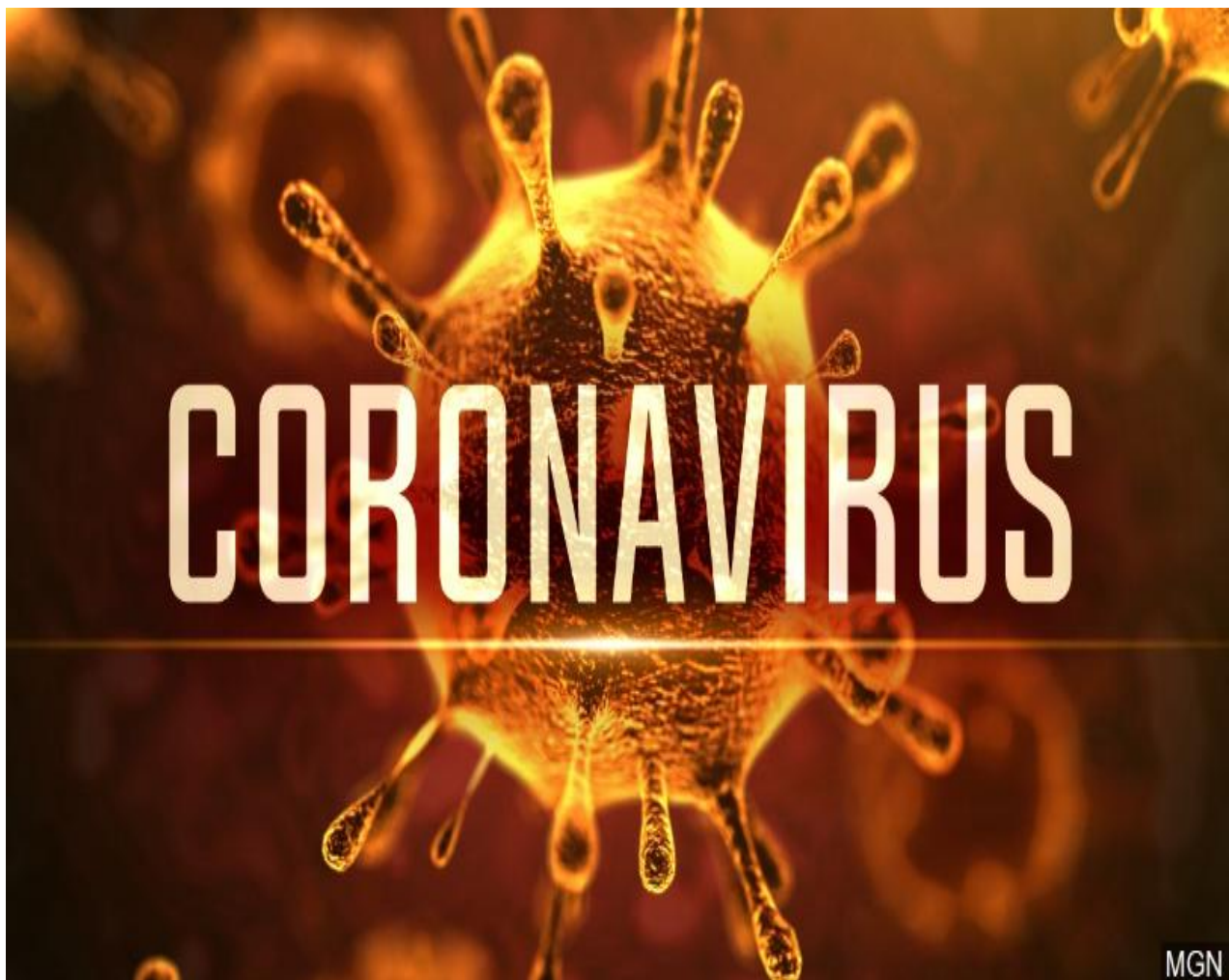


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Jamaica Preparing to Deal With Possible Coronavirus Outbreak

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KINGSTON, Jamaica, CMC – The Jamaica government says it has in place contingency provisions within the national budget to adequately deal with coronavirus (COVID-19) should the disease be detected here.

Finance and the Public Service Minister, Dr. Nigel Clarke, said in addition, the Bank of Jamaica (BOJ), which has net international reserves totalling US\$3.16 billion, has enough resources and the capacity to respond, “should the need arise.”

“The response would take the form of ensuring, for example, that we have adequate facilities for quarantining, which might mean preparing buildings (for that purpose), and

that we have appropriate medication (among other interventions)", he said, noting that consequent on Jamaica's economic stability, "our options are [greater]".

Responding to questions from members of the Standing Finance Committee of the Parliament, which is currently reviewing the 2020/21 Estimates of Expenditure, the Finance Minister said the Finance Ministry has been monitoring COVID-19 developments globally and is in touch with the principal Ministries that could potentially be impacted. These include the Ministries of Tourism, and Health and Wellness.

He said while Jamaica hasn't recorded any confirmed case to date, information, through the Tourism Ministry, from Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB) agents in North America "[where] a lot of our [visitors] come from" suggests that bookings for March and April "remain robust", based on the latest data.

"As at today... we are not seeing any cancellations in relation to forward bookings. But the information presented to me by the Ministry suggests that these could change overnight," Clarke said, adding that the Ministry, and by extension the government, is monitoring the situation "very closely" and is being "very cognisant of how this could evolve.

"We stand ready... and if the situation looks as if it's likely to escalate [in] Jamaica, there are measures that we can take," he added.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information has developed a three-tiered Education in Emergencies response system to alert schools and other public education institutions on the protocols to follow in public health emergencies.

It said the system is aimed at protecting children in conflict and natural disasters and includes strategies to improve preparedness and ensure children's right to continued education in times of crises.

According to the Ministry, at Level 1 or Green Alert, a bulletin is sent to all schools outlining tips/precautionary measures to prevent the spread of communicable diseases such as COVID-19 as guided by the Ministry of Health and Wellness (MoHW); all schools in proximity to the COVID-19 quarantine facility are duly informed in writing and updates are provided and actions taken as guided by the MoHW.

The Level 2 or Amber Alert, is an updated bulletin is sent to all schools outlining the epidemic nature of the COVID-19 to heighten awareness, to reiterate the seriousness of the threat and for all precautionary measures to be taken without compromise; parents are advised that students with flu-like symptoms should stay home until fully recovered and arrangements are made for all schools to be provided with J\$30,000 to J\$50,000 (One Jamaica dollar=US\$0.008 cents) to procure and make readily available to all student and staff hand sanitizers, hand washing soap and Lysol disinfectant. Updates are provided and actions taken as guided by the MoHW.

The Level 3 -Red Alert ensures teachers and caregivers are provided with support for children's continued learning regardless of where this takes place – in a classroom, at home or outdoors.

"Online learning kits are being prepared by the Ministry's Curriculum Unit for uploads on the MoEYI websites. PEP Practices booklets and PEP Camp Workbooks have been prepared for electronic distribution to support continued preparation. There will also be

multi-sectoral partnerships to ensure consistency in messages and informed responses.”

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