

Situation in The Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands April 10th, 2020

CONTEXT

On 30th January 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) a public health emergency of international concern. 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.

As of 9th April 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) has reported 1,436,198 confirmed cases and 85,522 deaths globally. In the Region of the Americas, WHO reported 454,710 confirmed cases and 14,775 deaths.

HIGHLIGHTS

The Bahamas

Since 2nd April 2020, there were 16 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 and six deaths including the first death of a health-care worker on 5th April 2020.

Of the total 40 confirmed cases:

- The male to female ratio is 1:1.2;
- Six are health care workers;
- Age groups for deceased cases are: 1 between 40 and < 60 and 5 ≥ 60 years of age;
- Five cases have recovered;
- There are 344 persons in quarantine
- 394 laboratory tests have been done to date.

On 5th April 2020 the country provided definitions of recovered cases from COVID-19 to include both test-based and non-test-based strategies.

Turks and Caicos Islands

Since 2nd April 2020, there were three new confirmed cases of COVID-19.

The first COVID-19 related death was reported on 4th April 2020.

There are 31 persons under isolation and quarantine/observation.

There are cases linked to travel outside of the country and sporadic cases due to in-country transmission of COVID-19.

The Bahamas

Island	Confirmed cases	Deaths
New Providence	33	4
Grand Bahama	6	2
Bimini	1	1
TOTAL	40	7

The Turks and Caicos Islands

	Confirmed cases	Deaths
TOTAL	8	1

SITUATION IN NUMBERS

TOTAL CASES

40 Bahamas
8 Turks & Caicos
Confirmed

5 Bahamas
0 Turks & Caicos
Recovered

7 Bahamas
1 Turks & Caicos
Deaths

PAHO RESPONSE

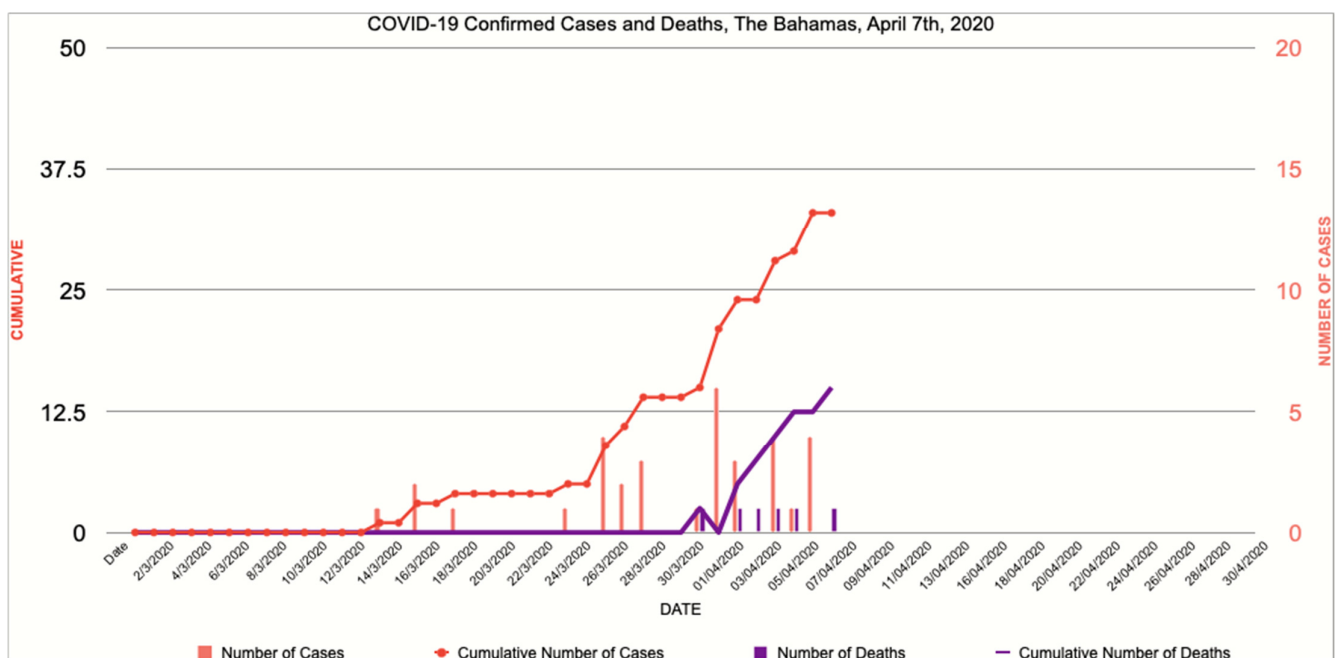
- ✓ Donation of laboratory supplies
- ✓ Risk assessment and situational analysis
- ✓ Technical guidance
- ✓ Communication
- ✓ Support to local authorities on surveillance and health systems planning

SITUATION SUMMARY

The Bahamas

- Continuation of Emergency Orders implemented since 20th March 2020, with continuations and increasingly draconian measures implemented since then. Current measures include 24-hour curfew, denial of entry to all travelers arriving by air and sea, the closure of schools and businesses except specified categories of businesses that generally provide access to food, health care, and pharmaceutical supplies.
- The 24-hour curfew order was revised to define essential workers that provide the following service:
 - Core Utilities (Communications, Electricity, Water), Customs Department, Department of Correctional Services, Health, Environmental Health Services, Fire Department, Media, National Insurance Board, Security Companies, Ministry of Social Services, and Waste Disposal and Sanitation Companies.
- A food shopping schedule commenced on 6th April 2020 for the island of New Providence. Essential workers, the elderly and persons with disabilities were given specified shopping times.
- The Government has mandated the general public to wear a face masks when accessing essential services.
- To reduce the social impact of COVID-19, the Government has taken measures to ensure the distribution of food to vulnerable individuals and payment of unemployment benefits, as appropriate, through the National Insurance Board.
- All major hotels have suspended operations. However, smaller hotels and Airbnb facilities are still operational and are accommodating guests. Activity in the wider tourism sector has ceased and will have a serious adverse impact on the national economy.
- A 24-hour centre is fully operational that provides to support the triage of possible cases and answers to COVID-19 health-related questions from the public.
- The Ministry of Health and the National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA) have been in discussions with external providers to improve management of data from monitoring of cases, contact tracing, and management of medical records of COVID-19 patients.
- The health sector is implementing measures to cope with an anticipated surge in persons requiring hospitalization and critical care.
 - Government-funded isolation and quarantine facilities are in operation for those who cannot effectively self-quarantine or self-isolate at home.
 - Elective surgeries have been cancelled and routine services like antenatal care, and chronic illness care at public health clinics have been reorganized to be provided in specified hospitals and clinics in New Providence and Grand Bahama. These measures are part of contingency planning to ensure increase availability of hospital beds and health care personnel to respond to COVID-19 critical care needs.
 - One primary health clinic (South Beach clinic in New Providence) with the capacity of 10 beds has been identified for the COVID-19 response for urgent care, as a referral centre and for sample collection. Additional expansion beds in other areas in the same facility is under consideration.
 - The Princes Margaret Hospital has implemented a modular unit with four beds for inpatient cases with the possibility of conversion as step-down ICU beds if needed with negative pressure in place.

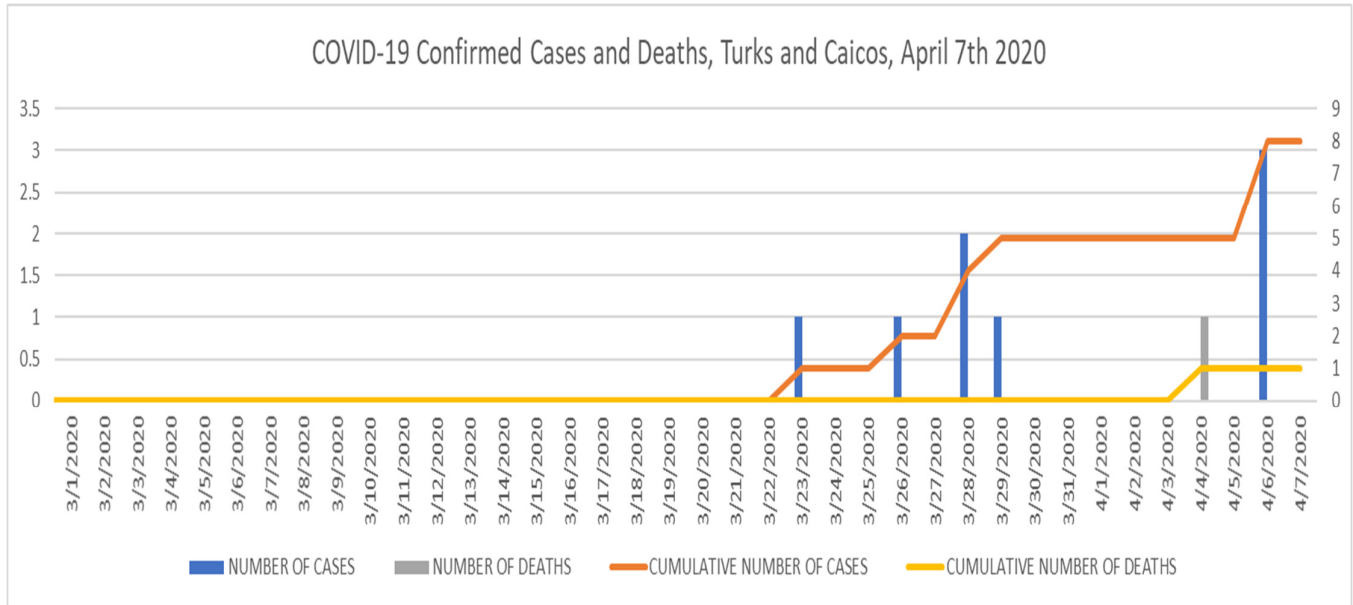
- In collaboration with the private sector, the Doctors West hospital facility has been operating for the care of COVID-19 cases with a capacity of 16 beds.
- In Grand Bahama, the Rand Memorial Hospital has put in place nine inpatient beds for COVID-19 patients and has identified additional beds in two other private facilities with additional capacity of 15 beds.
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- Health care protocols for triage and care of COVID-19 patients are being updated based on the evolving needs in the reorganized health delivery network.
- Reassignment of health staff is ongoing with daily monitoring and adjustments.
- Medical equipment and supplies are being distributed and new estimations are being calculated to identify existing inventory and gaps.



Turks and Caicos Islands

- Emergency Powers implemented on 26th March 2020 continues in effect and mandates the closure of the international airports and seaports, restriction of local travel, implementation of curfews, and compliance with physical distancing measures.
- Further to the implementation of the Emergency Powers, a lockdown will be in effect for two and a half days which commenced 9th April 2020 at 12noon to the end of day 10th April 2020 at 11:59 pm, and for the entire day on 12th April 2020. On the 11th April 2020 and 13th April 2020 only essential businesses will be permitted to operate.
- The Government welcomed the Security Assistance Team from the United Kingdom who will assist with strengthening in-country health capacity including COVID-19 response and military capacity considering the situation of illegal migration.
- Protocols are being updated in the overall reorganization of the health delivery network for triage and care of suspected COVID-19 cases.
- Interactions with Inter-Health Canada are ongoing daily to monitor the hospitals' performance,

planning and care of COVID-19 patients.



NATIONAL RESPONSE

The Bahamas Ministry of Health

- COVID-19 Laboratory testing continues at the National Reference Laboratory. Additional testing options are being explored for decentralization of testing to other populous islands, using rapid molecular tests e.g. GeneXpert.
- The Ministry of Health received a donation of rapid serological test kits, but there are no plans for their use for clinical diagnosis of COVID-19.
- The Ministry of Health released a Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping of COVID-19 confirmed cases and contacts.
- The Ministry of Health's Emergency Operating Centre continues to meet daily to respond to COVID-19 health needs.
- A risk assessment was done by a multi-sectoral group, and border control and quarantine options have been implemented since 30th January 2020 to reduce the risk of travel-associated cases entering the country and local spread of virus.
- Several PAHO/WHO tools are being implemented to support the Ministry of Health in exploring probable scenarios to plan for the health sector's outbreak response by estimating needs hospital beds, Intensive Care Unit (ICU) beds, human resources, and medical supplies.

NATIONAL RESPONSE

Turks and Caicos Islands Ministry of Health

- COVID-19 laboratory testing continues through accessing the Reference Laboratory in The Bahamas or the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), Trinidad, depending on flight availability for specimen transport.
- Ministry of Health officials continue daily discussions with PAHO for briefing on the evolving situation and technical assistance.

- Several PAHO/WHO tools are being used to support the Ministry of Health in exploring probable scenarios for planning for the outbreak response by estimating the number of needed hospital beds, ICU beds, human resources, and medical and PPE supplies.

PAHO/WHO RESPONSE

The Bahamas

- The PAHO Country Office (CO) continues teleworking arrangements which commenced on 20th March 2020.
- The CO submitted a proposal to PAHO/WHO for funding support to fill gaps in COVID-19 responses in The Bahamas.
- PAHO donated laboratory supplies to support real time PCR laboratory testing and is procuring rapid molecular test platforms and test reagents. The latter is with a view of expanding testing capacity to two additional islands for near-patient testing, and faster transfer of patients in need of critical care.
- PAHO is responding to a request for support for communication from the Bahamas' Ministry of Health.
- PAHO is collaborating with the Bahamas' Ministry of Health and the United Nations (non)-Resident Coordinator to explore opportunities for fund raising through international agencies to address gaps in the national COVID-19 response.
- PAHO continues to provide the Ministry of Health personnel in both countries with access to updated information through PAHO/WHO WebEx meetings, online courses, technical documents and guidelines and technical briefings.
- CO personnel are embedded within the Bahamas' Ministry of Health's Emergency Operating Centre providing technical guidance and support in the areas of primary health care, hospitals and acute care, information management, laboratory, surveillance and contact tracing.

PAHO/WHO RESPONSE

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.
- PAHO is assisting in the estimation of health sector needs for a surge in cases with planning for physical facilities to provide in-patient and critical care, as well as estimating human resource needs.

NEEDS

The Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands

- Strengthen the training of health care workers in COVID-19 new processes and infection prevention and control
- Personal Protective Equipment

GAPS/CHALLENGES

- The Ministries of Health in both countries and PAHO are seriously challenged to procure laboratory

and personal protective equipment supplies from international commercial suppliers.

- The Ministries of Health in both countries are under considerable pressure from the private sector to use serological laboratory tests. There are no regulations for diagnostics in either country to prevent use of such tests. Discussions are on-going.

Turks and Caicos Islands

- The country will not be able to cope with a sudden large surge in cases, because of its limited health sector infrastructure.
- The country is experiencing increasing challenges with referring laboratory specimens to CARPHA or The Bahamas. Options for building in-country laboratory capacity are being actively explored
- Access to in-country intensive care capacity remains a serious challenge, and a workable solution has not been put in place.
- There are shortages in human resources for health.