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Medical Association in St. Lucia Warns Phased Reopening Amid Coronavirus Pandemic Could be Premature

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Public Relations Officer of the St. Lucia Medical and Dental Association, Dr. Monique Monplaisir. By. CANA

CASTRIES, St. Lucia, Apr 20, CMC – The St. Lucia Medical and Dental Association (SLMDA) is cautioning government against any “phased reopening” of commercial activity, stressing that the country was “not out of the woods yet” with regards to COVID-19.

In fact, “far from it”, the SLMDA’s public relations officer Dr. Monique Monplaisir said in a statement Monday.

Prime Minister Allen Chastanet, in an April 12 address to the nation, said his government hoped to announce a phased reopening of commercial activities at month end, once the country was able to contain community transmission of COVID-19.

However, in its statement, the SLMDA compared that to someone deciding to stop taking prescribed antibiotics early because they were feeling better. The association described that as a “foolhardy and dangerous practice” and urged authorities to look at Japan, and Singapore to a certain extent, as examples of how premature reopening could be a bad move.

“They were successful at flattening the curve; however, they have seen a surge of positive cases now because they reopened too quickly,” Dr. Monplaisir noted.

The SLMDA said it strongly believed that, because of the limitations of St. Lucia’s in-country testing, even a phased reopening of commercial activity would potentially put everyone at risk.

The battle against COVID-19 in the Caribbean is far from over, stressed the SLMDA.

“We are not out of the woods yet. We are far from it. The Director-General of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) has warned us here in the Caribbean that the worst is yet to come. We have not seen the peak,” Dr. Monplaisir said.

As such, the SLDMA is urging residents to continue to adhere to the recommendations of public health officials.

“Please continue to stay home. Leave only if you must for medical reasons and to get essential supplies. Continue to adhere to physical distancing and other hygiene practices,” Dr. Monplaisir said.

The PRO went on to implore bus drivers to adhere to the stipulated number of passengers on public buses and call on the wider community to support those who are most vulnerable.

“Make a call, send a message, check in with people. Children will be restarting classes using a different format. It is new, it is challenging but it can be done. St Lucia, we can indeed win this war, but it will take the collective effort of each and every one of us. Please, stay home and keep doing safe practices,” she said.

In providing an update of the COVID-19 situation on Monday, Chief Medical officer Dr. Belmar George said that as of April 20, there were 15 confirmed cases. Of those, 13 persons have recovered and were discharged from hospital care, including two who were repatriated to the United Kingdom earlier this month.

There are two positive cases in isolation at the island’s respiratory hospital.

The last confirmed case was reported on Friday, April 10. Since then, 58 tests have been done and all have been negative.

“Though we at Ministry of Health are heartened by these data trends, we note that this should not provide us with a false sense of security and allow us to believe that we are no longer at risk for a COVID-19 outbreak,” Dr. George said.

“It is our awareness of this that drives our public health team to continue to work intensively in implementing all the core components of our health sector response, including testing, isolating,

treatment and care, contact tracing and public education.”

She appealed to residents to keep strict adherence to the infection prevention and control guidelines which continue to be issued by the Ministry of Health, stressing that while they are simple, they are inexpensive and effective methods of reducing the risk of spreading COVID-19.

A partial shutdown and 10-hour curfew which runs from 7 p.m. to 5 a.m. daily remain in effect.

Dr. George warned that the country was still at a critical juncture in the national COVID-19 response.

“As such, be mindful that everyone, with the exception of essential service workers, are required to remain at home unless leaving for food or medical purposes, that there should be no mass crowd events and social gatherings.

“These measures collectively help in achieving the physical distance required to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 within our population,” she said.