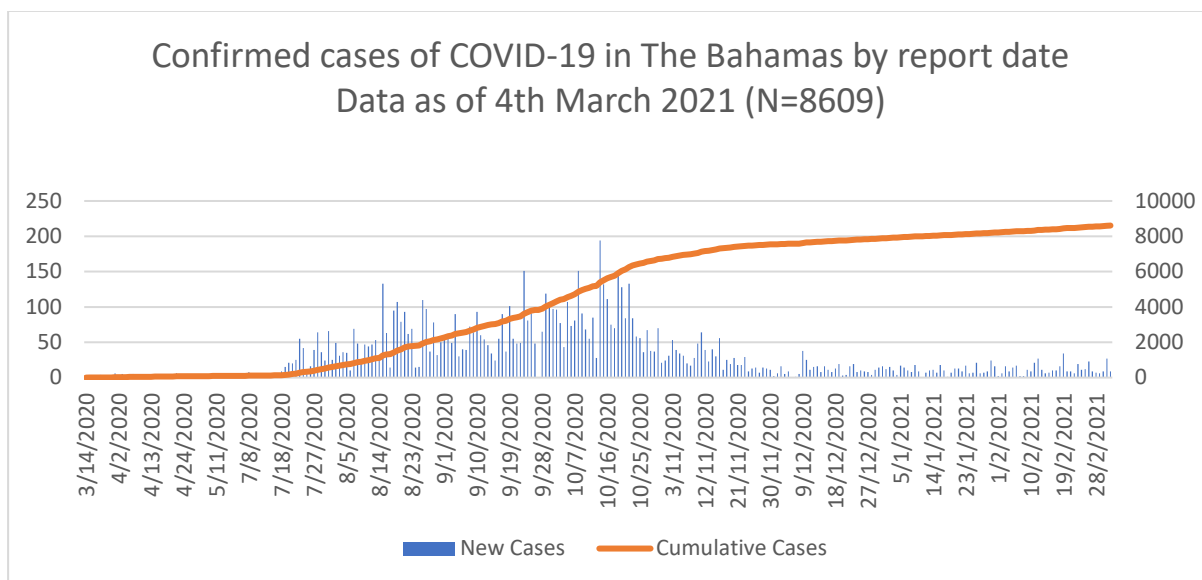
15 Bahamas
Deaths under investigation

PAHO RESPONSE

- ✓ Donation of laboratory supplies
- ✓ Risk assessment and situational analysis
- ✓ Technical guidance
- ✓ Communication
- ✓ Support to local authorities on surveillance and health systems planning

The Bahamas

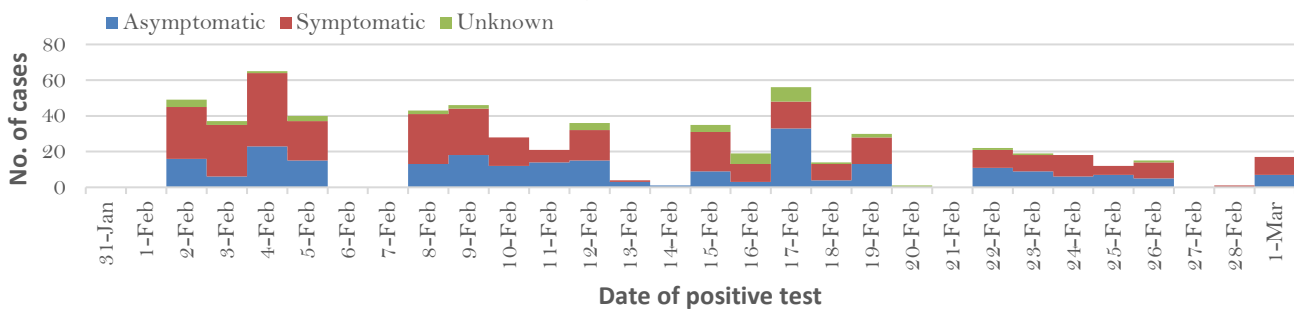
- Emergency Orders have been extended to 23rd May 2021.
- Nightly curfews continue for Abaco, Mainland Eleuthera, Mainland Exuma and New Providence from 10:00 pm to 5:00 am and on Grand Bahama, 11:00 pm to 5:00 am, Mondays to Sundays.



Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI)

- Protocols related to social distancing, wearing of masks and other related measures including screening for travel have been extended to 31st March 2021.
- From 3rd March 2021 to 17th March 2021 the following will apply:
 - Nightly curfew on all islands from 11:00 pm to 5:00 am;
 - Business closures at 10:00 pm nightly except hotels for guest check-ins;
 - 30% occupancy maximum for bars, places of Worship and restaurants;
 - Signage to be posted outside of bars and restaurants to indicate occupancy level;
 - Attendance at funerals and weddings limited to 20 persons;
 - Boating excursions limited to 50% capacity including crew members;
 - No public gatherings are to be held except those indicated above.

Figure 1: Symptomatic and Asymptomatic TCI COVID-19 cases by date of positive test
January 31 - March 2, 2021



NATIONAL RESPONSE

The Bahamas Ministry of Health (MOH)

- While there is a decrease in newly confirmed COVID-19 cases, daily new confirmed cases of COVID-19 continue to be reported in The Bahamas.
- There continues to be an increase in newly confirmed cases on the island of Abaco.
- The national authorities continue to require negative real time PCR tests from arriving travelers, the completion of a daily on-line survey for fourteen days after arrival and depending upon the responses, rapid antigen testing five and ten days post entry for all in-coming travelers, including citizens and residents.
- COVID-19 samples have been sent out of country for genomic sequencing to ascertain whether any variant strains are in-country.
- COVID-19 laboratory PCR testing continues at the National Reference Laboratory (NRL), Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH), Rand Memorial Hospital and private sector laboratories.
- The Contact Tracing Command Centre is still operational, although with a decrease in the number of volunteer contact tracers. An on-line contact tracing course continues to be offered through the University of The Bahamas (UB).
- A SharePoint platform is utilized for multiple user entry of contact tracing data, case investigation and laboratory test results whilst Go.Data is used for epidemiology analysis of a subset of exported data variables.
- Moderate to severe suspected and confirmed cases are treated at PMH, Doctors Hospital West and Rand Memorial Hospital.
- The Public Hospital's Authority continues to distribute PPEs across all public hospitals and clinics.
- MOH continues to provide telemedicine, telepsychology, mental health, and psychosocial support services.
- MOH continues to implement a communication campaign to increase immunization coverage for influenza and other vaccines.
- Preparatory work continues towards developing the National COVID-19 Vaccine Plan, with support from PAHO. This plan is very advanced.
- The communication campaign for COVID-19 vaccine continues.

Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) Ministry of Health

- There has been an increase in the daily number of new confirmed cases of COVID-19.
- COVID-19 vaccine distribution continued and the second batch, 23,400 doses of Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine, arrived in country this past week.
- One sample of four samples sent for genomic sequencing has been confirmed as having the United Kingdom Variant COVID-19 B.1.1.7.
- Persons continue to register for the COVID-19 vaccine via the online portal which is available in three languages: English, French-Creole, and Spanish.
- Go.Data is being utilized for field data collection and contact tracing investigations.
- Community drive-through services continue to provide access to COVID-19 tests throughout the islands.
- The National Public Health Laboratory continues to conduct COVID-19 PCR testing and 17,163 tests were completed to date. Testing has been expanded to include "frontline" workers and community-based testing.
- The National COVID-19 Vaccine Plan is being implemented – work having been expedited in line with the receipt of Pfizer vaccine. A national committee and a technical task force are supporting vaccine introduction policy development and implementation.
- The communication education campaign continues with communication materials on the COVID-19 vaccine shared via traditional means and social media.
- A Cuban health contingent of 20 persons continues to operate in medical facilities through a bilateral agreement between the two countries.

PAHO/WHO RESPONSE

- PAHO continues to provide both The Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands with access to updated technical guidelines and to technical assistance.

- PAHO/WHO briefing documents have been shared with both countries on COVID-19 vaccination and the emergence of COVID-19 mutant strains in different locations.
- The Country Office is assisting with procurement of Cepheid Testing Kits for COVID-19 for The Bahamas.

The Bahamas

- While there has been a decrease in the frequency of EOC meetings, weekly meetings continue for the COVID-19 Vaccination Rollout efforts.
- Three staff members provide data management support to MOH, assisting with coordination of data entry for cases, contacts and laboratory tests and with standardizing of analysis and reporting.
- A PAHO led Infection Prevention Control Training course was completed by 36 physicians and nurses from MOH, Public Hospitals Authority, and Department of Public Health.
- PAHO's regional and country office HSS and EOC groups have advised the MOH on expanding acute care services in three hospitals and adjusting workflow and workplace layout to minimize risks of COVID-19 infection.
- PAHO Country Office personnel continue to participate in MOH's planning committee for developing the country's COVID-19 Vaccination Strategy and plan.
- MOH has requested PAHO's assistance to procure syringes to support the vaccine rollout.

Turks and Caicos Islands

- PAHO continues to provide technical assistance and access to technical guidelines, information and communication products, has advised on contact tracing and data management and made donations of PPE.
- A weekly virtual meeting was convened between MOH and PAHO for discussion of the technical cooperation programme. Meetings have been suspended due to the holiday season and focus on COVID-19 vaccine distribution exercises. However, there are plans to resume these meetings in the coming weeks.
- A PAHO led Infection Prevention Control Training course was completed by 20 personnel from MOH.

GAPS/CHALLENGES

- Public compliance with and enforcement of public health protocols are challenges in both countries.
- Surges in travel-related cases and virus transmission among nationals and residents occurred in both countries after the re-opening of international borders, however, within-country transmission of COVID-19 currently accounts for most of the confirmed cases in both countries.
- There is a new risk to both The Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands from the emergence of mutant COVID-19 strains in large numbers in the United Kingdom and South Africa with evidence of spread through travel to other countries.
- CARPHA has advised Caribbean countries that it is offering genomic sequencing for COVID-19 strains through collaboration with a researcher at the University of the West Indies. Neither The Bahamas nor Turks and Caicos Islands have in-country sequencing capacity. Furthermore, The Bahamas normally experiences significant challenges to refer biological samples to CARPHA. The Bahamas has submitted samples for genomic sequencing to the WHO reference laboratory in Brazil and is awaiting results.
- Both countries require continuous supply of Cepheid Testing Kits for COVID-19. This presents a particular challenge for Turks and Caicos Islands as there are strict allocations per country by the manufacturer, Cepheid, and due to the initial kits being previously supplied through the United Kingdom (UK) Government, any additional kits will also need to be sourced through the UK Government.

The Bahamas

- A tented patient facility donated by Samaritan's Purse remains available in New Providence for expanded clinical capacity.

- COVID-19 testing offered in both the public and private sectors, both real time PCR and SARS CoV-2 antigen testing are offered with a requirement to report positive results and workload through the national COVID-19 surveillance system.
- There has been a decline in infections and requirements for isolation/quarantine of frontline health, security service and other sector workers.

Turks and Caicos Islands

- There appears to be a surge in confirmed COVID-19 cases on the islands. Responsive contact tracing and epidemiological investigations are on-going.
- Stigma and discrimination of COVID-19 confirmed and suspected cases remain a concern.
- “Roll out” of COVID-19 vaccines is on-going and it will be important to document country experiences and lessons learned.
- The recent in change in government due to the recent election on 19th February 2021 may have an impact on health policies and services.