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GRENADA CONFIRMS ONE MORE CASE OF COVID-19

Fellow Citizens, Good evening.

I am Nickolas Steele, Grenada's Minister of Health.

TODAY, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1ST, 2020, I announce that one more laboratory confirmed case of COVID-19 on mainland Grenada, has been diagnosed.

This brings the total confirmed cases of COVID-19 to ten.

The individual is a 58 year old male, who arrived in Grenada from New York on March 19th. He started experiencing symptoms on March 30th, and was tested on March 31st. His symptoms are currently recorded as fever, cough and general weakness. He is quarantined and being monitored closely.

There are two other family members in the household and they too, are under quarantine, but are not exhibiting any symptoms of the virus to date.

The individual was found through proactive contact tracing by Health Officials, using the Manifest of the New York Flight, which arrived in Grenada on March 19th.

I want to emphasize that Health care officials have been aggressively engaged in contact tracing, especially of individuals who arrived in Grenada during the March 16th to 22nd period.

We have found that most of our cases so far, arrived in Grenada, or are linked to someone who arrived in Grenada, during that period. The pattern is similar in several other countries throughout the region.

This reinforces to us the necessity to have closed our borders to contain the spread of this virus here on island.

All the individuals who have tested positive so far, for COVID-19, are stable and exhibiting mild to moderate symptoms.

In terms of testing, 37 people in total have been tested. Ten people have tested positive to date; with one result pending.

With increasing numbers of cases, CARPHA has been working with us and the rest of the region to deliver results in as timely a manner as possible. All cases have been reported to the World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Organization.

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Our Health Care team is sparing no effort in ascertaining the possibility of community spread here in the State of Grenada.

We continue to rigorously enforce quarantine and isolation measures. Several entire households are presently under quarantine, and we have asked the RGPF to further tighten their surveillance mechanisms to rigidly ensure that people are observing the rules.

I wish to address a very vexing matter: one of the cases confirmed last weekend, left Grenada on the same day the confirmation was announced, but before he got his results. We subsequently learned that he is now in the United Kingdom.

I wish to outline the timeline of events:

He was tested on Thursday, March 26th.

The results came back on Saturday, March 28th. As per procedure, health officials tried to reach him minutes later to inform that he had tested positive for COVID-19. As Minister, I went ahead and announced the cases to the nation, as we have been doing. The individual was neither found on the Saturday, nor the Sunday. On Sunday, health officials reported the matter to the Police. It was later confirmed that the individual and his family left the island aboard Air Canada, before he got his results on Saturday.

Sisters and brothers, this is troubling in many ways, especially the level of exposure between his place of residence in Grenada and his abode in the United Kingdom, where he says he is now.

This is a level of dishonesty and recklessness, such that we do not need at this time. We cannot stress enough, lives are already at stake, without the added risks.

We have followed up with that individual to ascertain his movements and mode of movement on the day he left the country undetected.

We are also following up with relevant law enforcement authorities because, in our view, this is cause for liability.

I remind the general population that as per international procedure, once someone is tested, that person is placed under self-quarantine at their place of residence, and officials monitor them, until their test results are obtained. Once they test positive, and once they do not need medical attention during the period of their illness, they are quarantined in homes and constantly monitored for the next 14 days.

This is the standard practice everywhere in the world.

This, fellow citizens, calls for a certain degree of honesty, respect and personal responsibility. This is a matter of public confidence and trust. We, as officials, trust that no one would be so reckless, as to knowingly expose others to this deadly disease.

To further enforce compliance, we have invoked the Quarantine Act, which states that

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individuals who disobey are subject to a ten thousand dollar fine or 6 months in prison.

It is regrettable that this has happened and we are taking steps to ensure that it never happens again.

In recent days, we have been able to secure several other facilities throughout the Tri- Island State, to add to the room stock that we now have, as possible quarantine areas, if we were to ever need more facilities.

Any individual who attempts to, or breaches the Quarantine Act, will be forcibly quarantined in public facilities.

Public trust is crucial in our efforts to beat this disease.

Fellow citizens, we remain vigilant and we continue to ask you to work with us, and more specifically, to do your part to help us contain and curtail the spread of this deadly virus.

While health officials continue to follow up on possible exposed individuals, we urge the public to report to, or inform the Ministry of Health or nearest health facility, of any individual displaying acute respiratory symptoms, especially if that person arrived in Grenada during the March 16th to 22nd period, or was exposed to anyone who did.

If you believe you are exhibiting symptoms of the virus, do not leave your house. Do not take public transportation.

Call the health hotline at 538 4787 or 458 4787.

As the Minister of Health, I am duty-bound once again, to remind that the entire population must continue to observe the practices and precautions necessary to contain the spread of COVID-19, here in the State of Grenada.

A State of Emergency is in place to safeguard the population. This is a public health and safety emergency. Failure to comply with those measures is potentially fatal to the general population, and is being enforced to the fullest extent of the law.

For every one person who contracts the disease, potentially dozens more are exposed and vulnerable.

Your actions can potentially have life or death consequences for someone else.

I again urge you to wash your hands frequently; practice proper cough and sneeze hygiene; do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth with unclean hands. It is extremely critical that you also maintain social distancing of at least six feet. I cannot stress that enough.

Above all, observe the curfew. Stay home, unless there's a medical or food emergency, or you

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are an essential worker.

Extra masks are being provided to frontline workers, including the RGPF, to limit their exposure to the virus.

Every time they are called out to enforce social compliance, those who break the law are putting the lives of the armed forces and medical personnel at further risks.

In closing, I thank again all our frontline workers, including our medical professionals and the Royal Grenada Police Force, for their selflessness in helping to protect Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, from this public health threat.

I thank also the artistes, other public figures, media personnel, private entities and other volunteers, who have lent their voices and their influence to help sensitize the population and help enforce compliance.

I thank those of you who are heeding our message and making this crisis a little easier, by observing the rules.

Please do your part. Stay COVID-19 Smart.

Nickolas T C Steele
Minister for Health, Social Security and International Business.