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Antigua to Rethink Protocols For Visitors and Nationals Entering Country Following Threat of Litigation by Some Visitors

Coronavirus / **Published On June 29, 2020 08:36 AM /**

Staff Consortium **June 29, 2020**

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Antigua's V. C. Bird International Airport

ST. JOHN'S, Antigua, CMC – The Antigua and Barbuda government is re-thinking its strategy in allowing persons entry into the island after some visitors threatened to take legal action over the requirement for a coronavirus (COVID-19) test on arrival.

Prime Minister Gaston Browne, speaking on his radio programme over the last weekend, said that some tourists were objecting to the tests. Antigua and Barbuda was among the early Caribbean countries that re-opened their international airports after closing down the facilities as part of the efforts to stem the spread of the virus.

“Some guests are saying you don’t have the right to put anything in my nose,” Browne said, adding that some tourists were arguing that both the tests and the hesitance of health officials to allow them to leave the country after they tested positive is a violation of their rights.

“A number of passengers have become somewhat litigious and we have had inquiries as to whether or not the government has the right to do these invasive swabs of passengers coming to the country,” Browne said

He said the government has been aware by one visitor of international health regulations “which she reckons precludes countries from doing these invasive swabs.”

Browne added, “We have a situation too, in which several of the guests, who actually had tested positive for COVID...changed their flights and returned to the United States the following day even though they were placed in isolation.”

The Prime Minister told radio listeners that two foreign nations had accused health authorities of violating their constitutional rights “their right to travel (and)...holding them against their will”.

Browne said that they threatened to sue and in another case, a woman said she could lose her job if she was asked to remain here for another week,.

Prime Minister Browne said later this week the government will announce a change of protocol to allow visitors to be tested before coming to Antigua

“So for example on Monday, we will have the students (returning from Cuba) who have been clamouring to come back home. There is a special charter to bring them back home, but we have already communicated to them that they will have to do a COVID tests and they will have to be negative in order to return home.

“Anyone of them who proves to be positive will not be eligible to come back on that flight,” Browne added.