

Situation in The Bahamas & Turks and Caicos Islands 8th April 2021.

On 30th January 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) a public health emergency of international concern. As of 8th April 2021, there were 132,977,390 cases and 2,887,274 deaths reported globally. The Region of the Americas accounted for 57,510,180 confirmed cases and 1,391,380 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 1st April 2021, there were 165 newly confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Among the new cases:

- Sixty percent (60%) were from New Providence and twenty-four percent (24%) were from Grand Bahama;
- 74 (45%) males and 91 (55%) females;
- 25 cases (15 from New Providence, 4 Exuma, 3 Grand Bahama, 1 Eleuthera and 1 Berry Island) were travel-related.

Among total confirmed cases:

- 79,493 real time PCR (RT-PCR) tests have been conducted to date.

Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI)

Since 1st April 2021, there were 7 newly confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Among the new cases:

- Seventy-one percent (71%) were from Providenciales;

Among total confirmed cases:

- 1117 (47.4%) males, 1204 (51.6%) females and 23 (1.0%) unknown gender;
- The age distribution of all cases is 0-5 (1.9%), 6-19 (9.8%), 20-29 (19.2%), 30-39 (24.7%), 40-49 (21.3%), 50-59 (13.8%), 60-79 (8.0%), 80 and over (0.8%), and unknown (0.5%);
- 497 persons are quarantined/home isolation;
- 19,091 real time PCR (RT-PCR) tests and 37,014 Rapid Antigen Tests have been conducted to date.

The Bahamas

Island	Confirmed cases	Deaths
New Providence	6535	146
Grand Bahama	1506	24
Abaco	321	6
Eleuthera	204	1
Exuma	129	1
Bimini/Cat Cay	123	3
Berry Islands	58	1
Inagua	19	0
Andros	52	0
Long Island	11	0
Cat Island	9	0
Acklins	7	0
San Salvador	10	0
Crooked Island	6	0
Mayaguana	3	0
Pending	371	7
TOTAL	9364	189

Turks and Caicos Islands

Island	Confirmed cases	Deaths
Providenciales	1871	12
North Caicos	96	0
Parrot Cay	13	0
Grand Turk	283	5
South Caicos	53	0
Middle Caicos	27	0
Ambergris Cay	1	0
TOTAL	2344	17

SITUATION IN NUMBERS

TOTAL CASES

9364 Bahamas
2344 Turks & Caicos

Confirmed

282 Bahamas
42 Turks & Caicos

Active Cases

8837 Bahamas
2279 Turks & Caicos

Recovered

36 Bahamas
2 Turks & Caicos

Hospitalized

1 Turks & Caicos
Positive Cases that Left Country

189 Bahamas
17 Turks & Caicos
COVID-related Deaths

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

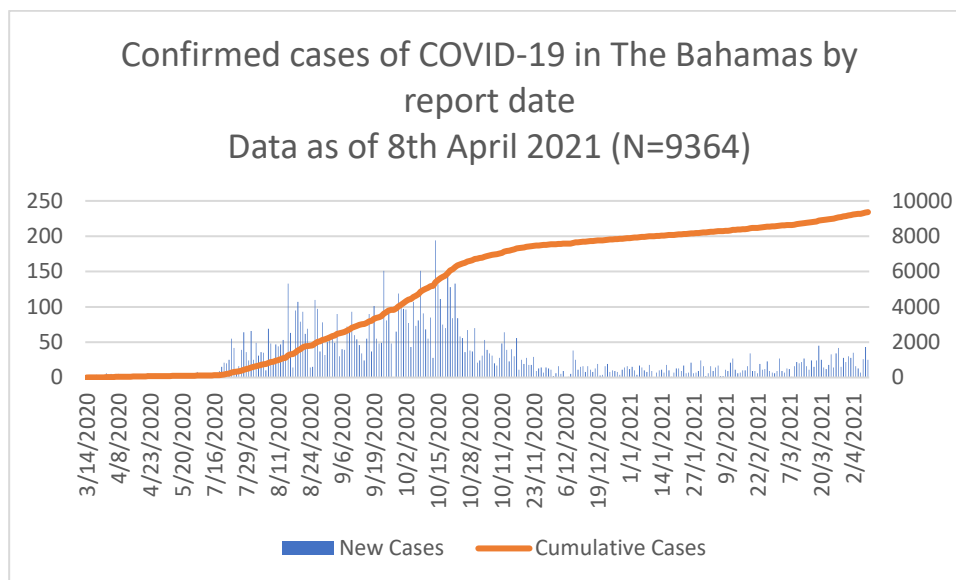
17 Bahamas
Deaths under investigation

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

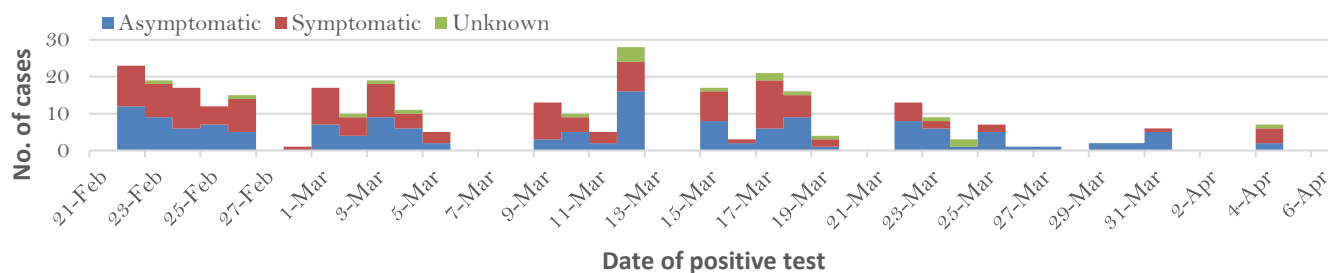
- Emergency Orders have been extended to 23rd May 2021.
- Nightly curfews continue for Abaco, Mainland Eleuthera, Mainland Exuma and New Providence from 10:00 pm to 5:00 am and on Grand Bahama, 11:00 pm to 5:00 am, Mondays to Sundays.
- Restrictions on vessels and travellers from Haiti into the country continue and will remain in place until 11th April 2021.
- COVID-19 vaccine distribution exercises were suspended from 1st April to 6th April 2021 in observance of the Easter holiday.



Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI)

- The pandemic public health regulations and protocols related to social distancing, wearing of masks and other related measures including screening for travel have been extended to 30th June 2021.
- One new public health measure was approved during the Cabinet meeting held 7th April 2021. This measure increases the number of persons to 50 at Official Funerals held outside only, in addition to 20 government officials and any police officers participating.

Figure 1: Symptomatic and Asymptomatic TCI COVID-19 cases by date of positive test
February 21 - April 6, 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.

- There was an increase in cases on Harbour Island, Eleuthera, mainly among persons from the US on Spring Break, just before and during the Easter period. A team from the MOH and the Advisor from the PAHO country office conducted a mission to Harbour Island to conduct contact tracing and initiate COVID-19 vaccination. The number of cases on Harbour Island have since decreased.
- COVID-19 vaccine distribution continued in both New Providence and Grand Bahama and was suspended on Eleuthera. As of 7th April 2021, more than 10,000 persons received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. COVID-19 vaccination rollout was expanded to include athletes competing abroad, coaches and other sports support personnel, hospitality personnel, physically disabled persons who are confined to the home, students studying abroad, teachers and school personnel. Vaccine distribution resumed on 7th April 2021. Additional sites added for distribution were Atlantis, Paradise Island and Bahamar, Cable Beach for hospitality personnel and the Kendal G. L. Isaacs Gymnasium for teachers and school personnel.
- 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 were sent out of country for genomic sequencing to ascertain whether any variant strains are in-country; and no variants were detected. Another batch of ten samples were sent to the Caribbean Public Health Agency for genomic sequencing. A National Respiratory Surveillance Genomics Database was implemented by the National Reference Laboratory (NRL) for future genetic analysis.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 this past week.
- COVID-19 vaccine distribution and community testing continued.
- 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 19,091 tests were completed to date.
- 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.
- 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 (see Figure 1. Below).



Figure 1. PAHO/WHO Country Representative for The Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands making presentation to non-governmental organizations which serve vulnerable populations. From left presentation is being to Ms. Philadendrin Russell of Bahamas Sexual Health and Rights Association, Mrs. Sharon Ferguson, of St. Matthew's Day Care Center for the Aged and Mrs. Felicia Carey of Teen Life Skills.

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 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 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. PAHO laboratory advisors will be assisting The Bahamas in building capacity for identification of variants.
- 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.