Interim Guidance about COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease) for Hotels and Guesthouses in the Caribbean
March 12, 2020

This document provides information on the COVID-19 for hotels and guesthouses in the Caribbean. This information is based on currently available scientific evidence and expert opinion and is subject to change as new information becomes available. It should be read in conjunction with relevant national legislation, regulations and policies. This document has been adapted for the Caribbean situation, and therefore may differ from guidance developed by other agencies.

Key Points

• There is an outbreak of pneumonia caused by a new coronavirus, which is a family of viruses that includes the common cold, named COVID-19. The outbreak started in Wuhan, China and has spread to over 100 countries.

• Person-to-person spread is occurring in multiple countries, increasing the risk of international spread by travellers.

• The immediate health risk from COVID-19 to the general public in the Caribbean is very high as sustained community transmission has been reported in countries with direct flights to Member States.

• Travel warnings have been issued by the US Center for Diseases Control (CDC)

• Many Caribbean countries have issued travel restrictions for countries with sustained community transmission

• Travellers to Caribbean countries may be asked questions about their health and travel history upon arrival and may be quarantined by port authorities when they arrive.

• This notice will be updated as more information becomes available on the outbreak.

Background

On March 11, the Director-General (DG) of the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of a novel coronavirus, COVID-19 Public Health Emergency of International Concern, as a pandemic, due to its rapid spreads across the world. The virus has rapidly spread from China to over 100 countries. The International Health Regulations ‘Emergency Committee is not recommending trade or travel restrictions at this time. The US CDC has issued travel advisories in countries where there is demonstrated sustained transmission1.

To date, imported cases have been reported in several Caribbean countries. The rapidly evolving situation now requires a shift in mindset in all countries from preparedness to readiness and rapid response. CARPHA has upgraded the risk of disease transmission to the Caribbean Region to **Very High**. The revised risk level is based on international risk assessment guidelines, since multiple countries outside the epicentre of the outbreak have reported secondary cases from imported cases, including an increasing number of countries reporting sustained community transmission and sustained transmission of disease in countries with direct flights into the Caribbean Region.

**What is the coronavirus disease (COVID-19)?**

The virus belongs in the same family of coronaviruses as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), 2002/03 outbreak (Reuters, CDC) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV), 2012 outbreak. The COVID-19 virus is a new strain of coronavirus not previously identified in humans.

**What are common signs and symptoms of infection?**

A person infected may have the following symptoms:

- Fever
- Shortness of breath
- Cough
- Breathing difficulties
- Other flu like symptoms
- More severe cases: pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death

**How is it transmitted?**

The source of the outbreak is yet to be identified. Person-to-person transmission has been demonstrated in many countries. Precautions must therefore be taken to prevent human-to-human transmission of the disease. Currently, COVID-19 has been shown to spread by:

- Large respiratory droplets often produced by coughing or sneezing which land on a person or surface and transferred to the mouth or nose
- Direct or indirect contact with infected secretions
- Body fluids (e.g., blood, sweat, saliva, sputum, nasal mucus, vomit, urine, or diarrhoea)
- There have been some instances when airborne transmission of other coronaviruses was thought to have taken place through exposure to aerosols of respiratory secretions and sometimes faecal material
- The COVID-19 may be spread by individuals that exhibit no symptoms
- There is no evidence that COVID-19 is spread by water, mosquitoes or food.
What can Hotels and Guesthouses do to be prepared for COVID-19?
The risk of a case being imported to the Caribbean is very high. These are measures that hotels/guesthouses can do to be prepared:

- Stay informed about the COVID-19 situation in your country. Updates will regularly be released by CARPHA and can be accessed at: www.CARPHA.org. Additionally, information can be found through the WHO or US CDC websites.
- Reduce exposure to and transmission of COVID-19 and a range of illnesses by:
  - Frequently cleaning hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand sanitizer
  - When coughing and sneezing, cover mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue – throw tissue away immediately and wash hands
  - Avoiding close contact with anyone who has fever and cough
  - If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing seek medical care early and share previous travel history with your health care provider
  - Stay home when you are sick to avoid the chance of infecting other people
- Provide staff with educational materials on COVID-19 so that they are aware of the signs and symptoms, where COVID-19 is spreading, and how it is transmitted.
- Ensure that staff members know who to contact in public health in your country, as well as first responders and healthcare providers, if they have any questions or concerns.
- Ensure staff are informed about procedures for reporting guests or other staff with symptoms and exposure history compatible with COVID-19 to the relevant health authorities in your country.
  - Guests or staff suspected to have been exposed to COVID-19, who have symptoms AND exposure history consistent with the disease, should call an appropriate healthcare provider. Be sure to inform them that you suspect you were exposed to COVID-19 and ask if they can handle such patients or recommend a specific provider.
  - Seek guidance from your country’s Ministry of Health for which facilities in your area are prepared to handle possibly infected persons.
- Procedures should be in place in the hotel/guesthouse for separating ill guests/staff from the rest of the hotel/guesthouse population and for minimizing the exposure of guests/staff to potentially contaminated environments while Public Health authorities are called.
- Should a suspect case be identified in the hotel/guesthouse staff should feel safe to clean the environment as basic cleaning agents will sufficiently kill the virus. Staff should wear gloves, eye protection, a face mask, and protective gown only during the cleaning process or when in the same room with the sick person.
- It is important to ensure that environmental cleaning and disinfection procedures are followed consistently and correctly. Thoroughly cleaning high-touch surfaces with water
and detergent and applying commonly used disinfectants (such as bleach) are effective and sufficient procedures. Medical devices and equipment, laundry, food service utensils and medical waste should be managed in accordance with safe routine procedures.

- Used linen, cloths, eating utensils, laundry and any other item in contact with a patient’s body fluids should be collected separately and disinfected in such a way as to avoid any contact with persons or contamination of the environment. Surfaces or objects contaminated with blood, other body fluids, secretions or excretions should be cleaned and disinfected as soon as possible using standard detergents/disinfectants. Manage laundry, food service utensils, and medical waste in accordance with safe routine procedures², ³.
  - Bag or otherwise contain contaminated textiles and fabrics at the point of use
  - Handle contaminated textiles and fabrics with minimum agitation to avoid contamination of air, surfaces, and persons
  - Use leak-resistant containment for textiles and fabrics contaminated with blood or body substances
  - Identify bags or containers for contaminated textiles with labels, colour coding, or other alternative means of communication as appropriate
  - Don’t use laundry chutes. If hot-water laundry cycles are used, wash with detergent in water ≥160°F (≥71°C) for ≥25 minutes

- Wear a disposable facemask, gown, and gloves when you touch or have contact with an infected person’s blood, body fluids and/or secretions, such as sweat, saliva, sputum, nasal mucus, vomit, urine, or diarrhoea.
  - Throw out disposable facemasks, gowns, and gloves after using them. Do not reuse.
  - Wash your hands immediately after removing your facemask, gown, and gloves.

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³ CDC 2003. Guidelines for Environmental Infection Control in Health-Care Facilities https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5210a1.htm
Appendix

The following infographics from CARPHA [http://carpha.org/What-We-Do/Public-Health/Novel-Coronavirus](http://carpha.org/What-We-Do/Public-Health/Novel-Coronavirus)
