

Situation in The Bahamas & Turks and Caicos Islands 25th 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 25th March 2021, there were 124,746,413 cases and 2,743,543 deaths reported globally. The Region of the Americas accounted for 54,800,639 confirmed cases and 1,319,552 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 18th March 2021, there were 161 newly confirmed cases and two new deaths.

Among the new cases:

- Forty-five percent (45%) were from New Providence and forty percent (40%) were from Grand Bahama;
- 78 (48%) males and 83 (52%) females;
- 10 cases (8 from New Providence and 2 from Eleuthera) were travel-related.

Among total confirmed cases:

- 74,708 real time PCR (RT-PCR) tests have been conducted to date.

Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI)

Since 18th March 2021, there were 44 newly confirmed cases and two new deaths.

Among the new cases:

- Forty-six percent (46%) were from Providenciales and thirty-nine percent (39%) were from South Caicos;

Among total confirmed cases:

- 1098 (47.4%) males, 1194 (51.6%) females and 23 (1.0%) unknown gender (data to 24th March 2021);
- The age distribution of all cases (data to 14th March 2021) is 0-5 (1.9%), 6-19 (9.7%), 20-29 (19.2%), 30-39 (24.8%), 40-49 (21.4%), 50-59 (13.8%), 60-79 (8.0%), 80 and over (0.8%), and unknown (0.5%);
- 543 persons are quarantined/home isolation;
- 18,615 real time PCR (RT-PCR) tests and 23,663 Rapid Antigen Tests have been conducted to date.

The Bahamas

Island	Confirmed cases	Deaths
New Providence	6342	146
Grand Bahama	1404	24
Abaco	303	6
Eleuthera	179	1
Exuma	123	1
Bimini/Cat Cay	116	2
Berry Islands	57	1
Inagua	19	0
Andros	46	0
Long Island	11	0
Cat Island	9	0
Acklins	7	0
San Salvador	10	0
Crooked Island	6	0
Mayaguana	3	0
Pending	365	7
TOTAL	9000	188

Turks and Caicos Islands

Island	Confirmed cases	Deaths
Providenciales	1854	12
North Caicos	94	0
Parrot Cay	13	0
Grand Turk	281	5
South Caicos	48	0
Middle Caicos	27	0
Ambergris Cay	1	0
TOTAL	2318	17

SITUATION IN NUMBERS

TOTAL CASES

9000 Bahamas
2318 Turks & Caicos

Confirmed

917 Bahamas
108 Turks & Caicos

Active Cases

7841 Bahamas
2187 Turks & Caicos

Recovered

32 Bahamas
3 Turks & Caicos

Hospitalized

1 Turks & Caicos
Positive Cases that Left Country

188 Bahamas
17 Turks & Caicos
COVID-related Deaths

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

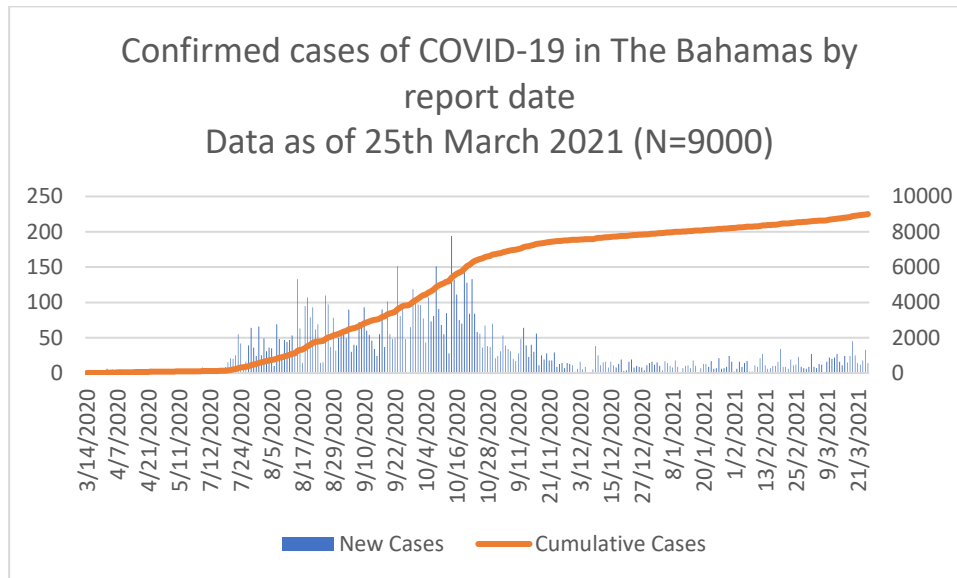
15 Bahamas
Deaths under investigation

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

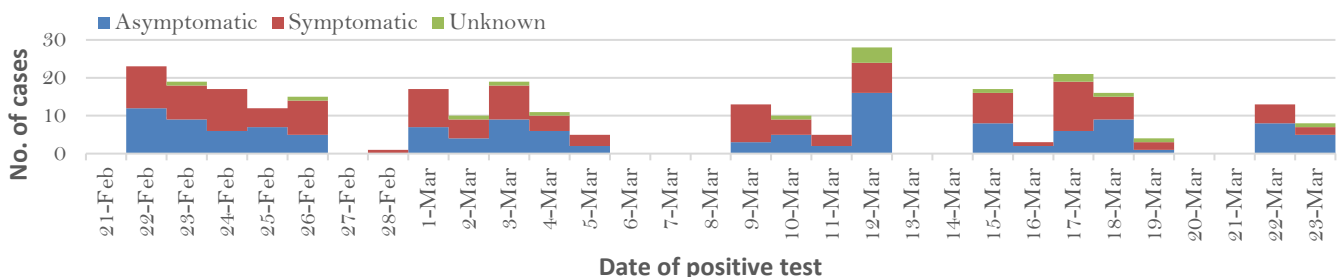
- Emergency Orders have been extended to 23rd May 2021.
- Nightly curfews continue for Abaco, Mainland Eleuthera, Mainland Exuma and New Providence from 10:00 pm to 5:00 am and on Grand Bahama, 11:00 pm to 5:00 am, Mondays to Sundays.
- Restrictions on vessels and travellers from Haiti into the country continue and will remain in place until 11th April 2021.



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.
- The public health regulations continue and will remain in place until to 2nd April 2021.
- The following were approved during the Cabinet Meeting held on 24th March 2021:
 - Amendments to testing for COVID-19 including the use of lateral flow devices;
 - Expanded vaccination campaign;
 - Policy for mandatory COVID-19 testing for civil servants in high-risk departments;
 - Returning TCI residents who have received two doses of the COVID-19 vaccinations to have a PCR test done upon arrival vs. prior to departure and within 5 days of travel to TCI;
 - Memorandum of Understanding with the TCI Medical Association for COVID-19 surveillance and community testing using lateral flow devices.

Figure 1: Symptomatic and Asymptomatic TCI COVID-19 cases by date of positive test
February 21 - March 23, 2021



NATIONAL RESPONSE

The Bahamas Ministry of Health (MOH)

- 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 islands of Grand Bahama and New Providence.
- COVID-19 vaccine distribution continued. As of 21st March 2021, more than 1500 persons received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. On 23rd March 2021, COVID-19 vaccination rollout was expanded to include caregivers accompanying elderly persons at Loyola Hall only and walk-up appointments at a new site, the Church of God of Prophecy, East Street. Healthcare workers only are accommodated at the Princess Margaret Hospital, Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre, and Doctors Hospital.
- Through a grant from the Canadian Government, 1,020 COVID-19 test kits purchased by PAHO were donated to MOH for COVID-19 testing exercises (see Figure 1. below).
- 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.
- Work continues on adapting and implementing the National COVID-19 Vaccine Plan to the changing situation with respect to access to vaccines, with support from PAHO. A modified distribution plan was announced in which healthcare workers, residents and staff of Senior Citizens facilities, and non-ambulatory patients in public facilities will be vaccinated from the 20,000 COVID-19 vaccine donation.
- The communication campaign for COVID-19 vaccine continues.



Figure 1. Handover ceremony of COVID-19 test kits by the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) to Ministry of Health, The Bahamas. Pictured from left are Acting Permanent Secretary, Ms. Siobhan Deane, Medical Microbiologist, Dr. Jessica Edwards, PAHO/WHO Representative, Dr. Eldonna Boisson, Minister of Health, Honorable Renward Wells, Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Pearl McMillan, and Executive Director, Dr. Bridgette Rolle.

Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) Ministry of Health

- There has been an increase in the daily number of new confirmed cases of COVID-19. Among the confirmed cases reported this week are several cases in South Caicos at the Eliza Basden Aged Care and Special Needs Center.
- COVID-19 vaccine distribution and community testing continued. As of the 21st March 2021, 12,935 persons received the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.
- A ceremony was held to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the first confirmed COVID-19 case in TCI on 23rd March 2021.
- The United Kingdom Variant COVID-19 B.1.1.7 was confirmed to be in-country via genomic sequencing of one confirmed sample.
- 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 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 provided 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 Cepheid COVID-19 Testing kits and 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.
- Weekly virtual meetings between MOH and PAHO for discussion of the technical cooperation programme remain suspended due to focus on COVID-19 vaccine distribution exercises. However, there are plans to resume these meetings in the near future.
- 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.
- Availability of syringes is minimal, globally, and countries risk using current stocks of syringes for their National Immunization Program for COVID-19 vaccine distribution.

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 change in government due to the election on 19th February 2021 may have an impact on health policies and services.