



Parliamentary Statement
Minister of Health and Wellness
Dr. the Hon. Christopher Tufton
Re: Ebola, Dengue & Cornwall Regional Hospital
Gordon House - Tuesday, 23 July 2019

Mr. Speaker, I wish to update this honourable house and the people of Jamaica on some important developments in public health over recent days and weeks.

Ebola

As at July 17, 2019, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, the Ebola Virus Disease Outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). That outbreak started in 2018.

The Ebola Virus Disease formerly known as Ebola Haemorrhagic Fever, is a rare but severe and oftentimes fatal illness in humans. Since 1976, there have been 10 outbreaks. The 2018 outbreak has been protracted and has now extended to the main commercial centre in the DRC.

The WHO has determined that though the risk had been high locally in the DRC and is now also high for the African region, the current global risk remains low. *Jamaica is, nonetheless, preparing for any eventuality.*



As such, the Ebola Virus Disease Response Plan, implemented in 2015, is being activated to increase awareness and educate stakeholders. Mr. Speaker, we are also:

- Undertaking specialised training and retraining of relevant stakeholders, including Immigration and Customs personnel, Port Health Staff, Public Health Departments, Clinical Care Teams and all persons who may handle specimen.
- Enhancing surveillance at Points of Entry to the island through sensitisation and screening.
- As well as reviewing clinical protocols for Management and Infection Control practices.

Mr. Speaker, we are also reinforcing our laboratory response capabilities and preparing isolation areas at our public health facilities. Back in 2015, we had procured Personal Protective Equipment, which were distributed to hospitals. We also put in storage emergency stock at the Ministry's Central Stores. We are now doing an inventory of these items and additional items will be procured as required.

The public can be assured that the current response arrangements are in place to enable an appropriate response in the event Ebola Virus Disease is introduced to the island.

Dengue

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Health and Wellness, on July 1, activated its Enhanced Vector Control Programme. This is especially important given that



Jamaica is still experiencing a dengue outbreak. Also, we anticipate an increase in the breeding of mosquitoes during these summer months, including those that carry the dengue virus.

At the peak of the outbreak in January this year, we had 1,943 cases. There has since been a significant fall in cases, with June 2019 having 124 cases to date.

As at July 22 (2019), the Ministry of Health and Wellness had in its electronic database from 2018, a total of 4,930 suspected, presumed or confirmed dengue cases: 1,057 with dates of onset in 2018 and 3,873 with dates of onset in 2019.

Mr. Speaker, the first few weeks of this month have seen the start of activities under the Enhanced Vector Control programme, including a comprehensive public education and media campaign; home inspections and the destruction of breeding sites by 1,000 temporary vector control workers; in addition to islandwide fogging by parish health departments.

We urge Jamaicans to recognise that they have a role to play in the control of mosquito-borne diseases, including:

- Keeping their surroundings free of debris.
- Destroying or treating potential mosquito-breeding sites.
- Wearing protective clothing.
- And using a DEET-containing mosquito repellent while, as much as possible, staying indoors with their windows and doors closed.



Further, dengue can be mistaken for other viral illnesses. We, therefore, recommend, Mr. Speaker, that members of the public avoid the use of aspirin, diclofenac, ibuprofen or any of the medications/pain relievers known as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. These drugs, when used to treat the fever in dengue, have been known to increase the severity of the disease. We, therefore, ask that the public use paracetamol or acetaminophen for fever and pain control.

Heat

Mr. Speaker, we are recording extremely high temperatures in Jamaica. As such, the public is reminded to continue to take precautions to reduce their exposure to heat and vulnerability to heat-related illnesses. Persons at highest risk are the elderly; infants and children younger than six years of age; persons who are overweight; and those with pre-existing conditions, including high blood pressure.

In order to prevent illness associated with the heat, members of the public are encouraged to:

- Hydrate with cool water.
- Limit or avoid sugar-sweetened drinks and beverages that contain alcohol.
- Exercise indoors where possible.
- Avoid the sun during the middle of the day.
- And wear light-coloured, loose-fitting clothes.



Cornwall Regional Hospital

The rehabilitation work at the Cornwall Regional Hospital (CRH) – in which I know many stakeholders have a longstanding interest – is progressing. However, it is a complex project and will take longer than was originally projected to reach completion.

It will be worth the wait, Mr. Speaker, and I trust that the required timeline adjustments can be appreciated by the members of this honourable house, since the goal is to have a state-of-the-art facility that delivers the optimal level of care to the more than 400,000 residents of the western health region. ***That said, every effort is being made to ensure the work is expedited.***

- It is known, Mr. Speaker, that the main building of the hospital was affected by mould. We have put in place the necessary environmental health and safety protocols that have guided the removal of the spores while preventing cross contamination and helping to guard against future growth.
- We have in place an Environmental Health and Safety team to monitor the work, including daily visits to the site and periodic air quality testing. High efficiency particulate air filters have also been installed to help preserve the air quality while work is ongoing.
- Mr. Speaker, in public health, we prioritise people's health and wellness above all other considerations. At the height of the concerns over the facility, we introduced a Staff Clinic to see team members with complaints



related to what was being experienced at the hospital's main building. In 2018, the clinic had 296 visits for air quality complaints. Between January and March this year, the clinic had 21 visits for air quality complaints.

- We have since engaged Newport Medical Group to provide specialist Occupational Health and Safety services to staff (predominantly nurses) with persistent complaints, despite deployment off the building. The CRH team is coordinating this and has completed medical histories for some individuals in order to refer them to the specialist. We anticipate that by the end of next month (August 2019), persons will be referred.
- We are also commissioning a study to answer the health concerns of CRH staff. A small Working Group – led by Dr. Kenneth James, public health lecturer, consultant and researcher from the Department of Community Health and Psychiatry at the University of the West Indies – was named to develop the approach to the study. The Working Group has since developed the approach.

In addition,

- Phase one, which includes roof repairs, the gutting of the 10th floor and the establishment of the hoist for the removal of debris, is ongoing and slated to be completed next month (August 2019).
- Phase 2, including the gutting of the entire facility in line with the appropriate environmental standards for discard of contaminated waste from the building, will begin in September and should conclude in December (2019).



- Phase 3, which will see the complete rehabilitation of the facility, will commence in 2020 and conclude in 2021.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, there is an independent, multi-skilled Oversight Committee for the project, established specifically to ensure accountability and provide transparency to the Jamaican public.

That committee is chaired by Professor Archibald McDonald – a trained surgeon, respected academic and former principal of The University of the West Indies – who is available to answer questions on the project.

Even as we have progressed the rehabilitation work on the main building, we have been able to continue to offer patients a range of clinical and support services that were successfully relocated.

- Between January and May this year, the hospital had 36,138 visits to the Outpatient Clinic and 5,286 Admissions. Last year (Jan – Dec 2018), there were 87,602 visits to the Outpatient Clinic and 12,187 Admissions. The year before, there were 73,489 visits to the Outpatient Clinic and 14,543 Admissions.
- Up to May this year, there were 16,798 visits to the A&E. Last year, there were 31,570 visits to the A&E. The year before, there were 37,106.
- In 2018, there were 3,316 surgeries (emergency and elective) performed. The year before, there were 3,859.



- 2018 also saw 22,114 X-rays done, 3,147 ultrasounds and 652 CT scans. The year before, 24,318 X-rays were done; 3,023 ultrasounds and 2,823 CT scans.

Other achievements under the project include:

- The construction of an A&E Department to include an Operating Theatre.
- The establishment of Two Operating Theatre suites with recovery room.
- The expansion of the Renal Unit, with Replacement Dialysis machines now being procured to ensure reliability and increased access.
- Full Laundry services re-established, supported by retrofitted boilers (relocated and upgraded to use natural gas as opposed to bunker seal oil).

The Cornwall Regional Centre for Diagnostic Services was also established on the hospital compound, reducing the outsourcing of emergency cases and currently offers X-rays, CT and Ultrasonography services.

The Inpatient Bed complement has also increased to 292 (including three ICU beds and 51 surgical beds at Falmouth) while independent water storage off the main building and a partnership with NWC for stable water supply has been established.

Measles

The Ministry of Health and Wellness is advising travellers to countries known to have circulating measles virus to ensure that they are adequately protected. At



this time of year when Jamaicans are preparing for travel overseas, the Ministry is reminding citizens to ensure that they and in particular, their children, are fully vaccinated against measles with the Measles-Mumps-Rubella (MMR) vaccine.

As at May 17, 2019 the countries in the Region that had reported confirmed measles cases were: Argentina, the Bahamas, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru, USA, Uruguay, and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease affecting mainly children. Infection spreads rapidly even before symptoms are evident and therefore has the potential to cause outbreaks. Vaccination is the only way to prevent the spread of measles. Two doses of the MMR vaccine are needed to provide full protection against the disease.”

Jamaica has prioritized MMR vaccination for children 10 years old and younger and the Ministry of Health and Wellness provides vaccines free of cost to children.



Adults over 40 years of age are likely to be immune to measles given that the virus would have been circulating in Jamaica during their childhood, and several measles vaccination campaigns have been conducted since then to ensure the protection of the population at that time.

Persons who are unsure of their vaccination status should contact their healthcare provider or visit a health centre. Persons, who develop a fever and rash, especially after visiting a country known to have measles cases, must contact their healthcare provider or visit a health centre immediately.

Yellow Fever Vaccine

Additionally, the Ministry wishes to remind persons travelling to countries known to have circulating yellow fever virus that vaccination against yellow fever is a requirement for travel. The Yellow Fever vaccine is provided at a cost at the Montego Bay Type V Health Centre in St. James and the Slipe Pen Road Comprehensive Health Centre in Kingston.

Since the recent breakout of measles in the Region of the Americas, there has been no case of measles in Jamaica.



In concluding, Mr. Speaker, I urge the support of the members of this honourable house and the people of Jamaica, as we take the necessary actions – at the local and national levels – to safeguard the public’s health and wellness.

Thank you.

Dr. the Hon. Christopher Tufton, MP
Minister of Health & Wellness