



**National Address by
Dr. the Right Honourable Keith Mitchell
Prime Minister
December 21, 2020**

Fellow Grenadians, when I addressed you a week ago, a number of suggestions were made for implementation, with the promise to review and update you accordingly. That period having expired, I am here tonight to inform you of the additional measures we now need to put in place, to curb the potential for the further spread of COVID-19 in Grenada. At the heart of these measures is a desire to protect the population.

Through rigorous contact tracing efforts since the detection of the cluster, we have determined that more than 800 people have been possibly exposed to the virus and as such, they have been tested and quarantined. A second round of testing will begin on Wednesday, December 23. The size of this cluster and the upward spiral recorded in recent days, are quite concerning, but what is even more troubling, is the likelihood of even more exposure of our citizens as you socialise during this festive season.

The true extent of the crisis we face, may still be unknown. Health officials have explained that based on the estimated window of exposure, many persons are possibly in the incubation stages of any potential infection and therefore, we must await their testing on the scientifically appropriate day, to better determine the magnitude of the cluster.

It is against this background that the Government of Grenada has taken the decision to impose a curfew, as announced through the Government Information Service earlier today, and which went into effect at 8:00 p.m. The nightly curfew will be lifted at 5:00 a.m. daily. It will remain in effect for 14 days in the first instance, and I encourage your full compliance.

The curfew is intended to minimise the number of social gatherings that generally take place during the Christmas season. We have refrained from imposing a full lockdown in recognition of the religious beliefs at the heart of the season. As a Christian society and in acknowledgment of the fact that churches have consistently adopted the recommended protocols, we thought it important to allow our citizens the opportunity to participate in religious traditions. That said, we call on all religious leaders to be very strict, in implementing the COVID-19 protocols at your respective churches. Our priority, at all times, must be protecting the safety of all citizens.

A special appeal is also being made for bus drivers and conductors to ensure that passengers are not allowed to use public transportation without their properly worn masks. Do not be afraid to refuse service to passengers who refuse to comply. It is far less costly to lose one bus fare than to be the conduit that facilitates transmission of this deadly disease.

Similarly, I encourage the managers of stores, supermarkets and other businesses, to have at least one person assigned to monitoring and managing adherence to your in-store protocols. Keep a daily log of all your patrons, as this is an important tool for contact tracing efforts. It might also be useful to have masks available for customers who may arrive on your premises without one.

I must commend members of the business community who took prompt action in recent days to temporarily halt their operations because of exposure of employees to the virus. This is indeed the type of collaboration we need in mounting the fight against this dreaded disease.

Sisters and brothers, the sacrifices we make today are critical to saving lives and affording us the possibility of reducing the threat of COVID-19 going forward. We welcome news of the approval and distribution of the highly-anticipated vaccines, but the reality is that it will be months before Grenada and other countries in the region, have access.

Even with this glimmer of hope, the new strain of coronavirus recently detected, compounds the challenge we face in the fight against this disease. Therefore, to reduce possible importation of this virus, Government has already instituted an immediate ban on all air traffic between Grenada and the United Kingdom. We will review this decision in 2021.

Several other measures are also in full effect:

- Take-out or delivery service **only** for restaurants.
- Village shops, including those licenced to sell liquor, must limit to three, the maximum number of customers served on the premises at any given time.
- A mask must be worn over the nose and mouth at all times, in public spaces.
- The recommended physical distance should be observed.
- The number of guests at weddings and funerals is limited to ten unless permission is sought and obtained from the Ministry of Health.
- Social gatherings at entertainment venues and beaches are expressly prohibited.
- Families are advised to create a household bubble, limiting their Christmas Day activities to individual households, while opting to share virtually with other extended family members and friends.

Sisters and brothers, the decisions and recommendations of Government must be complemented by public cooperation and compliance. We are making a concerted effort to avoid implementing tougher restrictions on the population at this time. Therefore, I urge all citizens to recognise your individual responsibility to protect yourselves and your loved ones. The grim reality is that if a significant difference is not observed within the next week or two, with respect to the rate of infections, Government could be forced to resort to a 24-hour lockdown.

I take a moment here to offer prayers and best wishes to those who have tested positive for COVID-19. We wish you a speedy recovery, particularly those who have developed symptoms in the last few days. The continuing rise in the number of positive cases, 57 as of December 21, with 50 being directly linked to the cluster, could present a serious threat to the capacity of the health care system, should any significant number of persons develop symptoms that require hospitalisation.

It is an opportune time to express immense gratitude to all frontline workers. Your unwavering commitment and willingness to go beyond the call of duty are greatly appreciated. We thank you for your sacrifices and we pledge to do our part in the fight against COVID-19. To our police officers, although ideally, we would want to see a greater level of voluntary compliance, we encourage you to be firm in enforcing the protocols.

In the past few days, we have intensified our public awareness efforts. I'm sure many of you have heard the public address systems passing through various communities, sharing information on the recommended protocols. I encourage you to pay close attention to these timely reminders of all the practices we ought to be quite familiar with by now.

Sisters and brothers, these are indeed very challenging times, especially for leaders. Although we are faced with making tough decisions daily, we are doing so in the midst of a global pandemic that has created an unprecedented impact on life as we know it. The decision to impose restrictions on the population, particularly at this time of the year, was not an easy one.

Traditionally, Christmas is all about togetherness, celebrating the birth of Christ and sharing in the love, joy and happiness that the season brings. As a devout Christian myself, the decision to restrict this much-anticipated togetherness is one of the hardest decisions I have had to make. But I am convinced that it was a necessary one, because the very act of coming together, can in fact put our loved ones at risk.

As Prime Minister of this country, with responsibility for the safety of thousands of people, it is incumbent on me, to minimise any potential threat to the population. It is with a heavy heart that I make tonight's announcement to impose a nightly curfew. I am not the Grinch that stole Christmas, I am the leader who is trying to ensure that we protect ourselves now to have a chance of celebrating future Christmases together.

2020 has been a painful year, filled with uncertainty, anxiety, frustration and even despair. Government remains committed to doing what we must to protect the people of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique but our efforts will amount to naught, if people are not cooperative. One of the key messages throughout this pandemic has been the importance of compliance – help us to help you. Government can only do so much, the real success in the fight against COVID-19 depends largely on the individual actions of the population, in following the recommended protocols. We are in this together, and I am confident, that together we can do this.

I thank you.