

Situation in The Bahamas & Turks and Caicos Islands 29th 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 29th April 2021, there were 149,440,201 cases and 3,150,196 deaths reported globally. The Region of the Americas accounted for 61,853,321 confirmed cases and 1,505,909 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 22nd April 2021, there were 477 newly confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 3 COVID-19 related deaths.

Among the new cases:

- Seventy-one percent (71%) were from New Providence and nineteen percent (19%) were from Grand Bahama;
- 244 (51%) males and 233 (49%) females;
- 11 cases (all from New Providence) were travel-related.

Among total confirmed cases:

- 86,984 real time PCR (RT-PCR) tests have been conducted to date.

Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI)

Since 22nd April 2021, there were 13 newly confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Among the new cases:

- All were from Providenciales;

Among total confirmed cases:

- 1139 (47.7%) males, 1225 (51.3%) females and 22 (0.9%) unknown gender (data as of 28th April 2021);
- The age distribution of all cases is 0-5 (1.9%), 6-19 (10.0%), 20-29 (19.1%), 30-39 (24.8%), 40-49 (21.3%), 50-59 (13.7%), 60-79 (7.9%), 80 and over (0.8%), and unknown (0.5%) (data as of 28th April 2021);
- 506 persons are quarantined/home isolation;
- 19,970 real time PCR (RT-PCR) tests and 54,460 Rapid Antigen Tests have been conducted to date.

The Bahamas

Island	Confirmed cases	Deaths
New Providence	7609	152
Grand Bahama	1735	25
Abaco	344	7
Eleuthera	228	1
Exuma	137	1
Bimini/Cat Cay	134	4
Berry Islands	58	1
Inagua	16	0
Andros	94	1
Long Island	19	0
Cat Island	10	0
Acklins	7	0
San Salvador	11	0
Crooked Island	7	0
Mayaguana	3	0
Pending	41	7
TOTAL	10453	199

Turks and Caicos Islands

Island	Confirmed cases	Deaths
Providenciales	1914	12
North Caicos	96	0
Parrot Cay	13	0
Grand Turk	284	5
South Caicos	53	0
Middle Caicos	27	0
Ambergris Cay	1	0
TOTAL	2388	17

SITUATION IN NUMBERS

TOTAL CASES

10453 Bahamas
2388 Turks & Caicos

Confirmed

679 Bahamas
21 Turks & Caicos

Active Cases

9494 Bahamas
2343 Turks & Caicos

Recovered

54 Bahamas
2 Turks & Caicos

Hospitalized

1 Turks & Caicos
Positive Cases that Left Country

199 Bahamas
17 Turks & Caicos
COVID-related Deaths

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

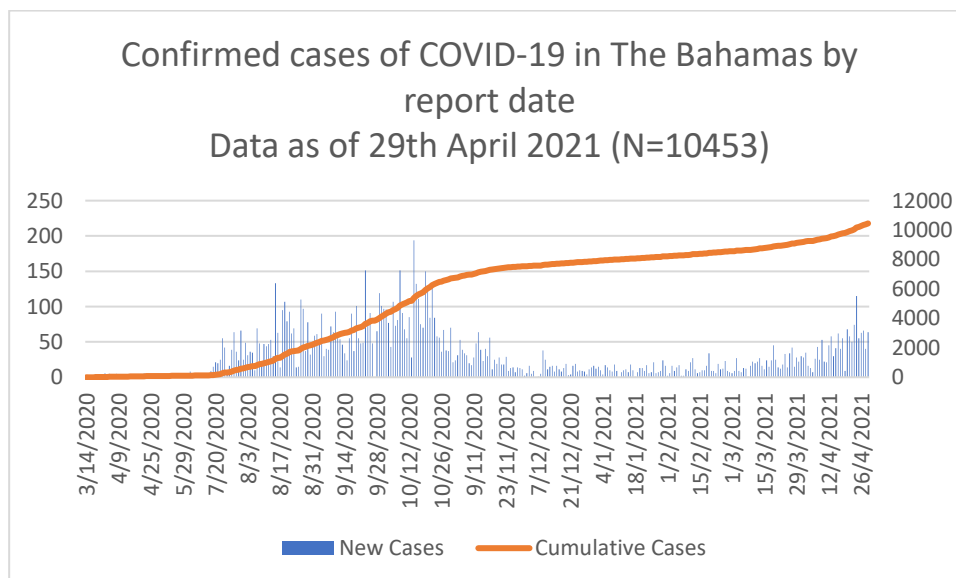
33 Bahamas
Deaths under investigation

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

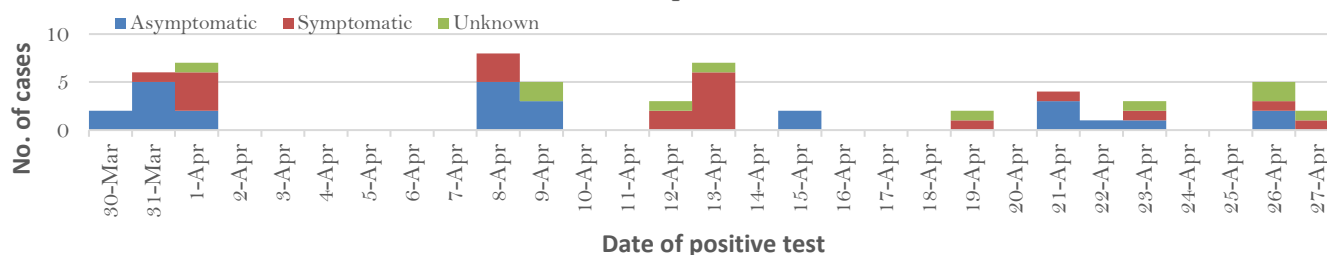
- Emergency Orders have been extended to 23rd May 2021.
- Nightly curfews continue for Abaco, Grand Bahama, Mainland Eleuthera, Mainland Exuma and New Providence.
- Restrictions on vessels and travellers from Haiti into the country continue and were extended to 12th May 2021.
- As of 1st May COVID-19 testing requirements for persons travelling between Abaco, Eleuthera, Grand Bahama, and New Providence will cease for fully vaccinated travellers once proof of full vaccination two weeks prior is shown. This will also apply to international travellers.



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.
- Weekly mandatory COVID-19 Testing is required for all teachers in the public school system.

Figure 1: Symptomatic and Asymptomatic TCI COVID-19 cases by date of positive test
March 29 - April 27, 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 continued on Abaco, Eleuthera, Grand Bahama and New Providence. As of 25th April 2021, 25,692 persons received their first dose of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine on these islands.
- COVID-19 vaccine rollout was expanded to include citizens and permanent residents 18 years of age and older on all islands. Rollout also commenced on Acklins, Andros, Berry Islands, Cat Island, Crooked Island, Exuma, Inagua, Long Island, Mayaguana, Rum Cay, and San Salvador. The United States Embassy and Life Flight Air Ambulance Services assisted with the rollout efforts in these islands through the use of their aircrafts to transport both the medical team and vaccines.
- 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 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 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 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.
- COVID-19 vaccine distribution continued. As of 25th April 2021, 16,340 persons received their first dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine which represents 47% of the population and 13,484 persons received their second dose which represents 39% of the population.
- 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 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.

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 during the week of 2nd May 2021.
- 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.
- 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 recently assisted The Bahamas in attaining capacity to identify the presence of COVID-19 variants present in samples, which would then need 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. However, there are still delays with the 24-hour time-period reporting stipulation.
- 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 low and the risk of expiration of doses before use is possible.
- The change in government due to the election on 19th February 2021 may have an impact on health policies and services.