



PRESS STATEMENT

From: Office of the Premier

Published: May 13, 2020

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

Updates on the Phased Reopening of the Economy & Protocol Discussions on Phased Reopening of the Tourism Sector

Good day to all hearing my voice, I extend warm greetings to all of you.

Another week has come and gone and I do hope that all of you are safe and well. We have come this far by faith, and we give God thanks.

Yesterday was International Nurses Day, and like the Minister of Health, Hon. Charles Kirnon, I wish also to express my personal thanks to the nurses and their families for their enormous service to humanity. I am truly thankful for the sacrifices they so often make in saving lives and restoring hope, especially more than ever now during this Coronavirus pandemic, when they have been called upon to give their all to this island, even at the risk of their own health. Thank you very much for your service to humanity and this island!

The island continues to maintain a positive trend as we have not registered a single new COVID -19 case since April 12, and active cases have reduced to one, with fewer persons visiting the Flu Clinic and the number of persons in quarantine has also significantly reduced.

It is clear that the coronavirus disease on island is under some level of control at this time, however this is no indication that we are clear and free to move on.

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Our borders are still closed and the movement of people into Montserrat is restricted. However, we all know that the time will come when our borders will have to be opened to the movement of people into and out of the island, and at that time we will once again be at an increased risk of exposure. So, we have to ensure that appropriate protocols are in place to manage this potential risk.

OECS Meetings – Protocol for Phased Reopening of the Tourism Sector

In fact, leaders across the region are very cautious about this and so it is essential that as a region we take a unified approach when our borders are open. Over the past ten days, a number of meetings were held amongst the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, (OECS) Tourism Ministers and various tourism stakeholders in the tourism sector, to discuss a draft protocol for the opening up of the tourism sector, and in particular air travel.

Member states were given the opportunity to discuss the draft protocol and to provide feedback. When agreed member states reserve the right to set its own timeline for the reopening of its borders to air traffic.

This is considered as the very first step to a phased reopening of the Tourism sector.

Cruise Industry

A protocol will also be developed for the cruise industry, including businesses that are directly linked to providing services for cruise ship passengers when they arrive on island.

One question that is often asked is; how will tour guides operate, in light of COVID-19?

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It is clear that Tour and Taxi operators will have to modify their seating arrangements, and will have to implement other protocols to ensure persons are not at an increased risk of exposure when utilizing their services.

To this end, the Ministry of Health will continue to vigorously monitor the situation for any presence of or likely resurgence of the virus, and will provide further guidance on ways to reduce possible exposure.

Arrival of Testing Machine

To assist with this monitoring, we are indeed thankful that the testing machine from the United Kingdom has now arrived on island and will provide the country with the ability to undertake a more vigorous testing regime which would allow for greater detection, tracking and tracing of the disease.

There can and never will be a full proof system in managing this virus. But all of us must play our part in continuing to keep each other safe as we continue to practice social distancing, staying at home if you can, practice good hygiene, and cover your nose and mouth when in crowded places.

Phased Opening of the Economy

Any prolonged closure of the economy can be disastrous for any island or country, and while your government's primary goal is to protect you, we have to now balance that as we also focus on the economy.

In seeking to apply a much broader and balanced approach to the re-opening of the economy, government sought and received input from a number of groups and individuals.

Contributions received, were then fed into a public sector task force which was assigned the responsibility of providing

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Cabinet with guidance to the gradual removal of restrictions that have been in place for the management of COVID-19.

The government wishes to place on record, its sincerest appreciation and thanks for the invaluable contribution made by the following groups, towards providing guidance for a phased reopening of the economy.

- The Montserrat Chamber of Commerce and Industry led by the President Mrs. Florence Griffith Joseph.
- Mr. Reuben T Meade (Former Premier) as chair, and all Members of the Economic Recovery Task Force.
- Hon. Paul Lewis and other members of the Parliamentary opposition;
- The University of the West Indies, spearheaded by Ms. Gracelyn Cassell.

Government is cognizant that not every business on Montserrat can be opened at the same time, as consideration for allowing businesses to open must be managed by the science, and each operation must be assessed to determine the level of risk that persons may be exposed to.

Each phase of implementation of this guidance strategy for reopening of the economy will therefore be influenced by the situation which exists, at the time at which that particular phase is to be implemented, and on the advice received from the Health professionals.

On May 7th we began phase 4 of the reopening of the economy, and this phase will continue until May 22nd when it will be reassessed. There is no guarantee that these measures will stay in place or that there will be new businesses added to the list. This current phase provides for the opening of businesses that are at low risk of spreading the virus and where social distancing measures can be put in place and monitored. The list of these businesses is aired from time to time on Radio Montserrat and can be viewed on the Government Information Unit Facebook page.

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You are still allowed to exercise two sessions every day as stipulated by the Order, but no vehicles are allowed to transport persons for the purpose of exercising.

Restructuring of Businesses

COVID-19 has resulted in a shift in our normal mode of operating and as such we must all adjust to the new way of doing things.

The science tells us that this virus will not be going anywhere soon and as a result we must begin to arrange our lives and our businesses to co-exist with the Coronavirus disease. In other words, we will have to learn to live with the virus and still go about our daily lives with some changes.

Business owners must now begin to give some serious considerations as to how best to reorganize their businesses, in light of COVID-19:

- Banks may have to ask more of us to use their Automated Transaction Machines (ATMs); meaning more of us will have to use cards.
- Supermarkets and shops will have to consider if online shopping and a delivery service will be the new norm.
- A shift system in businesses may become common place.
- Is it that working from home or remote working has finally reached our shores, as the new way of conducting our business operations?
- Social distancing is going to be with us for some time, so how do we greet our families and friends?
- Will restaurants and cook shops need to have fewer seating arrangements when we begin to eat out?
- How will COVID-19 impact the way we travel on the ferry or an aircraft?
- Is online learning and home schooling here to stay?

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- Is government in a position to increase its online payment system, providing for less face to face contact?
- In all of this, how will the culture of our island be affected; will we become anti-social or more friendly as a people?
- Will we become less caring or has the crisis knitted us closer together?

These are all points to consider and questions being asked about what the ‘new normal’ will mean for us; we all must clearly begin to think about this and talk about it.

While we continue to be on the alert we must also prepare ourselves to live side by side with the Coronavirus until a vaccine has been developed and readily available; until then we must continue to practice the social distancing and hygiene practices that have been promoted throughout our response to COVID-19.

Remember please stay at home if you do not need to be on the road for any business or shopping purposes, allowed for during this time. While you are at home keep yourself busy, call a friend and share a joke, speak with family members and find other means of keeping occupied at home.

Life is worthwhile living and in spite of all of this, it is worth living well.

We are in this together and we will all come out together.

May God bless all of you and may God continue to bless Montserrat.

END

Joseph E. Farrell
Premier
13th May 2020

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