



OFFICE OF THE
PREMIER
CAYMAN ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

Statement by Premier Hon Alden McLaughlin, MBE, JP, MP

on the Cayman Islands National COVID-19 Vaccination Plan

House of Parliament

Thursday, 10 December, 2020

Mister Speaker, I rise today to announce that Cabinet has approved a National COVID-19 vaccination plan for the Cayman Islands this week.

Mister Speaker, we have had much success with the control of COVID-19 on these shores and much depends on us maintaining this momentum. We will build further on our achievements with this plan, and provide a strong foundation for the safe recovery of the Cayman Islands' global economic interests while safeguarding the health of our people.

We have all been waiting for the availability of a safe and well-tested vaccine against the dangerous viral disease, COVID-19. One such vaccine, with a very convincing success rate, has now been approved separately in both Canada and the United Kingdom. The Pfizer/BioNtech vaccine is already being rolled out in the UK, a veritable Christmas gift in a country where tens of thousands of people have died as a result of

the pandemic. Approval from the Food and Drug Administration in the United States of America is expected shortly.

To support the OT's in the fight against this virus the UK Government is arranging to deliver supplies of vaccinations and it is anticipated the deliveries will start in early January. Mr. Speaker, we are hopeful that Cayman will see its first batch arrive in the first week of next year. We anticipate receiving a sufficient number of vaccines in the first batch to immunise several thousand people. Additionally, Government has contracted with the coronavirus Covax facility organised by the international vaccines agency, Gavi, to provide further vaccines through this mechanism, which also supports countries less able to fund vaccination programmes themselves.

Mister Speaker, the approval of the vaccine in the UK brings us closer to ensuring the safety of those at greatest risk from the effects of COVID-19. This includes those who are older, and who have certain defined conditions and diseases that make them more vulnerable to the effects of the coronavirus. And while I am not yet in those ranks, Mr. Speaker, I will say that I will be one of the first in line to take the vaccine to lead by example and to demonstrate my confidence in the safety of the vaccine.

A question that is already on everyone's lips is how Government will prioritise vaccination throughout our community. I can tell you that the objectives of the National Plan closely align with those set out by major public health agencies such as the Pan American Health Organisation and Public Health England. Our goals are as follows:

- To protect the integrity of the health care system and infrastructure for the continuity of essential services, by vaccinating health workers at all levels of care, and other essential services established in the country.
- To reduce the severe morbidity and mortality associated with COVID-19 by protecting the populations at greatest risk from the disease, and,
- To reduce transmission of infection in the community and generate widespread immunity by expanding vaccination to other groups. This will be achieved when vaccines become more available through 2021.

There is work to be done to successfully reach these objectives before the vaccine arrives, much of which is already under way.

- Government has already begun to implement a communication plan to answer any concerns the public may have, and to address the considerable misinformation that is already in the public domain. Since last week, detailed information about COVID-19 vaccinations has been available from the Frequently Asked Questions section of the Government's coronavirus website exploregov.ky/coronavirus. Further information will also be forthcoming shortly in this regard.

- The Health Services Authority has large quantities of syringes, needles, sharps boxes and equipment on order for delivery of the doses.
- Specialised freezers have also been ordered by the Health Services Authority, and there is already one such freezer at Health City Cayman Islands with spare capacity able to meet our needs.

Senior management and Public Health teams at the Health Services Authority are confident they will be able to commence this mass vaccination programme using existing resources.

Mister Speaker, consultation has also been undertaken with both private and public healthcare providers to better inform them of the plans and to allow them to offer their resources to deliver the vaccinations.

Health officials believe that with all preparations in place they should be able to vaccinate some 3,000 people per week.

Once the vaccine arrives on Island a number of groups have been prioritised for the **voluntary** vaccination. These include:

1. Healthcare workers and institutional residents, because this reduces the risk of spread between care givers and those they care for, and protects those that are not able to physically distance because of their situation

2. Frontline customer facing staff working at ports who are constantly exposed to the risks from travelers
3. Those over age of 60, and people suffering from conditions liable to put them at increased risk if they were to contract Covid-19
4. Workers who are essential for the continuity of Government services.

Mister Speaker, the second stage of the **voluntary** vaccination programme will consist of the delivery of the vaccine to:

- Essential service workers, teachers and school staff
- Those living in the households of anyone from the stage one vaccination programme.

The Ministry of Health has proposed the further opening of borders after stage two, around one month into the start of the overall vaccination programme, by which time we should be have vaccinated our most vulnerable.

The following restrictions would apply for people arriving from overseas:

- a) All travelers entering the Islands must be able to show that they have received an approved vaccine course against the virus which causes COVID-

19. This should have been completed before arrival, according to recommendations by the Public Health Department. They must also receive negative results from a PCR test upon arrival. Persons who meet these conditions will be exempted from quarantine, if living in households where the other residents have also received a vaccine.
- b) All people who are exempted from quarantine in this manner, including their households, will undergo repeat testing on day 5, day 10 and day 15 following the arrival date.
 - c) Regular PCR screening will continue with safety restrictions for healthcare workers, healthcare establishments, nursing homes and prisons.
 - d) Those involved in hosting travelers, including all port workers, hotel workers, restaurateurs, bar workers, leisure companies, taxi drivers and anyone else working in tourism, will be required to be screened for COVID-19 disease at regular intervals.

Mister Speaker, additional PCR testing capacity by the HSA, Doctor's Hospital and Health City Cayman Islands, should be able to match any increase in demand. The HSA and Public Health Department will also monitor the situation and promptly request any additional human resources necessary to this goal. Rapid testing may also be used to provide simpler access to testing for COVID-19 disease. But Mr. Speaker, I use the word may because it should be noted that widespread use of this in city-wide sampling programmes elsewhere has shown disappointing sensitivity in that it has only picked up between 50% and 70% of people who have COVID-19.

The final stage of the vaccination programme will consist of vaccinating the remainder of the population for whom the vaccines are intended.

Again Mister Speaker, I underline that taking the vaccine is voluntary, while the vaccine has yet to arrive in the Cayman Islands, I would like to take this opportunity to encourage all those people listening to these proceedings to do their due diligence, and to keep their minds open to the many benefits that participation in the voluntary national vaccination programme will offer.

It is an opportunity for us, as individuals, to take action to protect this community that we love so much, and which has done so much for us, while at the same time we protect ourselves.

I will end by assuring this honourable House that Government will remain vigilant throughout this process, as we monitor the roll-out of the vaccination, the proposed travel changes, and their impact on our society. Should there be an indication of substantial and worrisome community transmission of COVID-19 cases in the Cayman Islands, or if we were required to move up a suppression level, preventive measures will be promptly tightened through Public Health regulations, as they have been in the past. If this happens we will see a return to the wearing of masks in public places, physical distancing and the use of protective barriers to minimise further spread of the COVID-19 disease.

Mr. Speaker as I said before the successful development and imminent arrival of the vaccine seems like the Christmas gift we have all been waiting for. At the same time the vaccine is still not yet here. When it arrives, it will greatly reduce our chances of getting COVID-19, and the potential severity of the illness if we should contract it, but nothing is guaranteed.

Mister Speaker, we must continue to practice the preventive measures that we have followed thus far, including: washing hands, practicing respiratory hygiene, and following social distancing recommendations. Doing so will ensure that we in the Cayman Islands stay safe through the holidays and into 2021.

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