

# PRESS STATEMENT



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## **COVID 19 Weekly Message Premier, Hon. Joseph E. Farrell**

Residents and friends of Montserrat, this is the second in a series of weekly messages, geared at keeping you updated on activities and discussions, which your government is involved in, as we continue to find the best way to manage this corona virus pandemic.

My government is committed to providing relief to residents and businesses, impacted by the measures we have taken over the past two weeks.

I wish to assure you again, that the measures we have taken and will continue to take are for your safety from this dreaded disease COVID-19. Your health is paramount and I cannot over emphasize this.

With our limited resources we cannot for one moment allow the situation to get out of hand. The number of cases are increasing and we must put a halt to it; the only way this can be achieved is when each of us work together to protect each other.

It is only in unison and with one mission will we be able to defeat our common invisible enemy COVID-19.

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During the past week, Cabinet held several sessions, and discussed with various agencies, as the government seeks to continuously improve on the management plan which also includes the timely dissemination of information to the public.

In this regard, the Government Information Unit (GIU) and the Ministry of Health teams have been strengthened to provide the country with up to date information daily.

In my statement last week, I reported that the Government of Montserrat in collaboration with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and the Cuban government are working on providing medical assistance to Montserrat; to provide added support to fight the Corona virus.

Yesterday (Tuesday April 7), I was in contact with the Director General of the OECS who informed me that Cuba is working on our request and a response will be shared with us as soon as he receives word from Cuba.

This however may take a little time, bearing in mind the demand on Cuba to provide medical assistance globally.

In the meantime, plans are being advanced for the arrival of the team.

On Friday April 3, 2020 the Monetary Council of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank held the 1<sup>st</sup> Special Meeting of the Council, virtually. Members discussed and approved a range of matters; most of which were COVID -19 related.

We received updates from the Governor of the Central Bank on the impact the Coronavirus would have on the economies of member states within the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union, and we were told of measures which the bank has taken to mitigate against some of those impacts. In this regard, the Council approved, a number of proposals including:

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- A proposal by the Bank to make a grant of EC\$4M to member states from the fiscal reserve tranche to assist us with COVID -19 preparation and purchase some supplies as required. This and other approved proposals have been announced by the Bank, previously.

In addressing you last week, I also noted that your government was working tirelessly to provide assistance in an effort to alleviate the hardship which some persons would have been experiencing as a result of the islands lockdown, and where some businesses are not allowed to operate, and workers are laid off as a consequence.

Today, I am pleased to report that the Government has received an approval of funds from DFID as a first step to assist us with an immediate response to COVID 19. In a written correspondence this week, we were notified of a confirmation of £2.5million which will be added to Montserrat's 2020/21 Financial Aid allocation.

In addition to this, the Government of Montserrat, will be rolling out the first phase of a stimulus package which I announced last week, consisting of three main categories:

1. **Workers in the tourism sector**: hotels, restaurants, guest houses, taxi and tour operators and taxi drivers will be the first group of workers who will receive a percentage of their monthly wages. In the coming days, an application form will be on line for employers to apply on behalf of their workers. More detailed information will be provided through GIU and Radio Montserrat.

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## **Food Packages**

2. We are also rolling out the food package component which will be for persons who were not working but who are in need of assistance, this relief package will be administered through the Social services department and the details will be announced shortly. Please note, this food package is not for persons who are already on the established social welfare monthly assistance programme.

## **3. COVID -19 Benefit**

In addition to receiving a food package, persons who are self-employed can benefit from this COVID-19 benefit package of financial assistance.

These supportive measures would be for three months, in the first instance.

Other assistance packages will be forth coming once this first phase is fully up and running.

It will take a little while to fine tune the system to accommodate these packages, but in the meantime I ask that you be patient, as we must put in place the necessary checks and balances to ensure that those persons for whom the benefits are intended receive their fair share.

While as a government we continue to try and cushion the economic and social fall out of COVID–19 on the population, we cannot take our eyes off the disease itself.

We continue to look at what is happening around the world and we cannot but otherwise notice the increase numbers of corona virus cases, globally.

As I also stated, the increase is also being noted here at home as well, we have moved from one – two – five - six and now to eight in less than one month.

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This is alarming and is significant for the size of our population and so we must stop this spread.

My governments' focus in the coming days and weeks will be to increase the number of tests being done through whatever means possible.

We are currently working closely with Public Health UK and the OECS to secure the relevant equipment in preparation for additional and more serious cases, while at the same time stepping up efforts to have a larger percentage of the population tested for COVID-19.

We know that some persons are not displaying symptoms of COVID -19 but could be carriers and spreaders of the virus and we must break this chain.

Cabinet will meet this coming Thursday, and we will be reviewing the current measures to determine the next steps.

You are foremost in our minds, protecting your health is of absolute importance and we will not lay down our guards

I wish to thank those of you who are adhering to the measures and only leave home if you must.

Some essential businesses and services have introduced measures of their own to protect their staff and customers and I commend them for that and we ask that others do the same.

Unfortunately, not everyone is acting responsibly; some persons are brazenly violating the measures, having little or no regard for the safety of others, to this end the police must act.

Persons who break the law will be prosecuted, fined and or imprisoned. We have to and will take a zero tolerance approach to persons found violating the curfew. This 'tough love' is necessary to protect all of us and get Montserrat out of this crisis.

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Before I end, I wish to thank the staff in the ministry of health the doctors, nurses, technicians and all auxiliary staff of the medical fraternity, the staff in other ministries, GIU and Radio Montserrat, the Police Service, staff within the Office of the Premier, Ministry of Finance, Trade and others, who although on lockdown have been working tirelessly to help move things along; Thank you all very much.

- I am not ignorant of the fact that many of you are frustrated and bored at home. But, I wish to commend you for your understanding of the situation and for complying. I encourage you to continue to comply.
- To the children who must remain at home confined to inside or just the limited space outside, it may be hard for you to understand what is happening and adjust. In fact, my eight year old granddaughter messaged me on WhatsApp on the weekend. She wrote, “Grandpa can you change the curfew.” I had to send back a message explaining that the curfew was in place to prevent us from getting the coronavirus, that’s why we are at home. Many children may be asking you as parents the same question, and the answer should be the same, it is to protect you from contracting the corona virus.

I wish to encourage the children:

- Spend time doing your schoolwork but find some time to play your favorites games, as well;
- Watch shows on nickelodeon and Netflix and learn from every experience;

I continue to admonish you as adults to:

- spend time with the children;
- Enjoy some good family time together;
- Tell them stories of yesteryear, don’t be afraid laugh ,sing and pray together;

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- Care for those plants around the yard;
- Call a loved one or an elderly, or vulnerable neighbours.



Remember we are all in this together: the whole world is in this with us: How we come out of this crisis is dependent on how we adhere to measures which are in place.

I am convinced that we can and will be victorious if only we work together to protect each other.

May God continue to watch over all of us!

**END**

Joseph E. Farrell  
Premier  
8<sup>th</sup> April 2020

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