

Situation in The Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands April 24th, 2020

In 30th January 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) a public health emergency of international concern. As of 23rd April 2020, there were 2,587,754 cases and 184,766 deaths globally. Specifically, in the Region of the Americas, there were 995,524 confirmed cases and 56,753 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 17th April 2020, there were 18 new confirmed cases of and 2 deaths from COVID-19.

Of these new confirmed cases:

- Seven persons are hospitalized, ten are in home isolation, and one is in a Government quarantine facility;
- All have no history of travel outside The Bahamas;
- Eight are females ranging from ages 22 to 70 and ten are males ranging from ages 33 to 78;

Of the total confirmed cases:

- Fourteen persons have recovered;
- Nine persons are hospitalized: eight in New Providence and one in Grand Bahama, and the remainder of active cases are in self-isolation;
- Fifteen cases are health care workers;

Of the 792 persons in quarantine:

- Over 200 are health care workers;

Turks and Caicos Islands

Since 17th April 2020, there were no new confirmed cases of and no deaths from COVID-19.

Of the total confirmed cases, one person is hospitalized.

79 persons are quarantined/home isolation;

SITUATION IN NUMBERS

TOTAL CASES

72 Bahamas
11 Turks & Caicos
Confirmed

14 Bahamas
4 Turks & Caicos
Recovered

11 Bahamas
1 Turks & Caicos
Deaths

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

Island	Confirmed cases	Deaths
New Providence	61	8
Grand Bahama	7	2
Bimini	3	1
Cat Cay	1	0
TOTAL	72	11

The Turks and Caicos Islands

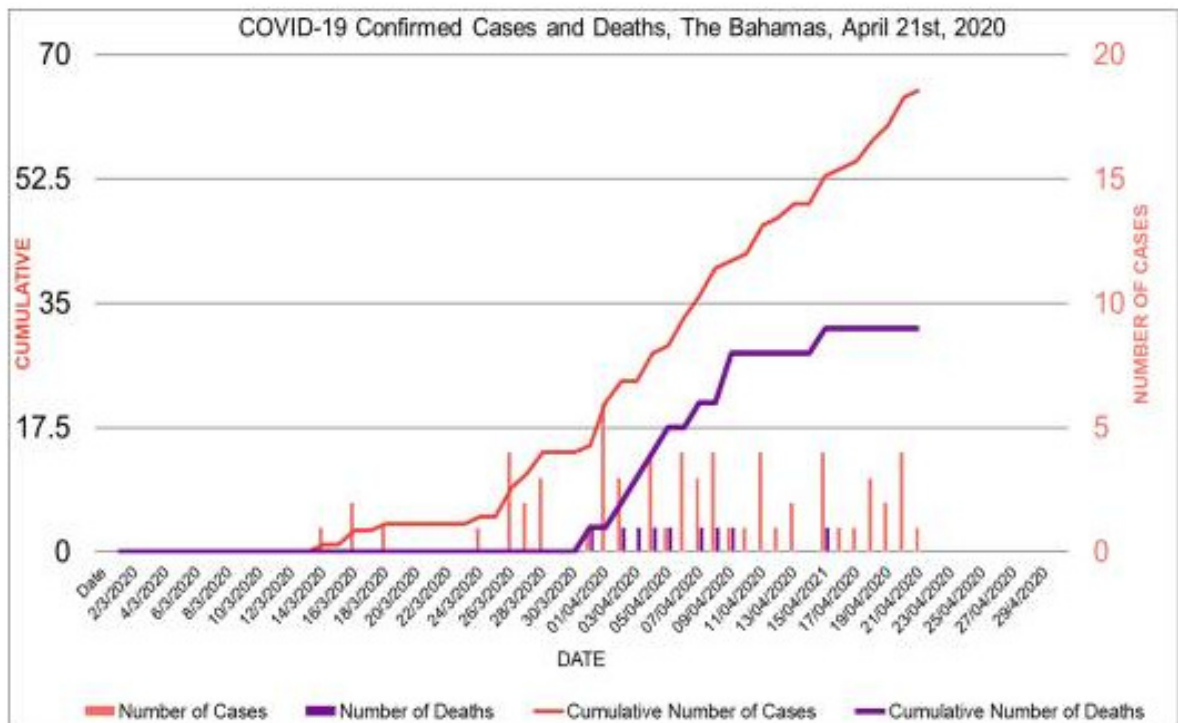
Island	Confirmed cases	Deaths
Parrot Cay	2	0
Providenciales	9	1
TOTAL	11	1

SITUATION SUMMARY

The Bahamas

- Continuation of Emergency Orders implemented since 20th March 2020, with increasingly draconian measures implemented since then. Weekly 24-hour curfew regulations and weekend total lockdown measures continue are expected to continue beyond April.
- Closure of schools and businesses continue except specified categories of businesses that generally provide access to food, health care, and pharmaceutical supplies.
- Following occupational exposures to infected patients in two hospitals in New Providence, investigations have been launched into the circumstances and patient flow. Laboratory testing is also being done for co-exposed health care workers and patients. Initiatives have been launched to improve sanitation and provide re-training in hygiene and appropriate use of PPEs for health care workers providing care in hospitals, nursing and private homes.
- Visiting hours at all Princess Margaret Hospital wards have been suspended until further notice.
- Persons providing medical services in homes are required to provide details on type of care and contact information for current patients to the Chief Medical Officer. They must also undergo an infection prevention and control protocol training by the Ministry of Health before continuing care.
- A COVID-19 risk assessment has been done for shelters housing Hurricane Dorian evacuees in New Providence. The assessment included review of disease surveillance data and measures for monitoring of health of evacuees.
- In New Providence, home and hardware stores, plant nurseries, auto part stores, landscape and property maintenance businesses have been added to the exempted business lists with operating hours on specified days. No further relaxation of restrictions is recommended by the Ministry of Health.
- On the Family Islands, construction projects have resumed as well as related businesses including electrical, hardware, lumber, and plumbing businesses.
- The mandate for wearing face masks outside of the household continues. Exempted businesses are required to provide masks to employees. Failure to comply can result in penalties. Furthermore, customers will not be allowed to enter business establishments without wearing a face mask.
- An Economic Recovery Committee was established to advise on re-opening of businesses and restimulating the economy. Formal announcement of the Committee is pending.

- Government measures for financial assistance to both individuals and businesses are ongoing. This includes the National Insurance Board unemployment benefit and unemployment assistance program, the Small Business Development Centre payroll support program, and the Department of Inland Revenue Tax Credit and Deferral program.
- The Union Health and Welfare Fund of the Bahamas Hotel Catering and Allied Workers Union commenced distribution of food vouchers to hotel workers.
- The Prime Minister has appealed to business owners to delay terminations of employment, if possible.
- Inter-island and international border control measures continue.
- A formal announcement of the Food Security Committee/Task force is expected. This grouping will address access to food and increase local food production and distribution for the short, medium, and long terms.
- The website of the Office of the Prime Minister is available for the public to ask COVID-related questions and make suggestions.

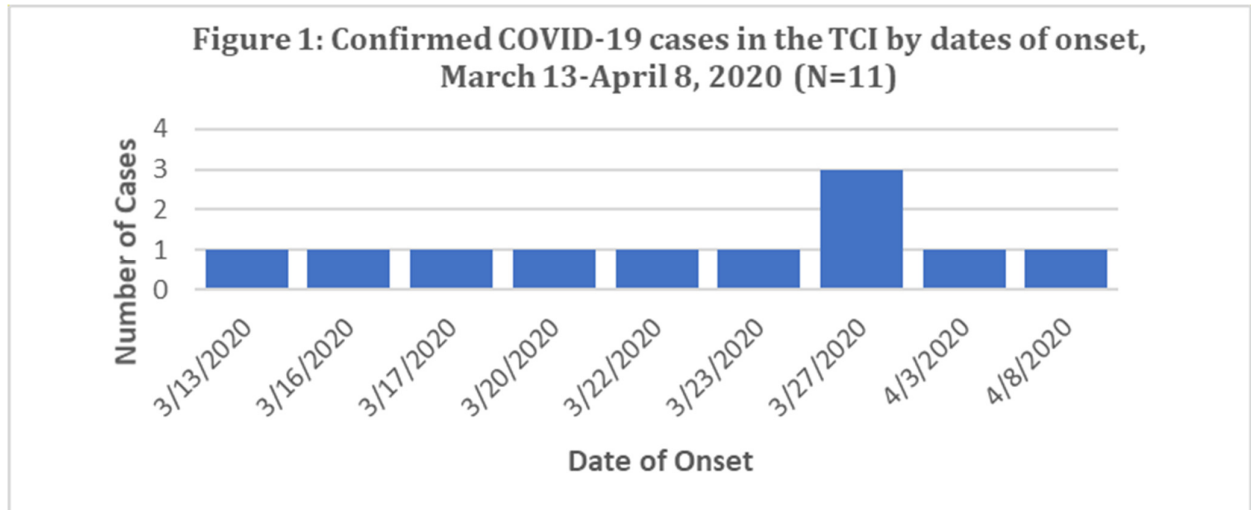


Turks and Caicos Islands

- Emergency Powers continue and mandate the continued closure of the international airports and seaports, restriction of local travel, closure of schools, implementation of curfews, and compliance with physical distancing measures.
- The nightly curfews between 8pm and 5am and the stay-at-home regulation have been extended until 4th May 2020 for all residents except essential service workers.
- Closure of businesses on Sundays and Wednesdays continued except for exempted businesses. This will continue until 4th May 2020. Exempted businesses are doctor's offices, hospitals, medical facilities, hotels with residential guests, and security services.
- Airports will remain closed to regional and international flights until 4th May 2020. Cruise ports will

remain closed until 30th June 2020.

- The United Kingdom Security Assistance personnel completed their quarantine during which time virtual meetings were held to discuss COVID-19 response.
- Online learning platforms continue to be used for education delivery to students across the islands.
- Hotline services to address coping strategies are established and being operated by the Department of Health, the Red Cross and School Guidance Counsellors.



NATIONAL RESPONSE

The Bahamas Ministry of Health

- COVID-19 laboratory testing continues at the National Reference Laboratory. Efforts continue toward establishing testing capacity on at least 2 additional islands.
- Health officials plan to expand RT-PCR capacity testing, targeting contacts of cases, health care personnel nearing the end of their quarantine period, nursing and homecare personnel, and individuals calling into the hotline reporting symptoms compatible with the suspect case definition.
- Policies and protocols have been developed and implemented for the following:
 - Criteria for clinical classification of COVID-19 positive patients;
 - General PPE Management;
 - Patient care at the South Beach Clinic;
 - Care for COVID-19 patients based on case classification;
 - Laboratory testing for COVID-19;
 - Identification and management of Suspected COVID-19 patients in community clinics;
 - Management of health care workers exposed to COVID-19;
 - Access to Government sponsored accommodation for health care workers.
- A re-training plan for all health care workers is being implemented with focus on Infection Prevention and Control measures and rational use of personal protective equipment.
- The reorganization of health service delivery has been successful in increasing in-patient options for providing care for COVID-19 patients.

- In New Providence, the South Beach Clinic will be further retrofitted to accommodate an additional 10 beds to increase the total capacity from 0 to 20 beds. Doctor's Hospital West has the capacity of 16 beds and PMH has an increased four-bed capacity from a recently established temporary modular unit being used for triage of patients. In Grand Bahama, the capacity at the RAND Memorial Hospital is six beds. The capacity is expected to increase to 22 beds with a plan to have a temporary in-patient facility brought on board within one week.
- Predictive statistical modelling tools continue to be used to estimate probable numbers of COVID-19 cases. This is a collaborative project of the Ministry of Health and the University of the Bahamas.
- The data capture tool of a virtual call center is being used to estimate the number of probable cases and their geographic locations. It is also being used to guide probable cases to the appropriate health care facility or to proceed with home quarantine on a situational basis.

Turks and Caicos Islands Ministry of Health

- A PCR Analyzer was received in country on 17th April 2020 to conduct COVID-19 testing. Laboratory training is underway and after quality assurance checks, validation, and other measures, in- country testing will commence.
- COVID-19 laboratory testing continues through accessing the Reference Laboratory in The Bahamas and the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), Trinidad, depending on flight availability for specimen transport.
- Ongoing, frequent public health messages are being broadcast to provide prevention and control advice for COVID-19, and general COVID-19 information and updates. The Ministry of Health's website and email are accessible to the public to address additional concerns.
- The Ministry of Health's weekly radio show commenced 'The COVID-19 Series' by discussing Contact Tracing, Recovery from COVID-19, and Quarantine/Isolation.
- The 'Ask the Doctor!' talk show continued with COVID-19 health questions being answered.

PAHO/WHO RESPONSE

The Bahamas

- The PAHO Country Office (CO) continues teleworking arrangements which commenced on 20th March 2020.
- PAHO continues to provide the Ministry of Health personnel with access to updated information through PAHO/WHO WebEx meetings, online courses, technical documents and guidelines and technical briefings.
- Country Office personnel are embedded within the Bahamas' Ministry of Health's Emergency Operating Centre providing on-going technical guidance and support in the areas of primary health care services, hospitals and acute care, information management, laboratory, surveillance, and contact tracing.
- The PAHO Consultant Epidemiologist made a presentation on outbreak investigation to the Surveillance Unit of the Ministry of Health (MOH); and participated in meetings on behalf of MOH on mathematical modelling to predict future case load and use of the Geographic Information System (GIS) for contact tracing.

Turks and Caicos Islands

- PAHO provides on-going technical assistance through virtual meetings, email correspondence, and teleconferences and access to PAHO/WHO WebEx meetings, online courses, PAHO/WHO technical guidance documents and technical briefings.

NEEDS

Both The Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands are in need of additional personal protective equipment, laboratory kits and testing supplies.

GAPS/CHALLENGES

The Bahamas

- Health care workers account for 20% of the total number of cases.
- Surveillance and contact tracing are predominantly done by phone, confirming some of the provided information given by contacts in at-home isolation and quarantine has been challenging.
- Assuring compliance by persons who are in self-isolation or self-quarantine.
- There is minimal validation that home quarantine and isolation facilities are suitable.
- There are delays in finalizing and ensuring easy access to policies and guidelines for the public and health professionals.
- Only verbal notifications have been provided to cases on contacts about requirements for physical distancing and infection prevention and control procedures. Written guidance documents are being developed for distribution.
- There is a risk of cross-infection between persons in Government quarantine and isolation facilities because both are located on the same premises.

Turks and Caicos Islands

- Limited surge capacity in secondary care facilities including limitations in bed space and human resources which are being addressed through collaboration with regionally and with the UK Government.
- No in-country intensive care capacity remains a serious challenge, and a workable solution has not yet been put in place.
- Disruption in supply chain and long lead times for procurement of PPE, medical, patient sampling and laboratory supplies.
- There are episodes of undocumented migrants entering the country. Strategies are needed for public education and surveillance among the migrant population.