



**OFFICE OF THE
PREMIER**
CAYMAN ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Premier's update on COVID 10

GRAND CAYMAN, Cayman Islands –The events of the last few days, with the confirmation of the first COVID 19 infected person, combined with his subsequent death and the impact on Health City Cayman Islands has understandably created much concern in our community.

A concern that I am sure has been heightened by the images that we see on our TV screens and on social media of what is playing out in Italy and elsewhere. A concern that similar scenes could play out here at home.

Let me say two things. I am concerned as well. But we should not panic. I say this because I, as Premier, and the entire Government, have been focusing on this for weeks. Our health professionals have also been focusing on this. And we will continue to focus and take the best advice available and to then make the decisions that we believe are in the best interest of all of the community

Whilst the Government and health professionals play our part each person living here also has a part to play to help keep the community as safe as we can. Dr. Lee will, I am sure, remind us again when he speaks about social distancing and hygiene.

But I do want you to know that we are, I am, taking the march of COVID 19 through the Caribbean very seriously. The primary role of Government is to protect the health, safety and well-being of its people. I, along with my Government take this role very seriously. This has been at the forefront of everything that we have done over the past two terms.

And this is why we took the decisions that we did on Friday last to ban cruise-ships for 60 days and to close educational facilities; cancel the final day of the inter-primary sports day; and to implement a ban of on no more than 50 persons at places other than supermarkets, medical facilities, pharmacies. This excludes staff at their places of work - though if at all possible we encourage businesses to allow those staff who can work from home to do so.

We also added several at-risk countries to the list of banned countries.

But as I indicated on Friday there were other measures being considered to help protect and safeguard our Islands. It is important that while we as a country seek to minimise the possibilities of local transmission that we do all we can to ensure that we prevent new infections reaching our shores.

So today I am announcing that the Cabinet has approved the following:

1. To close the Owen Roberts International Airport and the Charles Kirkconnell International Airport for international passenger flights for a temporary period of three weeks, beginning Sunday, 22 March, 2020, at 11:59 pm until Sunday, 12 April, 2020, at 11:59 pm
2. For all destinations except for the United Kingdom, inbound flights from Thursday, 19 March, 2020, will operate for returning residents only.
3. Outbound flights will operate as usual through Sunday, 22 March 2020.
4. With immediate effect, any person arriving in the Cayman Islands will be required to be isolated for 14 days.

5. Inter-Island flights will continue; however, flights from Grand Cayman into Cayman Brac and Little Cayman will be restricted to residents and essential persons, for example, medical staff, etc. This because, as we all know, Cayman Brac has a significant elderly population and we want to ensure that they are protected.
6. Cargo flights, as well as courier flights, will continue as will be emergency medical air- ambulance flights needed to take residents overseas for medical treatment.

We have not taken this decision lightly, but it is in the best interest and for the health of the people of the Cayman Islands. As a premier vacation destination of choice, this decision will help ensure that the Cayman Islands will be able to not only protect our people but to also protect the welfare of our tourism business and our guests over the long term.

We should always remember that because we have our own airline, Cayman Airways, we can maintain our air links as necessary. There are also options being pursued by the Governor, for which I thank him, to ensure that there is an 'air-bridge' maintained between the UK and its Overseas Territories during this period. We will advise more on this once details are confirmed.

I can also state that the decision, including the timing, was not made in isolation. Since Friday and over the weekend the Government has held meetings with key segments of our economy and more are planned. These include the banks, water companies, telecoms companies, Caribbean Utilities, the Chamber of Commerce, the supermarkets and main food and goods importers, the financial services sector, the tourism sector, and doctors representing the Cayman Islands Medical and Dental Society.

Conversations were wide ranging and encouraging. I am satisfied that everyone is taking this threat seriously and everyone supported the measures being taken by Government.

From what was said they all have plans to protect their staff and to keep their key businesses running. This is important to ensure that we maintain the services that a modern society requires.

I was also heartened by what I heard with regards to a willingness to assist those persons who will be hit hard by the economic reality that we are facing. The ban on cruise ships automatically means that several thousand people working in this industry will be impacted.

In discussions with the banks, they have all agreed to work individually with clients with mortgages and loans who are impacted during this period. Also, all of the water, electricity, and telecoms companies gave assurances that they would not disconnect customers. They also committed to working individually with customers who are having difficulty making their payments. They will individually be advising their customers of their plans in this regard. I thank them all again – it is in times like these that we must come together as a community and that we are doing.

There are other measures that are being worked on to help keep people employed and to keep food on the table, especially those in the tourism sector that is being hit hard, as you would have seen in today's Compass; more on those at a later date, perhaps as soon as tomorrow.

Whilst our tourism sector is now down it is not out by any means and we will work through this and rebuild once the worst is over. In our meeting with financial services, it was good to hear that they too supported the measures we are taking and were themselves taking precautions to ensure the strength of the business here continues. We are open for business and remain focused on serving local and international clients. They also have robust business continuity plans to ensure that clients can be served.

These are challenging times but as I have said previously, because of the sound financial management of Government finances over the last administration and this one we are better placed than ever before to ride out these types of situations. And we also have a strong and professional medical system, private and public, who are committed to helping keep us safe. As you would have heard there are no concerns regarding supplies of foodstuff and goods coming in so please everyone, do not panic buy.

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