

HURST REPORTS ON CABINET OF Wednesday, January 27, 2021

The Cabinet met both face-to-face and virtually, five Ministers choosing to join by electronic means. As is the custom of the Gaston Browne-led Cabinet, three separate groups of experts and officials were asked to join the meeting in order to contribute to enhanced decision-making.

1. The Chief Medical Officer, the Chief Health Inspector, the Consultant pathologist/Head of the Laboratory, the Principal Nursing Officer, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health, the Senior Medical Officer Epidemiology, the Nurse Epidemiologist at the Hospital all joined the Cabinet to discuss the measures that are necessary in order to contain the further spread of Covid-19.

The data indicate that the number of positive cases thus far in the month of January 2021 totaled 56; that number exceeds by far the monthly average since March 2020 when the first positive result was recorded. The Cabinet determined that the serious threat faced by the population, because of the disregard of the protocols and the resulting increase in infections, demand that new rules be applied.

The following now apply over the next 21 days, commencing Friday 29 January 2021 until Friday, February 19, 2021:

- i. **Curfew hours commence at 8:00 pm on 29 January 2021, until 5:00 am daily thereafter, or until Friday, February 19, when it may return to a later hour each night.**
- ii. **All bars are closed commencing Friday night, January 29, 2021, at 8:00 pm, until Friday, February 19, when they may be allowed to re-open.**
- iii. **Restaurants may serve take-out only commencing Friday night, up until 8:00 pm, on January 29, 2021, and close each night thereafter at 8:00 pm, until February 19, 2021.**
- iv. **Churches can continue to hold regular services under the conditions agreed-to with the Chief Health Inspector.**
- v. **Funerals may have only 25 mourners, in the church and at the cemetery. No wakes or after-funeral gatherings are allowed. No selling of beverages on the outside of the cemetery; no clustering is allowed. Official funerals are treated as a regular church service; social distancing is to be enforced at the cemetery afterwards among mourners.**
- vi. **Weddings are also limited to 25 persons, and there are to be no receptions following the wedding ceremony.**
- vii. **All recreational football and recreational basketball are to be discontinued immediately, until February 19, 2021.**
- viii. **The Super 50 Cricket Games, scheduled over the next several weeks, will not be allowed to have spectators.**
- ix. **Enforcement of the Protocols will be enforced more stringently.**
- x. **The pilot project, testing the tracking bracelet, is completed; consequently, arriving passengers placed in the quarantine centers may be required to wear them. Those allowed to stay in their homes shall have the bracelets deployed on their arms.**
- xi. **Passengers who knowingly rely on false declarations of Covid-19 certificates will be fined and/or confined.**

The Ministers and officials will expand on these expanded rules, intended to contain the community spread which other Caribbean countries have experienced.

2. The Cabinet invited the Receiver of the Jolly Beach Hotel and the General Manager of the property (before it was shuttered), in order to negotiate a price for the use of the hotel as a Government quarantine center. The agreement reached was acceptable and the hotel can be made ready in two weeks to receive the quarantined persons. Jolly Beach can house up to 800 persons. The Halcyon Hotel, currently used as the center has asked for the hotel to be returned so that it can begin repairs and refurbishment.

3. The Cabinet took a decision to provide the Social Security Board with US\$400,000 to meet payments to the social security pensioners, for the month of January 2021. More will be forthcoming in the days ahead, and more payments will be made to the pensioners. There is a gap between the amounts raised by the Social Security Board by way of deductions, and the amount which has to be paid out to recipients. The lay-off of thousands of workers has reduced collections, requiring the government to fill the breach each month.

4. The quarry at Bendals from which aggregates were being mined for the benefit of a known building project, has come under the control of the Ministry of Works. The Minister responsible for Lands explained to the Cabinet that the decision to transfer to Public Works was slow to be implemented though that decision was long made.

5. The State of Antigua and Barbuda will make good on its obligation to PAHO within a week. The Cabinet took the decision to bring its obligations up-to-date, given the enormously helpful role which the PAHO has been playing.

6. The Antigua and Barbuda Hotel Association is planning to institute a distress fee which will be charged to all paying customers at the nation's luxury hotels. The accumulated sum will be applied to the increased bill which a customer, testing positive for Covid when the customer's period of vacation is over, but when the customer will have to remain in Antigua until s/he is covid-negative. The Cabinet applauded the hotels for instituting this fee voluntarily.