

April 10<sup>th</sup> 2020

**Excerpts from the address to the nation on March 25<sup>th</sup> 2020, on the approach to the Covid 19 Pandemic**

**“Rising Stronger from the ashes of Covid 19”**

**Introduction**

Our government’s approach has been to follow the science; act prudently on the medical advice of the professionals in the Ministry of Health and Wellness; be guided by the sage advice of the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO), and the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA); distil the practical observations from the experiences of other countries world-wide and shape responses appropriate to our circumstances; and ramp-up in either an incremental or accelerated manner our policies and practical measures to fit the fluidity or altering nature of the global, regional, and national condition in all their inter-connectedness.

The central fact is that Covid-19 is a serious disease to be addressed seriously and scientifically, not complacently but also not hysterically. Proportionate responses are demanded always with urgency; and the changing level of risks is required to be managed sensibly and cautiously, avoiding both over-reaction and under-reaction. It is a balance not always easily achieved.

The received scientific learning and wisdom of the nature of Covid-19 is that it is not a death sentence like HIV/AIDS in an earlier period or more recently, Ebola. Some 80 percent of those who are infected by Covid-19 will have a mild infection and will recover well and in good time. Only a very small percentage of those who are actually infected will suffer significantly.

(i) **Health Dimension**

So, in keeping with the fluidity, unevenness, and evolving circumstances of the inter-connectedness and many-sided impacts of Covid-19, the up-to-date containment and management framework for Covid-19 in St. Vincent and the Grenadines involves the following:

1. All persons who arrive from China, Italy, Iran, South Korea, USA, United Kingdom and member-countries of the European Union, including the Overseas Departments of France, and Canada will be quarantined, automatically, at their own expense, for 14 days.
2. Any person, arriving from the same named-countries or any other country, with symptoms of COVID-19 will be isolated privately or in a public facility, and tested. Relevant medical protocols will further apply depending on the outcome of the test but in any event the isolation will be for at least 14 days.
3. All educational institutions (pre-schools, early childhood centres, primary, secondary, post-secondary and tertiary) have been closed one week prior to the Easter vacation, and continuing, until the start of the third school term.
4. An advisory was issued for the cancellation of the Easterval in Union Island and the Easter Regatta in Bequia. The organisers of Gospel Fest have postponed the holding of this Festival from April to an unspecified date in the future.
5. An advisory by the Ministry of Health and Wellness has been issued for places of entertainment, social gathering, worship, or locales for funerals, weddings, birthdays, or social parties, to restrict the number of persons attending to a reasonable size, and to follow protocols of personal or social distancing as are reasonably practicable in all the circumstances. I urge all of us to follow the Ministry's protocols; it is in all our interest.
6. An altered regime for the granting of sick leave for employees with flu-like symptoms or respiratory problems or Covid-19 infections has been established for central government employees. This regime is advisory for state-owned enterprises and the private sector. Employers are being asked, as far as is reasonably practicable, to organise their workplaces, shift systems or home-work regimes to better face the threat of Covid-19.
7. The array of oft-repeated personal hygiene protocols are advised to be scrupulously followed by individuals, families, at homes and workplaces.
8. An Isolation Unit is currently being set up and is scheduled for opening by mid-April 2020.

9. A flu clinic on St. Vincent and temporary isolation facilities (retrofitted containers) in the Grenadine islands of Bequia, Canouan, Union Island, Mayreau, and at Kingstown have been put in place. Quarantine/isolation rooms have been identified for these Grenadine islands plus Mustique, and on St. Vincent.
10. The equipment, materials, and supplies for testing Covid-19 have been ordered and are due to arrive in St. Vincent and the Grenadines shortly. Other materials and supplies to combat Covid-19 have also been ordered and are also due to arrive soonest. Until in-country testing becomes available, testing is being done at the CARPHA labs in Trinidad or in Barbados, courtesy of that country's government.
11. A hotline for Covid-19 has been set up.
12. Some forty (40) Vincentian nurses and intern doctors have been, or are being, hired to strengthen the containment and surveillance at the hospitals and clinics, the ports of entry, hotels, and the hotline in respect of Covid-19.
13. Twelve nurses and four doctors from Cuba, a gift from the government and people of Cuba, are due to arrive in St. Vincent and the Grenadines tomorrow for an initial 3-month period, but which time period may be extended, to assist us in containing and managing Covid-19.
14. The government has purchased the anti-viral drug, Interferon, from Cuba in sufficient doses to satisfy the treatment cycles for 50 patients. The OECS Pharmaceutical Procurement Service has also ordered additional supplies of this drug for St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The dosages of Interferon will arrive in a few days' time. The OECS has ordered more for us, at our request.
15. Overall, the Ministry of Health and Wellness, has taken several other practical measures, in its normal and enhanced operations, to fortify our battle against Covid-19, especially as regards elderly persons, pregnant women, and other at-risk groups.

Let us support the efforts of the Ministry of Health and the government, and play our part in the fight against Covid 19.