

Situation in The Bahamas & Turks and Caicos Islands 3rd June 2021.

On 30th January 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) a public health emergency of international concern. As of 3rd June 2021, there were 171,503,612 cases and 3,693,119 deaths reported globally. The Region of the Americas accounted for 68,009,675 confirmed cases and 1,785,897 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 27th May 2021, there were 227 newly confirmed cases of COVID-19, 3 COVID-19 related deaths, and 2 non-COVID-19 related deaths.

Among the new cases:

- 180 (79%) were from New Providence;
- 97 (43%) males and 130 (57%) females;
- 18 cases (17 from New Providence and 1 from Eleuthera) were travel-related.

Among total confirmed cases:

- 99316 real time PCR (RT-PCR) tests have been conducted to date.

Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI)

Since 27th May 2021, there were 8 newly confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Among the new cases:

- 5 (62.5%) were from Providenciales and 3 (37.5%) were from South Caicos;

Among total confirmed cases:

- 1159 (47.9%) males and 1258 (52%), 1 (0.1%) unknown (data as of 2nd June 2021);
- The age distribution of all cases is 0-5 (1.9%), 6-19 (10.1%), 20-29 (18.9%), 30-39 (24.8%), 40-49 (21.5%), 50-59 (13.6%), 60-79 (7.9%), 80 and over (0.8%), and unknown (0.5%) (data as of 2nd June 2021);
- 22321 real time PCR (RT-PCR) tests and 91708 Rapid Antigen Tests have been conducted to date.

The Bahamas

| Island | Confirmed cases | Deaths |
|----------------|-----------------|------------|
| New Providence | 8823 | 169 |
| Grand Bahama | 1808 | 31 |
| Abaco | 363 | 7 |
| Eleuthera | 237 | 1 |
| Exuma | 155 | 2 |
| Bimini/Cat Cay | 137 | 4 |
| Berry Islands | 87 | 2 |
| Inagua | 22 | 0 |
| Andros | 164 | 2 |
| Long Island | 25 | 1 |
| Cat Island | 69 | 0 |
| Acklins | 7 | 0 |
| San Salvador | 12 | 0 |
| Crooked Island | 7 | 0 |
| Mayaguana | 3 | 0 |
| Pending | 54 | 11 |
| TOTAL | 11973 | 232 |

Turks and Caicos Islands

| Island | Confirmed cases | Deaths |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------|
| Providenciales | 1940 | 12 |
| North Caicos | 96 | 0 |
| Parrot Cay | 13 | 0 |
| Grand Turk | 284 | 5 |
| South Caicos | 58 | 0 |
| Middle Caicos | 27 | 0 |
| Ambergris Cay | 1 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 2419 | 17 |

SITUATION IN NUMBERS

TOTAL CASES

11973 Bahamas
2419 Turks & Caicos

Confirmed

665 Bahamas
9 Turks & Caicos

Active Cases

10993 Bahamas
2386 Turks & Caicos

Recovered

44 Bahamas
2 Turks & Caicos

Hospitalized

1 Turks & Caicos
Positive Cases that Left Country

232 Bahamas
17 Turks & Caicos
COVID-related Deaths

Bahamas
1 Turks and Caicos
Non-COVID-related Deaths

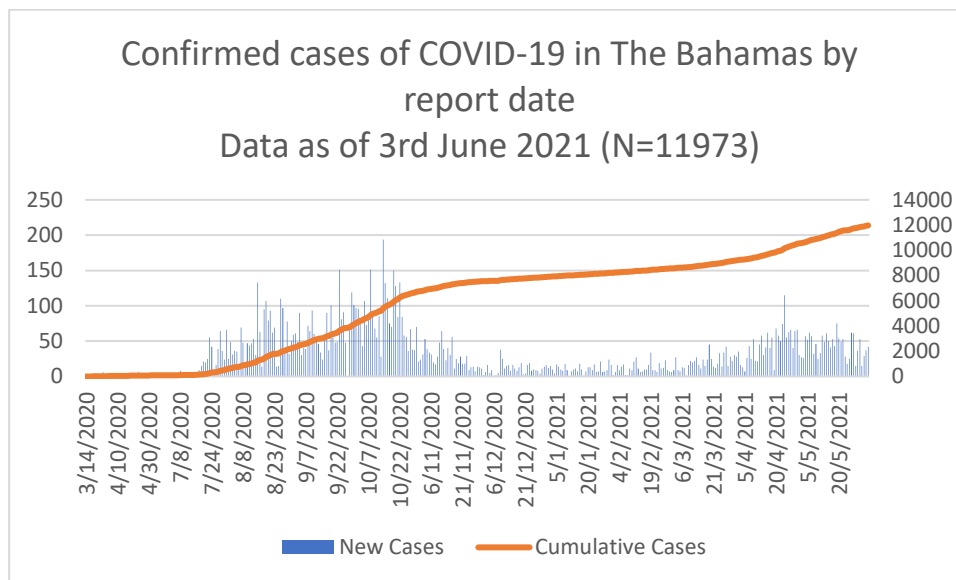
Bahamas
Deaths under investigation

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

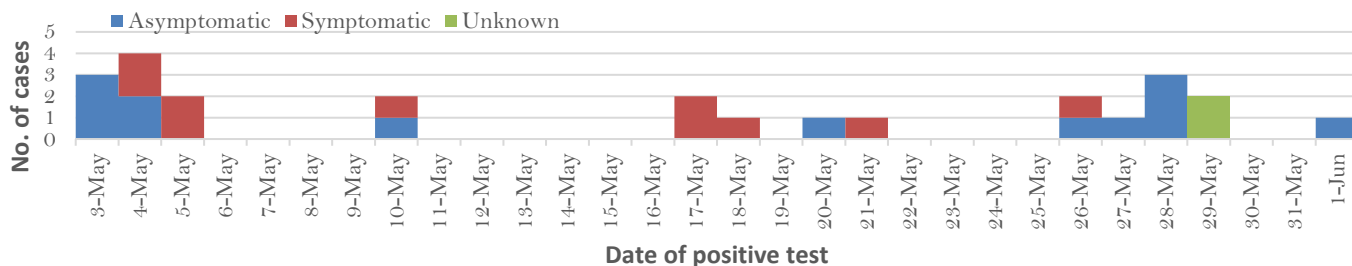
- Emergency Orders have been extended for three months until 19th August 2021.
- Nightly curfews continued for Grand Bahama and New Providence.
- A 14-day lockdown continued for Bullocks Harbour and Great Harbour Cay in the Berry Islands, Cat Island, Central Andros, and North Andros.
- Restrictions on vessels and travelers from Haiti into The Bahamas continued and will remain in place until 10th June 2021.



Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI)

- The pandemic public health regulations and protocols related to physical distancing, wearing of masks and other related measures including screening for travel have been extended to 30th June 2021.

Figure 1: Symptomatic and Asymptomatic TCI COVID-19 cases by date of positive test
May 3 - June 1, 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 New Providence.
- COVID-19 vaccine distribution including second dose administration continued. Three additional vaccination sites at three churches were utilized on 29th May 2021 for COVID-19 vaccine distribution.
- As of 29th May 2021, there were 46,378 persons who received the first dose and 8,659 persons who received the second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

- Moderate to severe suspected and confirmed cases continue to be treated at Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH), Doctors Hospital West and the Rand Memorial Hospital. PMH continues to only service emergency cases and operate outpatient clinic services via telehealth and virtual means.
- The national authorities continue to require for non-fully vaccinated travelers a negative real time PCR test, the completion of a daily on-line survey for fourteen days after arrival and depending upon the responses, and rapid antigen testing five- and ten-days post entry.
- COVID-19 samples were sent out of country for genomic sequencing to ascertain whether any variant strains were in-country; and no variants were detected up until November 2020. Another batch of ten samples were sent to the Caribbean Public Health Agency for genomic sequencing in March 2021 for which results are pending.
- A National Respiratory Surveillance Genomics Database was implemented by the National Reference Laboratory (NRL) for genetic analysis. Since implementation, several genomic deletions and variant mutations have been identified by the NRL.
- COVID-19 laboratory PCR testing continues at the 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.
- 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 in adapting and implementing the National COVID-19 Vaccine Plan to the changing situation with respect to access to vaccines, with support from PAHO.
- The communication campaign for COVID-19 vaccine continues.

Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) Ministry of Health

- There has been a decrease in the daily number of new confirmed cases of COVID-19.
- COVID-19 vaccine distribution continued.
- To date, six persons who were fully vaccinated with the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine tested positive for COVID-19.
- 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.
- 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 though 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

- There has been a halt in Emergency Operations Center (EOC) meetings and weekly meetings for the COVID-19 Vaccination Rollout efforts.
- Two staff members assisted MOH with outbreak investigations and assessments on the Family Islands, namely Andros, Cat Island, Eleuthera, and the Berry Islands.
- 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 participated 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.
- PAHO/WHO country office provided personal protective equipment of masks and gloves, cleaning and sanitizing reagents and temperature guns to vulnerable populations through various non-governmental organizations.



Figure 1. PAHO/WHO Country Office Personnel assisting the Ministry of Health, Bahamas with COVID-19 Outbreak Investigation, Assessment and Vaccine distribution. From left is Dr. Gabriel Vivas, Health Systems Advisor, in the Berry Islands and Mrs. Carlyne Smith-McKenzie, National PAHO Consultant in Cat Island.

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 continues.

- 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 during the second surge. However, within-country transmission of COVID-19 currently accounts for most of the confirmed cases in both countries.
- There is a risk to both The Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands from the emergence of mutant COVID-19 strains in large numbers in several countries with evidence of spread through travel.
- The Caribbean Public Health Agency (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. However, PAHO has assisted The Bahamas is attaining capacity to identify the presence of COVID-19 variants present in samples, which still needs to be sent to a reference laboratory for sequencing. Furthermore, The Bahamas normally experiences significant challenges to refer biological samples to CARPHA.
- 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. However, there are still concerns about insufficient capacity for handling severe cases.
- COVID-19 testing is offered in both the public and private sectors. Both RT-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.
- A nursing shortage has been identified in-country with significant effects for delivery of healthcare services.

Turks and Caicos Islands

- Stigma and discrimination of COVID-19 confirmed and suspected cases remain a concern.
- "Roll out" of COVID-19 vaccines is on-going. However, vaccine uptake is now reduced and the risk of expiration of AstraZeneca doses before use is possible, as there is high vaccine hesitancy for this vaccine.