

# PSA, registered nurses: Frontline workers not ready for COVID-19

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Frontline workers are not prepared with the right equipment and procedures for an outbreak of COVID-19, say officials of the Public Service Association (PSA) and the T&T Registered Nurses Association (TTRNA).

“There are a couple of gaps in San Fernando and Tobago which have highlighted that we are not yet prepared,” TTRNA president Idi Stuart said in a brief interview yesterday.

“Not much training is happening on the ground and the training that is happening is very haphazard and it is not sufficient,” he added.

Stuart said the WHO (World Health Organisation) recommended that if any health worker feels their safety is not being considered and the necessary PPE



PSA President Watson Duke

(personal protective equipment) are not there “they have full right to remove themselves from any dangerous situation.” He said this recommendation will be adhered to by nurses.

The TTRNA is seeking a meet-



Minister of Health Terrence Deyalsingh, replies to a question posed by the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad in the House of Representatives yesterday.

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ing with the Ministry of Health so the gaps it has identified can be addressed before it's too late.

PSA president Watson Duke said similar deficiencies are being faced by the frontline workers under his association's remit.

“The port health workers at the airport, the seaport, the watch officers, the immigration officers, Customs (and) Excise officers, healthcare professionals—they feel vulnerable at this time. There have been no educa-

tion exercises for them, there is no particular environment that makes them feel safe,” he said.

Duke cited reports that some 3,387 health workers in China had been infected with COVID-19 leaving more than a dozen dead.

In Parliament yesterday Health Minister Terrence Deyalsingh outlined the country's plan thus far.

“With these measures, the assurance is given to this honourable house that the Ministry of Health is continuously monitoring the progress of the COVID-19 within the global, regional and local context and will scale up its overall response plan with sufficient resources to allow for building local capacity, networks among agencies within the public and private sectors and training and most importantly protection for our frontline personnel with full PPE, hazmat suits, etcetera,” he said.



## Lee pleased with COVID-19 plans for Couva Hospital

While United National Congress (UNC) chairman David Lee is pleased that the Couva Hospital will be used as part of Government's COVID-19 action plan, he believes this also disproves Health Minister Terrence Deyalsingh's claims that the facility is nothing more than a construction site.

“We are happy that we are seeing the Couva facility is being used for that. It augers well for the citizenry. But this hospital should have been open a long time ago,” he said in a brief telephone interview with Guardian Media.

“What it also solidifies and substantiates is that the Couva has always . . . been ready and is in a ready state to be opened, so that if the minister is utilising the Couva facility in case of a major outbreak, then it tells the country that the Couva hospital has always been ready to accept patients.”

On Thursday, Deyalsingh said the Couva Hospital will be used as a centralised hub for treatment for those who may potentially be af-



Opposition Chief Whip David Lee in Parliament yesterday. PICTURE COURTESY OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENT

ected by the coronavirus.

“We must have a major medical facility which could be quarantined, locked down by security, that will be designated as a level, sort of three, facility because there now you have ICU capacity if needed, you have operating theatres if needed. That

facility is currently being operationalised to do just that and has been for the past week or so,” he explained.

The hospital was opened in 2015 by the then People's Partnership government as a children's hospital but was never commissioned. Since the change in government shortly after, the facility has been a point of contention with the opposition criticising government's failure to commission and utilise the \$1.6 billion facility.

“Government, especially the Minister of Health, claimed the facility was not feasible for operation due to several factors, including structural deficiencies. The hospital was opened last year as a Multi-Training Facility operationalised by the North Central Regional Health Authority in partnership with the University of the West Indies (UWI) in the first phase, which includes the provision of advanced diagnostic imaging and pharmacy services, according to information on the Udecott website.

## Jamaica expands travel restriction

Jamaica is following T&T in expanding the list of countries to which their travel restrictions apply to as the country tries to protect itself from the COVID-19 outbreak that is spreading across the world.

The announcement was made on Thursday by Jamaica's Minister of Health and Wellness Dr Christopher Tufton, hours after T&T's Minister of Health Terrence Deyalsingh made a similar announcement.

According to a release from the Jamaican ministry, the decision was “based on the risk assessment and the World Health Organisation Situation Report 37 on the COVID-19, dated February 26, 2020, additional countries will be incorporated into the travel restrictions.”

The restriction applies to travellers entering Jamaica from Italy, South Korea, Singapore and Iran—the same countries added to T&T's list, except for Japan.

The release said the ministry is “reviewing the situation in Japan, where there are 164 cases and one death; and will advise whether that country is to be included in the list of restricted countries.”

Much like T&T, restrictions apply to travellers who have visited China or the newly added countries within 14 days. The criteria outlined for the new restriction by the Ministry of Health and Wellness are as follows:

- All Jamaicans who have visited the countries on the list within the last 14 days will have landing privileges in accordance with the law but will be subject to a health assessment and quarantine.

- Persons who have visited the countries on the list within the last 14 days and who do not have permanent residency or marriage exemption in Jamaica will not be granted landing privileges at any of the country's ports of entry.

- Non-Jamaicans who have permanent residence and marriage exemptions who are landed and who had visited the countries on the list within the last 14 days will be subject to a health assessment, quarantine.

- Persons who have visited the countries on the list and have been granted landing privileges and classified by the Ministry of Health and Wellness as high risk will be quarantined in Government facilities. Those who are assessed by the Ministry of Health and Wellness as low-risk will be quarantined at home under the supervision of the Parish Health Department.

- Individuals returning from the countries on the list who have been granted landing privileges and who display any symptom of COVID-19, as per the case definition published by the Pan American Health Organisation/World Health Organisation, will be placed in immediate isolation at a health facility.