

REMARKS
The Hon Kim N Wilson, JP, MP
Minister of Health
Coronavirus Technical Update
31 March 2022 – 4 pm

Good afternoon.

I begin my remarks today with the sad news that Bermuda has recorded another coronavirus related death since our last update. I extend my sincere condolences to the family and friends of the deceased.

This unhappy news reinforces for all of us that, unfortunately, the pandemic is still with us – and will be with us for a long time, both locally and globally.

Notwithstanding the fact our number of positive COVID cases is declining, and we are doing better, we must keep our eye on the ball and not become complacent. While the regulations are being relaxed today, this does not mean that we can let our guard down.

As a reminder, from today, you must wear a face mask indoors when:

- travelling by bus, ferry (excluding the outside decks), taxi, limousine or minibus – both passengers and operators,
- working in or visiting
 - health service providers such as a doctors or dentists, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, etc., and
 - health services, such as a hospital, dental facility, laboratory, residential care facility etc.,
- visiting or working at Corrections facilities, and,
- inside the L. F. Wade International Airport building.

Although those are the only places where masks are mandatory, the Ministry of Health strongly recommends that every business owner or operator, event venue, church, etc., have a clear policy regarding mask wearing for their premises.

Your mask policy can apply to either your staff or your customers, or both. Assess the situational risks involved, and develop an appropriate mask policy with safety as the priority. Legally, each business can set its own policy and refuse service to those who do not comply.

As I said many times before, the pandemic is not over, and the public health emergency is ongoing. Unfortunately, 40% of COVID-19 cases have no symptoms, and the symptoms that are experienced are easily confused with allergies, the flu or the common cold, making it difficult to identify.

The virus is easily spread from person to person, even from someone who has no symptoms, and positive cases among staff and customers often result in business interruptions.

Masks effectively control the spread of the virus, and anyone who wishes to wear a mask should wear one. Especially when physical distancing is impossible (whether indoors or outdoors), when we are around people we don't know well, or when we are in poorly ventilated settings. Wearing a mask is vital for people who have compromised immunity or are unvaccinated.

Remember, the COVID-19 virus is easily spread from person to person by small virus-containing droplets that are exhaled when an infected person is speaking, singing, coughing, sneezing or just breathing.

As we learn to live safely with Covid, the Ministry of Health has several recommendations to assist the community.

- Where you can, hold events outdoors. If an event must be indoors, ensure it is in a well-ventilated space where windows and doors can be opened – this includes cabins of boats.
- Make sure there are adequate supplies available to support healthy hygiene behaviours, such as soap and water, hand sanitiser containing at least 60 per cent alcohol, paper towels, tissues, disinfectant wipes, and no-touch trash cans.
- Try to always 'know your status'. This can be achieved by testing for COVID-19 regularly using a home antigen test. Businesses are encouraged to include regular testing in their office policies. Party goers are advised to take advantage of home test kits, too, to 'know before you go' [out].

What many restaurants, gyms, offices, shops, movie theatres and places of worship have in common is that they can be crowded settings where people from different households mix together. These group settings are at a higher risk for the spread of infection.

Although contact tracing will no longer be required, it is helpful for businesses to develop a contingency plan to support contact tracing, and notify the Department of Health of any case of COVID-19 at their establishment. This involves having customers at the premises sign in and provide the following contact information:

- Their full name
- Date and time of visit
- Phone number and or email address

Before I end, I want to remind everyone that there are steps we can all take as individuals to help prevent the spread of disease and keep ourselves and others in the community safe.

We can:

- wear a mask, especially in crowded places (indoors and outdoors) where we cannot maintain an appropriate physical distance of 6ft,
- keep an appropriate distance from others who are not included in our party as much as possible,

- wash our hands frequently and properly or, if soap and water are not available, use hand sanitiser, and,
- avoid crowded indoor venues, crowds of people and settings where we are in close contact with others.

As another reminder, although the Pier 6 vaccine clinic finishes up today, we will continue the fourth dose booster clinic at the site of the former art gallery in Crisson's at 71 Front Street, across from the number five parking lot, starting Friday, 1 April, from 12 noon until 5:30 pm. This is available until 15 April, and you must make an appointment as there will be no walk-ins.

Unfortunately, there is no convenient access for wheelchairs, so clients who use wheelchairs should be accommodated by their physicians, or they can attend the Hamilton Health Centre, where appointments are also required.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Crisson Family for quickly working with us, and allowing the Government to use their premises for the continuation to conclusion of our mass vaccination programme.

Please note that there is enough supply of COVID vaccines to meet the current demand. However, we strongly advise everyone who wants to receive the vaccine or is eligible for the booster to register online as soon as possible or call the vaccine hotline on 444-2498, option #2.

One final note, as of today, the Covid 19 Crisis Relief Emotional Wellbeing Hotline is closed. I want to sincerely thank Dr. Alison Daniels and her small and enduring team for staffing the hotline for 2 years since the hotline opened in April 2020.

Remember: Living safely with COVID means we must continue to follow public health guidance, and get vaccinated and boosted.

Thank you.