



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Ministry of Health



Managing through COVID-19

A Health Response
to the 2020 Pandemic

Building a Resilient Health Sector in T&T

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the rapidly spreading coronavirus outbreak as a global pandemic.

Flattening the curve became the main objective as countries worldwide moved into action to slow the spread of the virus, protect the vulnerable and save lives. More than a month later, a significant slowdown in the number of new infections—from a peak of more than 100 cases per day to 30—has brought relief, and an ease in restrictions, to citizens. Beaches, gyms, houses of worship and cinemas recently reopened, and will remain available if residents continue to be responsible and follow health regulations. Wearing masks, social distancing, sanitizing hands and staying home when ill are literally saving lives.

While the number of cases globally are trending upwards, Trinidad and Tobago, has so far avoided what many of the world's most developed countries have encountered in some form— an overburdened health sector.

One big advantage for Trinidad and Tobago, according to Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr. Roshan Parasram, is the country's infrastructural development.



This Parallel Healthcare network has been crucial in slowing the spread of COVID-19 within the population.

"There were a number of facilities due to be completed and close to completion. We were able to use these facilities to create a parallel health care system.

This parallel system included Couva Hospital, which is the main treatment centre. Hospitals at Arima and Point Fortin have also been completed, while Caura Hospital and a number of other facilities—UWI Hall, Debe Campus, and the

National Racquet Centre in Tacarigua, provide enough room to meet quarantine and step down needs.

This Parallel Healthcare network has been crucial in slowing the spread of COVID-19 within the population. That approach—uniquely applied to this country's advantage—is keeping the disease at bay from the primary healthcare system, protecting medical staff and their vulnerable patients.

"...What they tried to do in a lot of countries," Dr. Parasram explained, "is to treat patients in the existing framework, [which led to] infections of other persons while they were in hospital, and [infections of] staff."

The availability of doctors and nurses waiting to join the public health sector was also a boon to this country's anti COVID-19 efforts.

Additionally, the health sector's prudent management of personal protective equipment (PPE), and the ramping up of testing capacity to more than 1,500 tests daily are key factors in mitigating the impact of the pandemic

locally. The "yeoman service" by the healthcare workers, too, has also been instrumental in Trinidad and Tobago's COVID-19 response.

"I have never in all these ten months got word from anyone that a health care worker has said that they're not going to work with a COVID-19 patient," Dr. Parasram emphasised. "So the resilience of the system really comes from the workforce, and they've really stood up to the test."

Despite the health system's robust response to this global threat, the truth is, the nature of the virus means COVID-19 will be with us for some time, even after a vaccine becomes available.

Dr. Parasram is urging the population to maintain its discipline. This will minimise the strain on the parallel healthcare system that's battling the spread of the coronavirus. A system that continues to be proactive in saving lives in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Ministry of Health has been proactive in boosting the capacity of the health system. The initiatives will continue in 2021:

BUILDING CAPACITY

Infrastructure (Completed)

Arima Hospital (June 9, 2020) - 150 beds
Point Fortin Hospital (July 4, 2020) - 100 beds
Diego Martin Health Centre (Oct. 6, 2020)
LINAC Machine (for cancer treatment)

Infrastructure (In progress)

Sangre Grande Hospital - 100 beds

Port of Spain General Hospital (POSGH) Central Block (due Jan. 2022) - 540 beds
Couva Hospital - expanding Dialysis treatment capacity
Couva Hospital - Vitreo Retinal (eye) services capacity

Equipment (Completed)

POSGH - New neurosurgery equipment
POSGH (Maternity Dep't) - New Operating Theatre equipment
Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex (EWMSC) - Anaesthesia machines (8)
EWMSC - Haemodialysis Machines (8)

Coping with Pandemic Fatigue

— by Dr. Hazel Othello

We cannot deny that persons are becoming tired of the COVID-19 pandemic. Daily increases in local and global infections and deaths, upscaling of restrictions after long awaited downscaling, no hugs, no gatherings and on the horizon physically distant holiday celebrations to be followed by normal workdays on Carnival Monday and Tuesday. For some persons, it feels like just too much. In these cases, a range of negative emotions can emerge and if unchecked, can breed opposition and defiance of public health guidelines with consequent increased risk for infection and transmission.

Pandemic fatigue is a very real experience of exhaustion resulting from the cumulated impact of the pandemic on persons' lives over the past months. More than mere recklessness or indiscipline, it is the effect of prolonged feelings of:

- Fear
- Loneliness
- Anxiety
- Hopelessness
- Increased sadness
- Irritability
- Worry
- Helplessness
- Frustration

Persons also begin to yearn for the social activities and interpersonal connections they may have previously taken for granted until that need takes precedence over their personal safety and that of their loved ones.

Polls conducted in several countries have found decreasing levels of compliance with public health measures over time and some have clearly demonstrated that respondents reported greater difficulty with rules which impacted social interactions than those involving personal hygiene measures.

Coping Mechanisms

So how do we cope with this challenge? Sometimes taking a break from the news for a few days until you no longer feel overwhelmed can help. Try to eat healthy meals and get enough sleep.

Find ways of safely getting your physical exercise

Do other things that you enjoy without breaching restrictions

Maintain social connections safely via telephone and / or social

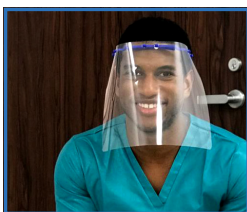


media, but limit your exposure to social media interactions if they make you feel uncomfortable.

Find creative, new, safe ways to celebrate special occasions. Remember that it's ok to feel a bit anxious or unhappy at times; we are all trying to adjust to new realities. If you feel overwhelmed, take some deep breaths and focus your mind on happier times. If needed, reach out to a supportive member of your family, a respected leader in your community or your general practitioner.

The Future is liveable

The pandemic will be with us for the foreseeable future, therefore building resilience is of utmost importance. Remember that every coping skill you learn during this pandemic, has the potential to help you to overcome future challenges. Let us therefore work together to survive COVID-19 and all its consequences.



"We need our citizens to remain vigilant. We on the frontline are committed to fighting this virus day and night and we hope our fellow citizens commit to the same. Healthcare workers or not, we can all wash our hands; we can all wear our masks; we can all fight this virus together."

— Dr. Andre Earle

Sangre Grande Hospital - Equipment for ICU, Dialysis, Ophthalmology, Lab Dep'ts
South West Regional Health Authority (SWRHA) -
New Ambulances (10)

DEVELOPING RESILIENCE

Digitalisation of the Health Sector

Health Information Management System
Electronic Health Records

MAINTAINING RESPONSIVENESS

Maternal/Child Health

Diabetes in Pregnancy project
Reduction in mother-to-child AIDS transmission

Development of E-maternal app to monitor pregnancy health

OTHER INITIATIVES

Prevention/Control of Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs)

TTmoves and Health and Wellness initiatives

Decentralisation of Mental Health Care

Enhanced treatment of communicable diseases (H1N1, HIV/AIDS, COVID-19)

Step up COVID-19 testing capacity

Agreement to join COVAX to ensure access to COVID-19 vaccines once available

Government's Milestone COVID-19 Initiatives

- **JANUARY 29TH** Government began thermal screening of passengers at the nation's airports and heightened vigilance at sea ports
- **JANUARY 30TH** Cabinet approved travel restrictions on anyone who had been in China for a 14 days' period prior to their arrival in Trinidad and Tobago
- **JANUARY 31ST** COVID-19 is proclaimed as a dangerous infectious disease under the the Public Health Ordinance, Chap. 12 No. 4
- **FEBRUARY 6TH** Ministry of Health adopted the World Health Organization's (WHO) Internal Grading System for effective management and operations of Public Health Emergencies
- **FEBRUARY 7TH** 1st COVID-19 test conducted by Caribbean Public Health Agency
- **MARCH 5TH** Appointment of the Multi-Sectoral Committee comprising representatives from various Ministries/ public agencies to treat with COVID-19 and any emerging infectious diseases in the future
- **MARCH 18TH** Minister of National Security announced Government stricter measures to slow the spread of COVID-19: gatherings of more than 10 persons will not be allowed
- **MARCH 20TH** Landmark decision- both houses of the Parliament debated and passed The Miscellaneous Provisions (2019 Novel Coronavirus[2019-nCoV]) Bill, 2020
- **MARCH 21ST** Ministry of Health launched hotline 800-WELL for COVID-19
- **MARCH 23RD** Government announced \$2B pandemic relief package
- **MARCH 26TH** Prime Minister announced "stay-at-home" measures effective midnight March 30 until April 15, 2020
- **APRIL 2ND** Implementation of the Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Guidelines for Homes for the Aged and Long Term Care Facilities
- **APRIL 16TH** Prime Minister appointed a 22-member Road to Recovery COVID-19 team
- **APRIL 23RD** Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, approved Corporations disinfecting and sanitizing key areas across including public transportation hubs, local roads leading to supermarkets, pharmacies and local markets

May 1st - Oxford University Research lists Trinidad and Tobago as #1 country in implementing COVID-19 lockdown rollback checklist.

- **APRIL 27TH** Testing at Homes for the Aged and supply of masks as preventative measure for this high risk group
- **MAY 1ST** Cuban ICU nurses arrive in TT to help fight COVID-19
- **MAY 19TH** Ministry launched the 'New Normal' Campaign for COVID-19
- **MAY 27TH** Ministry of Health updated its public health protocols based on local and international COVID-19 research
- **JULY 2ND** Ministry of Health designated eight (8) locations across the country to conduct community testing for COVID-19
- **AUGUST 26TH** Ministry of Health instituted the next phase of their "escalated response" - persons that test positive for the virus with asymptomatic or mild symptoms will now home quarantine
- **AUGUST 31ST** Government amended the Public Health Ordinance to institute a fine for anyone seen not wearing a face mask in public
- **AUGUST 31ST** 160,000 Rapid Test, Antigen Kits ordered for the screening COVID-19 process
- **SEPTEMBER 5TH** Minister of National Security Stuart Young announced the Government's 'liberalised exemption policy' to allow nationals abroad to return home
- **OCTOBER 17TH** Minister of Health indicated countries will have equal status to COVID-19 vaccines for 20% of their population once the vaccine is formulated and effective
- **OCTOBER 24TH** T&T has a case load of 30 to 40 COVID-19 cases on average per day; Minister Deyalsingh calls it "a pretty good position"
- **OCTOBER 26TH** Dr. Avery Hinds, Technical Director of Epidemiology, MOH, advises that the cases have plateaued and reminds citizens to continue to practice personal responsibility to ensure that cases remain on a downward trajectory

**PROTECT YOURSELF
& YOUR LOVED ONES**

