

Statement By The Minister Of Tourism And Civil Aviation

Dr Clarice Modeste

As Minister for Tourism, I am deeply concerned at the toll the Corona pandemic is taking on our country at large, and the tourism industry.

I am, however, heartened by the quick response of the Government to not only safeguard our shores, but also to put mechanisms in place to bring help and relief to a broad cross-section of the most vulnerable citizens, and to open the doors of opportunity for business start-up and business improvement.

I am well aware that the revenues of Government are negatively affected and it will require prudent financial management to continue to pay the salaries of all staff in the public service and meet new commitments to provide payroll support to a large number of persons who are out of income at this time. In addition, the necessary functions of Government have to be accomplished, including the funding of COVID-19 activities. Payroll support will be provided for a wide category of workers including hotels, restaurants, bars, public buses, tourist vendors, taxi drivers and market vendors. The details are being finalized for roll out in the shortest possible time.

It is important to note that the stimulus measures outlined by the Prime Minister and Minister for Finance were stated to be preliminary and that further review will occur as we go forward. No one knows how long this global health crisis will persist and as a government, we must be prudent and flexible in our approach. The Prime Minister and Minister for Finance continues to hold discussions with regional and international partners and financial institutions, such as the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, to explore further ways of bolstering the economy in the short and medium-term.

The GDB soft loan facility for small hotels will be significantly increased, and the requirements for qualification considerably relaxed. Also, the other soft loan provided by the same facility has increased available funds with very favourable conditions from which the tourism sector can benefit. Besides, the ECCB under the chairmanship of Dr. the Right honourable Keith Mitchell will be providing loans at concessionary rates to aid in the recovery process. The Government of Grenada has come to the rescue of the Tourism Industry many times before, and even in the recent past has intervened to ensure that flights continue to come

in this together. I urge all stakeholders to work with us as we explore ways to get this critical sector back on its feet in the shortest possible time. This is a time to put the country first, and not give in to personal persuasions. Let us ensure that whatever is put out in the public domain is factual. I express appreciation to those in the industry who have offered advice and other means of support in these difficult times and I invite everyone to join us in this battle against COVID-19. May God continue to bless you and keep you safe.

to our shores. The Ministry of Tourism and the Grenada Tourism Authority is reviewing plans and preparing for a renewed Tourism Industry. It would require innovation, commitment and sacrifice on the part of everyone. We look forward to a strengthened public-private partnership because we're all

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UWI Cave Hill experts release study findings to curb COVID-19 spread

As countries institute quarantine measures to contain the spread of COVID-19, they are being given an early warning to be prepared to deal with the associated side effects.

In a just-released document, the Public Health Response Team of The UWI Cave Hill Campus, said studies have shown that mass containment or mass quarantine measures for extended periods can result in post-traumatic stress symptoms, confusion, anger, infection fears, frustration, boredom, inadequate supplies, inadequate information, financial loss and stigma.

As a result, they have recommended that the timing and repetition of these necessary measures, be carefully considered.

The advice is contained in a document titled, Intervention Strategies for Stages 2 and 3 of the Barbados COVID-19 Response: An evidence base.

It comes as countries struggle to contain the deadly virus that has, so far, killed over 128,000 people worldwide and infected more

than two million, of which over 6000 cases are in the Caribbean. To date, there are no available vaccines or antivirals.

Deputy Dean in charge of Research and Postgraduate Studies, and Senior Lecturer in Qualitative Research Methods at The George Alleyne Chronic Disease Research Centre, Dr Madhuvanti M. Murphy said there are trade-offs to mass quarantine or containment strategies.

"The Barbados Government has made quick moves towards suppression in line with recommendations coming out of the evidence. For example, they have made the current containment measures for a short period, which evidence suggests can reduce some of the side effects mentioned. Keep in mind that these containment strategies may need to be repeated to curb the waves of infection that are expected to follow the relaxation of containment.

"In this way, our health system is not overburdened at one specific time, but hopefully by slowing the disease

spread, can handle cases over a longer period. Other public health interventions such as physical distancing, hand washing and other hygiene measures must continue regardless of containment measures."

The members of the public health team have different areas of expertise. Professor Ian Hambleton specializes in statistical modelling, Dr Murphy and Dr Heather Harewood are concentrating on non-pharmaceutical interventions, Dr Natasha Sobers and Dr Christina Howitt are in charge of surveillance while Dr Kim Quimby and Dr Natalie Greaves are focusing on process planning and evaluation.

"If population-level quarantine is necessary, results indicate that every measure must be taken to ensure that this experience is as tolerable as possible," the team said.

To lessen the effects of the measure, the researchers recommend that individuals in quarantine be provided with access to meaningful activities such as free online services and support groups and that authorities ensure the availability of

basic supplies such as food, water, and medical supplies.

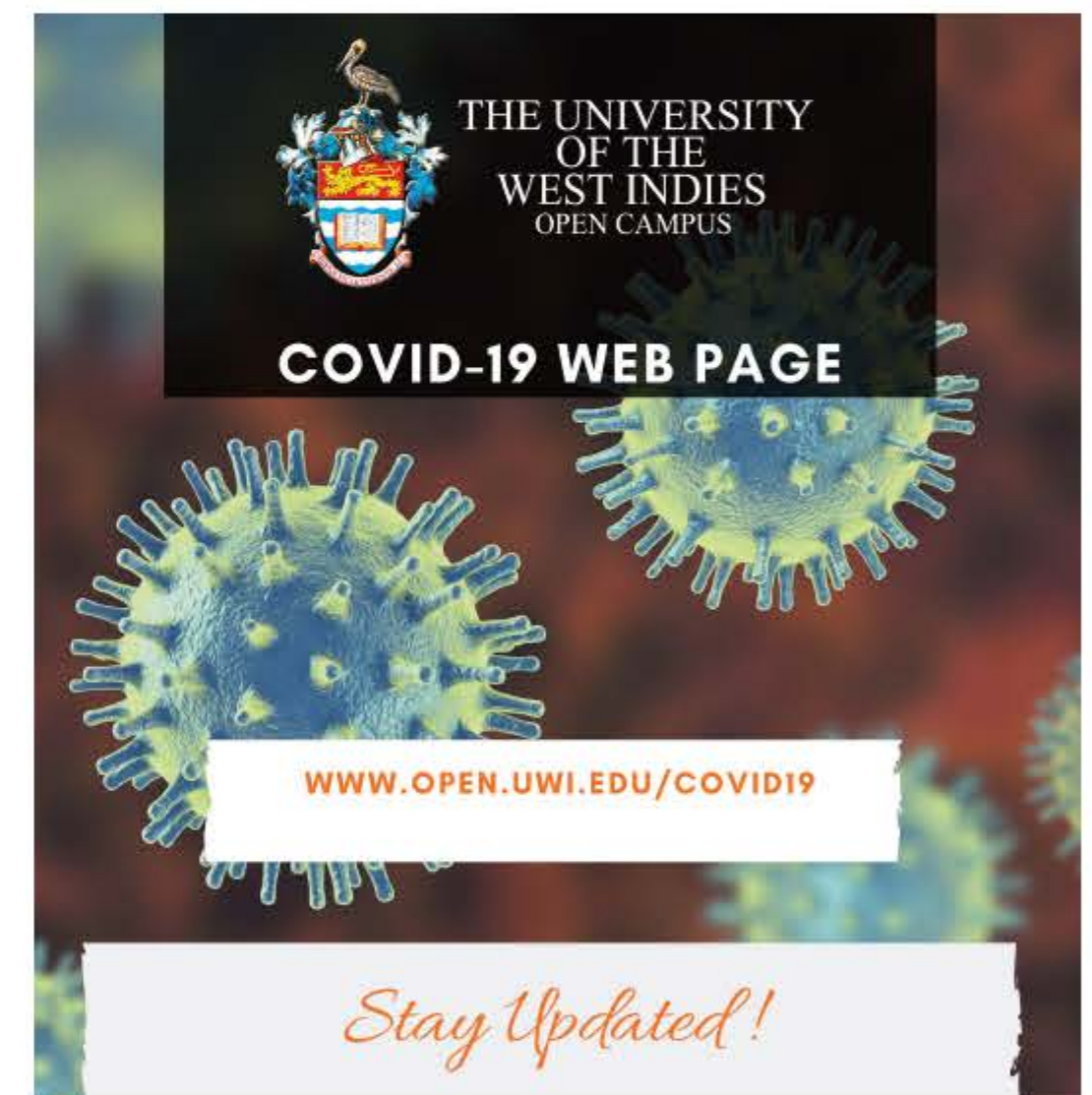
The experts analysed the strategies being used to suppress the virus - information, education and communication, in particular, continued sensitization and communication with the public; no mass gatherings; social distancing in the general population; social distancing in persons 70 years and over and community-wide quarantine as a pandemic containment strategy.

They concluded that while containment is necessary, clear timeframes were needed and legal framework necessary for implementation.

They also agreed that communication was a critical tool in the fight, including social media.

"Past pandemics have found that communicating recommendations related to distancing interventions have the most compliance issues due to underlying beliefs on the negative social and economic consequences of such behaviour change," they noted.

Though the term social distancing has now become a buzzword, the experts



cautioned that it does not seem to be well understood and suggested that it be replaced with the phrase physical distancing.

Regarding that strategy, they cited data on public behaviour in the United Kingdom during the current pandemic.

"Overall, social distancing such as 'avoiding going out' was not perceived as a very effective measure to prevent COVID-19 (69%) in the UK," the team said.

"In addition, while 71% of the general UK population reported changing behav-

iour in response to government guidance, it was notably lower for young adults ages 18-24 years (53%). This indicates a need for targeted communication to this group, using alternative media resources example NGOs, social media, social influencers, as even though globally they are not considered vulnerable, they can spread the virus. As well, men need to seek care early since globally they have been most affected and this is attributed to them not seeking care early."