



Ministry of  
Health & Wellness

**Immediate Release**  
**February 20, 2022**

**Statement from The Ministry of Health and Wellness on the Adjustment in the COVID-19 Health Protocols Effective February 20, 2022**

The Ministry of Health and Wellness remains encouraged by signs of progress resulting from both the responsiveness of the Bahamian people in adhering to recommended public health and safety protocols and the Government's comprehensive strategy to combat the fourth wave of COVID-19. This comprehensive strategy ensures that every tool available for successful outcomes is accessible to assist in the daily decline in COVID-19 cases and a significant reduction in hospitalization of persons infected with the virus.

During the fourth wave, the Ministry of Health and Wellness pursued a multi-pronged strategy that included the following initiatives:

1. Introduced free COVID-19 testing for asymptomatic residents in New Providence and Grand Bahama,
2. Expanded the locations and methodologies to improve the uptake of COVID-19 vaccines,
3. Implemented a national distribution program of the medical-grade masks to the community in partnership with the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and NGOs
4. Entered into purchase agreements for new pharmaceutical treatments for persons infected with COVID-19, and
5. Revised isolation and quarantine rules to reflect the science and progress of knowledge on the behaviour of the COVID-19 virus.

The increased access to testing enabled the early identification and subsequent isolation of individuals who contracted the COVID-19 virus, thus reducing the possibility of further community spread of COVID-19. The exploration of increased access to vaccine delivery systems has resulted in the strategy to decentralize COVID-19 availability to private medical practitioner's offices and expand access to the vaccine in community clinics in New Providence and Grand Bahama. The COVID-19 vaccine has been available in community clinics in the Family Islands since December 2021. The distribution of medical grade masks and the adherence of persons wearing these masks in high-risk situations have been important in reducing individuals' exposure to the highly contagious omicron variant. Within the first weeks of the fourth wave, we concluded a contract for the procurement of new pharmaceutical drugs to treat patients with complications from COVID 19. Additionally, the revision of isolation and quarantine protocols, based on scientific evidence and experience,

has resulted in reduced challenges with the successful implementation of business continuity plans in the face of COVID-19 across all sectors.

In collaboration with the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Health and Wellness launched a Together Against COVID-19 campaign focus on a public education initiative to give Bahamians the information they need on vaccines, new variants, and COVID-19 related health questions.

The measured success experienced in the management of the pandemic is the product of every sector of society. It demonstrates what we can achieve together if we are minded to work together to improve the Bahamian society. The Ministry has played its role in developing, along with partners, the comprehensive strategy as guided the Government's mandate and commitments laid out in the Blue Print for Change. On the wings of this success, the Advisory Committee has made some recommendations to revise the Health Services Rules in the pathway to restoring normalcy. It is noted that as the situation improves, the public can expect more revisions to remove or relax restrictions. However, the public is reminded that the relaxation of certain restrictions could be tightened if the picture of the pandemic worsens to reduce the further spread of COVID-19 and prevent risking injury to the economy. The Ministry encourages Bahamians who have not yet been vaccinated or received their booster shots to make an appointment today to protect themselves against the possibility of becoming infected or hospitalized with any new COVID-19 variants and spikes.

**The Ministry of Health and Wellness announced the following adjustments in our Health and Safety protocols effective February 20th, 2022:**

#### **Religious Instruction and Activities**

A church or place of religious instruction or worship may conduct services, including a wedding or a funeral, in accordance with the protocols issued or approved by the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

A church or place of religious instruction or worship on an island listed in the Second Schedule (Grand Bahama and New Providence) may conduct services provided that:

- Attendance is limited to fifty per cent of the occupancy of the facility where the service is being conducted.
- The applicable protocols issued or approved by the Ministry of Health and Wellness in respect of that church or place of religious instruction or worship is adhered to.

## **Funerals**

Funeral services may now be conducted in the church or place of religious activity with the casket or urn present, provided that all COVID-19 protocols and any protocols issued or approved by the Ministry of Health and Wellness are observed.

A funeral service may be held at a graveside provided that all attendees and officiants adhere to the COVID-19 protocols and any protocols issued or approved by the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

## **Group Exercise**

Indoor group exercise is permitted subject to rule 9(4) (a) of the Health Services (COVID-19) (General) Rules, 2021, ***provided that the group is limited to not more than thirty people.***

## **Restaurants**

Restaurants must ensure that all patrons are fully vaccinated or have a valid negative rapid antigen test result. ***The maximum seating shall be seventy-five per cent of the seating capacity.***

***Restaurants are required to ensure that all patrons observe mask-wearing protocols as outlined by the Ministry of Health and Wellness.***

## **Social Gatherings**

***Social gatherings may be held or attended indoors, provided that they are held at a private residence, with not more than forty people.***

Social gatherings may be held or attended at a facility, provided that all attendees are either fully vaccinated or present a valid negative COVID-19 test result and all COVID-19 protocols are adhered to.

***Social gatherings may be held outdoors with not more than one hundred people, provided that all attendees are either fully vaccinated or present a negative COVID-19 test, and all COVID-19 protocols are adhered to.***

***The public is reminded that large gathering events remain prohibited at this time.***

Anyone who hosts or attends a social gathering contrary to the above rules commits an offence and is liable upon summary conviction in the case of a host, to a fine not exceeding two thousand dollars and to a fine not exceeding three hundred dollars for each person in attendance, and in the case of an attendee, to a fine not exceeding three hundred dollars.

**Travel Requirements**

Anyone entering The Bahamas or travelling inter-island from Grand Bahama and New Providence is required to undergo a rapid antigen test on the fifth day after arrival and submit the result to the Ministry of Health and Wellness via its travel health website <https://travel.gov.bs>

Anyone who is out to sea on the second day of his stay is required to undergo a rapid antigen test at the first port of call thereafter and submit the result to the Ministry of Health and Wellness via its travel health website <https://travel.gov.bs>

Where the rapid antigen test indicates a positive result, that person shall be required to undergo an RTPCR test and submit to mandatory isolation in accordance with the rules. Anyone who fails to undergo a COVID-19 test in accordance with rules is liable to a fine not exceeding one thousand dollars or to a term not exceeding one month's imprisonment.

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