

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Jamaica Surpasses 250 Confirmed Coronavirus Cases

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JAMAICA — The number of COVID-19 cases has surpassed the 250 mark, with 19 more positive cases confirmed Wednesday.

Jamaica now has 252 confirmed cases.

Of the 19 new cases, seven were associated with the Alorica call centre in Portmore, St Catherine. There are now 131 COVID-19 cases related to that business process outsourcing (BPO) entity.

The spike in cases at Alorica, which resulted in Jamaica's confirmed COVID-19 cases surging, had prompted a one-week lockdown of St Catherine last Wednesday. The lockdown has been extended another seven days, ending April 29.

A statement from the Ministry of Health and Wellness said the St. Catherine Health Department is monitoring the situation. A total 647 of the 787 Alorica employees have been tested and authorities are following more than 500 close contacts of confirmed cases linked to the workplace cluster.

Prime Minister Andrew Holness announced the closure of all BPO facilities in the country for 14 days, starting Wednesday, because of the Alorica outbreak.

He said the move to close the call centres was a very difficult decision, but stressed there was no easy solution.

“We fully understand the role the BPOs play in providing employment for many Jamaicans, but the health and welfare of the people of Jamaica take precedence over everything else at this time during the COVID-19 crisis,” he said, adding that the critical processes of the BPOs will be allowed to continue under strict management.

“We are going to appoint one of our agencies, along with the Ministry of Health, to closely examine those minimum operations, because we don’t want that to be used as a guise for full operation.”

Of Jamaica’s 252 cases, 34 are imported, 53 are contacts of confirmed cases, eight are local transmission cases not epidemiologically-linked, and 148 are under investigation. The infected range from ages 2 to 87.

The health departments across the island are currently tracing approximately 1,409 close contacts of the confirmed cases.