

## **REMARKS**

**Minister of Health**

**The Hon Kim N. Wilson, JP, MP**

**Coronavirus Media Briefing Update**

**17 March 2022**

Good afternoon.

Sadly, I begin my remarks today by reporting that since our update on Monday, Bermuda has had another COVID-19 related death.

I extend sincere condolences to the family and friends who recently lost a loved one in the circumstances related to this coronavirus. You are in our thoughts and prayers.

As I have said repeatedly, the pandemic is not over, and the omicron variant continues to circulate throughout our community. Our positive cases are increasing, and it is important to note that new cases are outpacing our recoveries.

Since our last update, there were 3264 test results received by the Ministry of Health, and 105 were positive for COVID-19.

These results are from testing done on:

- Sunday: 14 positive out of 460 results (3.0% positivity)
- Monday: 58 positive out of 1325 results (4.4% positivity)
- Tuesday: 33 positive out of 1479 results (2.2% positivity)

5 of the new cases are classified as imported with a history of travel in the previous 14 days.

The additional 100 new cases are classified as either local transmission (48) or under investigation (52).

Additionally, there were 90 recoveries.

There are 271 active cases, of which:

- 265 are under public health monitoring; and
- 6 are in hospital, with 0 in intensive care.

From January 11, 2021, when Bermuda's vaccine campaign began, to March 12, 2022 Bermuda has experienced:

393 Covid-related hospitalisations [including repeat admissions] of which:

- 312 or 79% were persons who were not fully vaccinated, and,
- 81 or 21% were fully vaccinated.

In addition, since we began our vaccination programme on January 11 last year, we have had 113 deaths, of which:

- 95 or 84% were persons who were not fully vaccinated, and,
- 18 or 16% were fully vaccinated.

Sadly, the total number of deaths related to this coronavirus illness is 126.

**I will now provide an update on our vaccination programme.**

Since January 11, 2021, Bermuda residents have received a total of 126,461 vaccinations.

Of the 126,461 vaccinations given as of March 12, 2022:

- 52% are women and,
- 48% are men

87.0% of all residents over the age of 65 years have had at least one vaccination and 85.6% are fully immunized.

To date, 75.0% of the population has been vaccinated (1 dose), and 72.5% of the population has been immunized (2 doses).

Additionally, 72.0% of those eligible for a booster have received their booster.

As a reminder, vaccine booster appointments are available until March 31<sup>st</sup> at Pier 6 by appointment or walk-in.

After March 31, the COVID-19 vaccine will be available through participating physicians' offices and participating pharmacies, and there will likely be a charge for this service.

I encourage anyone who wants to get vaccinated to register their interest on [gov.bm/vaccines](http://gov.bm/vaccines) as soon as possible.

And if you are eligible for your booster, please get it. Studies released by the CDC show the booster provides improved protection against severe illness and hospitalization due to COVID-19.

Parents wishing to get the COVID-19 vaccine for children aged 5-11 should register as soon as possible as our current paediatric vaccine supplies are limited.

Parents should first register their child on [gov.bm/vaccines](http://gov.bm/vaccines) and then contact their paediatrician to arrange to get the vaccine. If your child does not have a paediatrician, contact the Hamilton Health Centre on 332-8906 for assistance in scheduling an appointment.

### **Moving on to public health legislation...**

Cabinet has agreed to make the following adjustments to public health regulations:

- the current Covid Regulations, which were set to expire on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2022, will be extended until 30<sup>th</sup> April 2022;
- the public health emergency will be extended a further 60 days through 29<sup>th</sup> May 2022; and,
- after 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, there will be a mandatory indoor mask mandate for the following settings:
  - for those in healthcare or institutional settings, such as healthcare facilities, nursing homes, rest homes and Corrections facilities;
  - for those providing transportation for the public, which includes the indoor spaces of ferries, as well as on buses, taxis and minibuses; and,
  - inside at the Airport.

Notwithstanding the limited situations where the law will require indoor masks, the Ministry of Health nonetheless strongly recommends businesses set mask requirements for entry and the provision of services which are appropriate for their establishments.

Scientific evidence has shown that the major route of transmission of the COVID-19 virus is via droplets and aerosols from speaking, singing, coughing or sneezing.

As such, masks have been proven to be an effective form of personal protective equipment. They are effective because they both *block exhalation* of virus-containing droplets and form a *barrier to inhalation* by filtering out droplets and particles.

We recognise there are many environments where people must be in contact with others outside their family group for long periods of time, such as at work, so we encourage businesses to think carefully about what mask policy is appropriate for their situation – both for their customers and clients, and for their staff.

Having consulted with the Attorney-General, the Ministry can confirm all businesses have the right to implement this simple public health measure in a manner that they choose.

Between now and the end of the month, the Ministry is working to update the public health guidance on gov.bm to assist the community as we all continue to learn to live safely with COVID.

In closing, I cannot stress enough how important it is for us to do our best to stay safe and healthy. Do not get complacent. Be very careful about your settings, mindful of the risks of not following public health guidance.

I am very concerned about the increase in positive cases, especially among young people. Currently, the average age of positive coronavirus cases is 36 years old, and persons aged under 20 are the main drivers of active cases.

To be clear, we all need to work together to reduce the spread. Make sensible decisions regarding mask-wearing, attending crowded events, and use the home antigen tests so that you know your COVID status.

We must look out for each other. We must act responsibly and adhere to the public health guidelines. This current outbreak is not over, and to get through this, we must take responsibility for ourselves and others in our community.

To decrease the odds of getting the coronavirus, increase fresh air ventilation indoors and avoid closed spaces, crowded places and close contact settings. Continue to follow Public Health guidelines, wear a mask, practice good hand hygiene, and maintain physical distance.

Thank you.