



Public Hearing Summary

Wednesday, February 5, 2020

Inquiry Subject:

An inquiry into the preparedness of public authorities for the potential spread of the Novel Coronavirus in Trinidad and Tobago.

Committee Members:

The following Committee Members were present at the meeting:

- Mrs. Bridgid Annisette-George - Chairman
- Dr Lackram Bodoie - Vice-Chairman
- Mr. Daniel Dookie - Member
- Mr. Foster Cummings - Member
- Ms. Nicole Olivierre - Member
- Ms. Amrita Deonarine - Member

Witnesses who appeared:

Ministry of Health

- Mr. Asif Ali - Permanent Secretary
- Dr. Roshan Parasram - Chief Medical Officer
- Dr. Vishwanath Partapsingh - Principal Medical Officer
Environmental Health
- Dr. Osafo Fraser - County Medical Officer of Health (CMOH),
St. George East

Ministry of Finance

- Ms. Savitree Seepersad - Deputy Permanent Secretary

Ms. Yvonne Neemacharan	-	Deputy Permanent Secretary
Ms. Eleanor Alleyne	-	Deputy Director of Budgets (Ag.)
Ms. Vidyah Marcial	-	DC Operations, Customs and Excise Division
Mr. Bernard Nicholas	-	DC Enforcement, Customs and Excise Division

Ministry of National Security

Mr. Vel Lewis	-	Permanent Secretary
Mrs. Charmaine Gandhi-Andrews	-	Chief Immigration Officer

Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

Mrs. Trudy Gill-Conlon	-	General Manager/ CEO (Ag.)
Ms. Joy Guy- Browne	-	Occupational Health Nurse
Dr Sonia Roache	-	Medical Superintendent

Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

Col. Albert Griffith	-	General Manager (Ag.)
Ms. Oswald Bruce	-	Coordinator Operations and Aviation Training
Mr. Kurt Manal	-	Deputy General Manager Airport Operations- Piarco International Airport

Key Issues Discussed

Ministry of Health (MoH)

1. The designation of the Novel Coronavirus as a public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organization (WHO);
2. The rapidly rising number of confirmed Novel Coronavirus cases globally and the absence of the virus in Trinidad and Tobago;
3. The likely underreporting of suspected virus cases;
4. The number of virus-related deaths globally;
5. The low death rate of the Novel Coronavirus;
6. The limited capacity of small developing States to deal with disease outbreaks;

7. The number of thermal screenings carried out on passengers so far;
8. The justification for the 14-day travel restriction concerning travellers originating in China;
9. The public education campaign carried out by the Ministry;
10. The symptoms of the Novel Coronavirus;
11. The different means whereby the Novel Coronavirus spreads;
12. Details surrounding the other viruses belonging to the category of coronaviruses;
13. The general protective measures against the Novel Coronavirus;
14. The procedures one must undertake if one suspects they may have contracted the Novel Coronavirus;
15. The MoH's collaboration with regional and international agencies;
16. The difference between quarantine and isolation;
17. The number of beds available at the quarantine facility within the Caura Hospital and the scope for quickly increasing capacity if the need arises;
18. The isolation capacity of the port health unit at the Piarco International Airport;
19. The quarantine protocols in place regarding Trinidad and Tobago nationals being repatriated from China;
20. The anticipated effect of the influx of carnival visitors;
21. The MoH's communication with carnival stakeholders;
22. The participation of private sector medical institutions and personnel in virus surveillance efforts;
23. The status of stocks of medical material and contingency plans through PAHO for rapid restocking;
24. The composition of a typical Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kit;
25. The simulation exercises conducted by MoH's rapid response teams;
26. The nature of the testing conducted to confirm virus infection;
27. The current reliance on the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for laboratory virus confirmation;
28. The laboratory testing services to be provided by Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) starting in mid-February;

29. The rapid testing kits developed by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO);
30. The collaboration between the MoH and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries concerning agricultural produce possibly originating in China;
31. The need to convene a formal multi-sectoral committee; to coordinate virus-related initiatives between the MoH and relevant stakeholders;
32. The status of the National Plan regarding public health emergency preparedness and response;
33. The alignment of public health authorities with guidelines published by the WHO and CARPHA; and
34. The insurance provisions in place for health care workers given their exposure to the virus.

Ministry of National Security

1. The effective tracking of passengers' travel history;
2. The challenges in determining passengers' geographical origin;
3. The use of the Advanced Passenger Information (API) system to determine the original port of embarkation of passengers travelling to Trinidad and Tobago;
4. The lack of provision for PNR (Passenger Name Record) information in Trinidad and Tobago's API legislation;
5. The refusal of entry to a passenger originating in China who was suspected of carrying the virus;
6. The contact tracing efforts concerning passengers on board flights containing travellers originating in China; and
7. The monitoring of unofficial ports of entry.

Ministry of Finance

1. The protocols in place for emergency funding via the Contingencies Fund.

Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

1. The systems in place for monitoring arrivals from China at sea ports;

Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

1. The possibility of extended waiting times at the airports during the carnival season due to the screening initiatives being carried out.

View the Hearing:

The hearing can be viewed on our YouTube page via the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGGNaEUJKEo>

Next Meeting:

The next Public Hearing of the Committee will be held on **Wednesday, February 12, 2020**, at 1:30 p.m. At this meeting the Committee intends to conduct an inquiry into the Maintenance of Community Pools.

PAAC Secretariat

February 5, 2020