



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS

# *Key Takeaways*

## **NATIONAL ADDRESS BY PRIME MINISTER**

COVID-19 NATIONAL RESPONSE UPDATE - 13 APRIL 2020

**Now online at [opm.gov.bs](https://opm.gov.bs)**

**Prime Minister invited discussion on the way forward for the country during the coming weeks and months ahead, while providing an update on where we stand in our fight against the COVID-19 virus.**

He noted that social distancing measures, curfews and lockdowns are having a positive effect. We must however continue to observe these measures and not become complacent.

He thanked Bahamians for their fortitude and patience.

He pointed out that the government has a full, comprehensive and vigorous plan in place in response to COVID-19 which includes health agencies, social services, finance, NIB, the uniformed branches and all government ministries and agencies. The National Coordinating Committee is working with the private sector and the non-profit community in this fight as well.

Doctors in private practice and all other health professionals are being asked to join the fight at a time when their expertise is greatly needed.

He thanked all those who are doing their part as members of the citizen army.

While the Ministry of Health will provide a comprehensive update tomorrow, the Prime Minister confirmed the total number of confirmed cases at 49 (as of Monday 13 April 2020) with 8 confirmed deaths.

He noted that those who have succumbed were older with conditions leading to poor outcomes. These conditions include hypertension, asthma, obesity and malignancy (cancer).

To date, testing has been confined to those with moderate and severe symptoms of the disease, however as testing expands more people will be diagnosed, including those with mild symptoms. Testing will be expanded this week and will result in an increase in the number of cases. This expansion in testing will also result in a lower fatality rate.

Health professions will continue to compile information on the outbreak that will guide our health strategy, including lockdowns and curfews. The strategy being used by the government seeks to manage the disease to prevent a surge and prevent the loss of countless lives.

**The South Beach Clinic will now operate as a COVID-19 facility able to accommodate 10 COVID-19 patients, effective Sunday 12 April 2020.**

The Prime Minister welcomed ideas and suggestions for finding the most efficient system for shopping, noting that this is still a work in progress. He thanked all for their patience. He reminded all that the aim of the schedule is to limit the spread of the virus while ensuring that all have time to purchase necessities. **To this end, food shopping by last name is temporarily suspended effective Tuesday 14 April through Friday 17 April 2020. The alphabet shopping schedule will resume Monday 20 April 2020.**

**Grocery stores will open from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m.**

- **Monday to Friday from 6 a.m. to 8 a.m. will be reserved for seniors and those with disabilities**

**During weekend lockdowns, grocery stores will operate on Saturdays from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. for essential workers only.**

- **Saturdays from 6 a.m. to noon :- health professionals, police and defence force officers, employees of clearing banks and employees of wholesale distributors**
- **Saturdays from noon to 6 p.m. :- remaining essential workers as identified in the Emergency Powers (Lockdown) Order (this includes essential workers of core utilities such as water, electricity and communications, the media, the RBPF, security company workers, department of correctional facilities, customs, immigration, social services, environmental health services, waste disposal and sanitation workers, fire services and NIB)**

**Pharmacies will open on Saturdays until 3 p.m. for essential workers only.**

All pharmacies and food stores should have hand sanitizer available for use by all staff. Store owners should also ensure that employees are wearing the appropriate protective equipment.

**The police will be present at major stores to support physical distancing protocols.**

Wholesale bakeries and water producers, wholesale food suppliers will also be allowed to operate during the lockdowns to allow for re-stocking.

The Prime Minister again reiterated that there is no need to panic shop as he has been assured by local wholesalers that there is enough food for all.

He encouraged store owners to enforce the shopping schedule when it is in effect and to ensure that physical distancing protocols are observed. He encouraged store owners to find a system of access to their stores that works best with the above criteria in mind.

**Residents are asked to wear a mask covering their nose and mouth, at all times while away from their homes. All residents are to travel with their ID at all times.**

The Prime Minister asked that we consider using reputable online grocery delivery services and encouraged the creation of more online delivery and pick-up options for food.

To further stimulate domestic economic activity and manufacturing, the Government announced effective Friday 10 April 2020, a ban on the import of non-medical masks in order to help develop the local industry.

This ban does not apply to the importation of medical-grade masks for health care workers.

**The details of a Food Security Taskforce will be announced shortly. This taskforce will focus on ensuring that those in need are provided with adequate food. The Taskforce will also make recommendations to increase food production in The Bahamas, including through**

**BAMSI, farmers' markets, backyard and community gardens and other ways of producing and distributing food in the short-, medium- and long-term.**

The government will be aggressively promoting healthier eating, nutrition and physical activity. The current range of health problems in our country and the resulting impact on immune systems, is playing a significant role in how our bodies deal with the effects of the virus.

The Ministry of Social Services is providing food vouchers and the National Insurance Board is providing assistance for those previously engaged in the formal tourism economy. For those outside of the formal economy or who would not be eligible for certain types of assistance, the Ministry of Health along with governmental and non-governmental agencies, is examining the issue of food insecurity and will mobilize resources to mitigate these challenges.

Through their efforts, fresh produce, cooked meals, grocery packets and other food supplies have been delivered to those in need in Abaco, Grand Bahama, Eleuthera, and New Providence.

The Cabinet is reviewing the proposed Rental Assistance program which we will be announced once it has been finalized.

The Prime Minister acknowledged that many Bahamians are concerned about their finances and are scared about what the future holds. He assured that work is being done around the clock to ensure that assistance is there for those in need.

**At the appropriate time an announcement will be made on the formation both an economic and a social development high-level group to offer recommendations on the way forward.**

There is also ongoing consultation with Bahamian academics, historians and researchers, who are looking at the historical record and our National Archives to help give us greater perspective on how best to move forward.

The Office of the Prime Minister is working on setting up a COVID-19 Suggestions and Questions platform on its website, [opm.gov.bs](http://opm.gov.bs). This will provide a central point of contact for the submission of non-health related suggestions and questions.

Please look out for more information on our Facebook page – Office of the Prime Minister – The Bahamas to find out when this platform will go live.