



National Address

**The Most Hon. Dr. Hubert Minnis
Prime Minister**

3 August 2020

My Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

The global COVID-19 pandemic is in a new and more dangerous stage at home and abroad.

Some countries are experiencing what some believe is a second wave of the pandemic, while the first wave continues and has gotten worse in other countries.

From Europe to Asia to Africa to North America to Australia, various measures, such as lockdowns, curfews and travel restrictions, are being reapplied to address the surge in cases within countries.

We are facing a similar situation and challenge here at home.

Just as we acted aggressively and forcefully during the initial outbreak of the pandemic, we must once again act quickly and forcefully to protect the general health and to save lives.

Over the past two weeks, health officials have seen an increase in a number of indicators that point to the need for a national lockdown.

There has been an exponential increase in the number of cases, an increase in hospitalizations, an increase in the demand for ICU beds, and sadly, an increase in the number of deaths.

The more cases that present to health institutions, the more services will be needed. Right now, our bed capacity and human resources are being increasingly stretched.

Health officials advise that a lockdown will allow for the repurposing of health facilities and addition of health resources to

accommodate the increased need for hospitalizations and healthcare support.

They also advise that a lockdown will provide the opportunity for enhanced contact tracing, which will identify cases before they become very ill and prevent the spread of infection by the contacts.

The management by the Surveillance Unit of those in isolation and quarantine will continue to be strengthened.

I wish to stress that our ICU beds are at capacity and that non-critical care beds are approaching capacity.

Today, health officials reported 31 new confirmed cases, 22 on Grand Bahama and 9 on New Providence, for a total of 679 confirmed cases.

An increase in the number of cases is expected before the current surge is brought under control.

The Ministry of Health will provide further details during their regular updates to the public.

Therefore, Fellow Bahamians and Residents, acting on the advice of health officials, I am announcing today a national lockdown for the entire country, commencing tomorrow, Tuesday, 4 August 2020 at 10 p.m.

The national lockdown will be for a minimum of two weeks. Nearing the end of this period, we will assess the health data, and advise whether a further lockdown period is necessary.

The extension, relaxation or cessation of the national lockdown will in part be determined by the cooperation of Bahamians and residents.

The longer we take collectively to bring this second wave under control, the longer it will take to resume a sense of normalcy.

All of our actions, collectively, make a difference during this pandemic.

We all have a personal and social responsibility in the fight against COVID-19.

Both government and citizens must play their part in helping to protect the health of others.

Each island in our archipelago must do its part.

We are known as a family of islands for a reason.

While the Government of The Bahamas will continue to encourage various health measures, we will also vigorously enforce the emergency measures in order to protect the general good.

In particular, we will vigorously enforce quarantine measures.

I plead with those in quarantine to remain in quarantine until their quarantine period ends.

Those who break quarantine and who are COVID-19 positive pose a risk to others.

While we are encouraging you to remain in quarantine, if you break quarantine, you will be fined.

Let me note that an assessment will be made of Grand Bahama nearing the end of its lockdown period on Friday, 7th August at 5am. A determination made whether an extension is necessary on Grand Bahama.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

I acknowledge that this lockdown is on short notice.

Unfortunately, this is the dangerous nature of this virus, which requires quick and aggressive action.

I assure you that careful consideration has been given to your essential needs.

As such, the following essential items will be available during Monday, Wednesday and Friday, from 7 am to 5pm for the general public, and again on Saturday from 7am to 1pm for essential workers. These include:

- Food stores
- Water depots
- Pharmacies from curb side or take-away windows only;
- and
- Gas stations for external services only.

Food stores and pharmacies are encouraged to offer, and the public is encouraged utilize delivery services as much as practicable.

The purpose of alternating days is based on health guidelines that strongly demonstrate that limiting movement, and having clear days where there is no movement, helps to minimize the spread of COVID 19.

All households are asked to identify one person to be the designated shopper for each of the essential services I have identified above. Our enforcements will be monitoring this and the number of persons travelling in vehicles.

Throughout the country, all businesses and offices will be required to suspend operations, with limited exceptions and to have their staff work remotely, where this is possible.

Such exceptions include:

- Commercial banks will be permitted restricted hours of operation to the public, until 1 p.m. on Monday, Wednesday and Friday;
- Accommodation will be made for international banks, trust companies and financial institutions to have a skeleton team in office on the same days;
- Construction will be permitted to continue, having regard to the fact that we are in hurricane season; this will be permitted Monday thru Friday, 7 am to 5pm, and Saturday 7am to 1pm;

- However, hardware stores will only be permitted to provide curbside services on Monday Wednesday, and Friday, from 7am to 5pm.

- Private medical facilities will be permitted to provide emergency medical care and immunization services only, Monday, Wednesday and Friday. All routine services are to be suspended.

- Home healthcare takers, certified by the Ministry of Health, will be permitted to carry out these important services.

- Essential commercial ports will be permitted to carry on their respective services;

- Caretakers will be permitted to maintain crops and animals;

- There will be no curb side and takeaway dining or retail, other than as mentioned for hardware stores;

- The Secretary to the Cabinet and permanent secretaries will give instructions to Public Officers.

I also wish to advise that live streaming from a religious facility will continue to be permitted during the lockdown, with no more than 10 people at the facility, to accommodate virtual services.

Families will be permitted to lay to rest their loved ones. Funeral services will continue to be permitted at the graveside

only, with no more than five attendees, excluding the officiant and the mortuary staff.

Persons will be permitted to exercise in their immediate neighborhoods during this period from 6 am to 9 am.

There is no change in the travel policy as outlined in the most recent Emergency Powers Order.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

We go into lockdown together, not as political partisans or a people divided.

At my invitation, members of the Official Opposition attended the Ministry of Health's 3 p.m. briefing earlier today at the Cabinet Office.

We enter this lockdown together as one people, as a Bahamian community united in love and a shared desire to fight this deadly virus together until the battle is over.

I know that a lockdown like this is the last thing we wanted as a country.

I know the nation is hurting; that our economy is in a terrible state; that many businesspeople are struggling; that many workers are now unemployed; that families are scared; that many of us are afraid of catching the virus.

I offer deep condolences to all those who have lost loved ones because of COVID-19.

We are also praying for all of those ill in hospital or at home.

Let me say to you as your prime minister and as someone who long ago took a solemn medical oath to save lives:

I will and I must do all that is right and necessary to protect your life and those of your loved ones, neighbors and fellow-citizens.

We are taking the required and necessary measures to comprehensively battle COVID-19.

I promise you, we can and we will rebuild our economy and our society.

But what we cannot do is bring people back to life.

So our first and foremost priority will always be to protect the lives of Bahamians and residents.

Life is God's most precious gift.

We all have a moral duty and sacred obligation to protect life and to promote the dignity of every human being, made in the image and likeness of our Creator.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

During the national lockdown, the National Food Distribution Task Force will continue to operate.

The only substantial change to the program is there will only be food distributions on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, depending on your zone.

There are zone leaders spearheading the distribution of food across our country.

In New Providence they are as follows:

- in the northeast sector, the zone leader is the Bahamas Feeding Network;
- in the southeast sector, the zone leader is the Bahamas Red Cross;

- Lend a Hand Bahamas leads the efforts in the Nassau City zone and
- Hands for Hunger covers the western end of the island.

The One Eleuthera Foundation spearheads the outreach on Eleuthera.

In Abaco and the surrounding cays, Idea Relief is the zone leader.

A multi-sector committee provides leadership and coordination on Grand Bahama.

The other Family islands are covered by the Bahamas Feeding Network and the Bahamas Red Cross.

In the Family Islands, distribution is coordinated with the mail boat service. Please contact the NGO in your area of residence if you have questions.

The Task Force is currently assisting more than 27,000 households throughout the country.

With a household average of four people, approximately 108,000 people are receiving food. The scale of the program is unprecedented for our country.

To the Ministry of Social Services and the NGOs serving on the Task Force, I extend the deepest thanks of the Government.

Your service and the many thousands of hours your staff and volunteers are contributing is deeply appreciated. We are very

grateful for the many private donations that continue to come into the Government and NGOs.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

This battle against COVID-19 has been a terrible strain on the country.

It has been an unbearable burden on many families, on poorer Bahamians, on small business people, on caregivers and individuals with older parents.

The strain, the frustration, the anxiety, the loss of livelihoods and savings has been a crushing burden.

So many of you have made so many sacrifices, including our dedicated health care workers and the members of our uniformed branches.

But just as we got through the initial stage of the pandemic because of your sacrifice and your cooperation, we can and we will get through this current outbreak.

The Government will do all that we can to provide emergency assistance and relief, including through Social Services, National Insurance Board, the Small Business Development Centre and other agencies.

Things will get better on the other side and we can and will return to some sense of normal.

Once we have reduced community spread, we can reopen parts of our economy again.

I will in due course also make a number of announcements based on the recommendations of the Economic Recovery Committee.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Our policy to combat this dangerous and very contagious virus includes encouraging Bahamians and residents to abide by health measures such as: wearing masks, physical distancing, encouraging Bahamians and residents to remain at home, weekend lockdowns, curfews, beach and park closures and other measures.

Like many other countries, we also have a policy of enforcement, which we are continuing to strengthen.

In May, the government signed a contract for a program that will facilitate the electronic monitoring of quarantined individuals.

The program is expected to help curb breaches of the quarantine protocols, which can lead to further spread of the novel coronavirus.

The Hubbcats Solution was selected from seven proposed digital solutions.

The program will create a perimeter around the site of the quarantine individual and alarm when there is a breach, alerting

members of the Surveillance Unit and the Royal Bahamas Police Force, who will visit the property.

It is a 24-hour monitoring service for all those in home quarantine and isolation.

It provides geo-fencing capabilities, which pre-programs virtual boundaries around the property of those in quarantine and isolation.

Privacy is an important feature and the information collected from individuals will remain anonymous.

Clients requiring monitoring will have an App downloaded onto their phones and activated by an ambassador.

The Royal Bahamas Police Force has assumed full responsibility for the Hubbcats Monitoring platform.

To date, a total of 25 police reserves have been trained and an additional 25 will be trained.

The COVID-19 Enforcement Unit Command Centre, which is now operational, is located in the Cable Beach Police Station.

The Government has acquired 21 vehicles that will be properly outfitted with communications systems, and deployed with police officers and individuals as ambassadors to patrol public spaces, beaches and parks predominantly.

The ambassadors will be identifiable, wearing their blue trousers and light blue shirts with caps all embroidered with the COVID-19 logo.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Let me give you an update on Hurricane Isaias.

I wish to thank NEMA and the many government departments and agencies who kept their focus on their responsibilities for hurricane preparedness.

I and also thank the Bahamian people and residents of the entire archipelago for their readiness ahead of Isaias in these pandemic times.

The storm turned out to be less destructive than we had prepared for.

We must remain vigilant and on alert for the remainder of the hurricane season during which we are also battling this pandemic.

To assess the effects of Isaias, we did a flyover of the Northern Bahamas yesterday.

I was accompanied by Minister of Works, the Hon. Desmond Bannister and the Director of NEMA, Captain Stephen Russell. I also invited the Leader of the Opposition, who joined us on the flyover.

Also on the flight were Kevin O'Reilly, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Western Hemisphere for the United States, who is temporarily the Chargé d'affaires to The Bahamas and Rear Admiral Eric Jones, Commander of District 7 of the United States Coast Guard.

We flew over Andros, Bimini and the Berry Islands. The weather did not permit us flying over Grand Bahama.

From the air, there did not appear to be much physical damage to structures.

NEMA and the Ministry of Works will continue their assessment and provide the appropriate responses to any need or damage that exists on the ground.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

As I said previously, much of the world is battling a resurgence of this highly contagious virus.

Countries like us that had success during the first wave are seeing new, aggressive spread.

They too are having to re-institute restrictions, curfews and in some instances lockdowns.

This virus is highly contagious.

A small hotspot could quickly turn into a large number of cases that threaten to collapse a health system.

Our successful policies led to a blunting of the first wave in this long battle against the coronavirus.

After that success our focus shifted to gradually reopening our economy so Bahamians could earn a living and return to some level of normalcy.

We also had to repatriate hundreds of Bahamians from overseas due to global border closures.

All countries faced this difficult transition where risk was involved.

We worked to implement policies to limit risk to keep Bahamians safe.

However, there was no policy that would completely eliminate risk.

As we outlined to the public on several occasions, Bahamians travelling abroad to hotspots and returning has been linked to cases.

Also, we have had issues with people who were supposed to be in quarantine not abiding by the restrictions placed on them.

Like countries in Europe, the Americas, Asia, Africa and the Pacific, we are assessing what policies worked and what needs to be improved to minimize virus transmission.

There is no easy guide or textbook or manual for dealing with this virus.

No country's pandemic response has been perfect.

What my Cabinet and Health team are working on day and night is adjusting policies that need fixing in real time.

We will continue to do this because the crisis is ever changing.

The problems of Monday at times are radically different to the problems of Wednesday. That is how quickly situations change in this pandemic.

As a people we must be resilient and harden ourselves to the difficult period we face.

COVID-19 is not going away any time soon.

We will defeat this second wave just as we defeated the first.

But I warn you that due to how easily the virus spreads we are likely to have future waves.

This is the dangerous nature of pandemics and of this virus which is very contagious.

A more normal time will not come until there is a vaccine.

We have to keep working in tandem to prevent outbreaks.

The Government will continue to refine its policies to limit activities that cause virus introduction or spread.

You must also do your part.

Do not travel to hotspots. Do not invite people to your homes. Do not attend mass gatherings of any kind. Stay physically distant from others.

Wear your masks properly over your nose and mouth when you are out. Wash or sanitize your hands regularly.

The Government and citizens are partners in this fight.

The more disciplined we are during the restrictive period I announced tonight, the sooner we can lift some measures.

2020 has not been the year any of us imagined. I know many of your plans have been halted. Many of your dreams paused.

It is difficult not having our routines. It is difficult not seeing our friends, families and loved ones in the close ways we used to before the virus.

Pandemic fatigue is setting in.

Many are tired of restrictions; tired of separation. I understand your frustrations. I too would like to be back to better times.

However, we must not let that frustration lead us to slacken our behavior or resolve.

COVID-19 kills. COVID-19 leaves some survivors so damaged that their lifespans may be shortened.

Let us remain disciplined, keeping to the public health advice.

Sacrifice now to stay healthy so that when this is all over you can once again go back to those times spending time with those you love.

I would like to take this opportunity to offer my condolences to the family of Mr. Bertram Canter, a longstanding public officer in the Office of the Prime Minister.

I also offer my condolences to the family of Mr. Archie Nairn, a former Permanent Secretary.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Emancipation Day is usually one of celebration, when we recall the emancipation of enslaved Bahamians.

I wish you a Happy Emancipation Day, albeit one in which we are going through a difficult period in our history.

On this Emancipation Day, let us take inspiration from our forbearers, who overcame slavery and who transcended the history of their bondage to build our Bahamas, one of the most successful small countries in this hemisphere.

Let us draw from those who came before us, the resilience, the courage and the fortitude to overcome this deadly virus and its devastating effects on our economy and society.

The great Nelson Mandela once said:

“To be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.”

Even as we cherish our individual freedoms and rights, let us also respect the rights and the needs of others.

Let us remember that in the practice of freedoms, we should not put others at risk.

Our civil liberties, enshrined in our Constitution, also come with corresponding civic obligations and responsibilities.

We are one people.

We are a family of islands.

We are a Commonwealth of hopes and dreams and shared purpose.

Recently, Mrs. Clarice Granger passed away. She was a woman of tremendous kindness, grace and generosity.

She gave a lifetime of love and service to The Bahamas, including helping to mentor generations of women through the Girl Guides.

When she came to the Office of the Prime Minister a few years ago for the signing of an agreement to build a new Girl Guides Headquarters at the foot of Fort Charlotte, I asked her why she gave so many years of service in so many ways.

Mrs. Granger whispered in my ear: “Because we belong to each other as Bahamians and as children of God!”

May her words be our shared prayer and resolve.

May we follow her example in this time of need.

Let us continue to pray without ceasing and to beseech the God of New Beginnings for resilience, for fortitude, for a spirit of love, unity and compassion.

And let us pray for guidance and direction.

Thank you and good evening.
