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# The Caribbean has Recorded More Than 300,000 Confirmed Covid Cases and 6,700 Deaths Since March 2020

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**Visiting quarantined mother, communicating through a glass window. By. GETTY IMAGES**

BRIDGETOWN, Barbados, CMC – Caribbean Community (CARICOM) leaders have expressed “deep concern” at the significant increase in the number of deaths and positive cases linked to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in recent months in the region.

The CARICOM leaders met in a “Special Emergency Meeting” virtually on Monday to consider a regional response to the recent surge in infections, hospitalizations and deaths due to the pandemic.

No official statement has yet been released by the Guyana-based CARICOM Secretariat regarding the outcome of the deliberations, but well-placed sources told CMC Tuesday that the regional leaders “expressed deep concern at the increase with more than 100,000 new cases and 1400 deaths between July 2021 and 12 September 2021”.

According to the sources, the meeting received an update on the pandemic from the Executive Director of the Trinidad-based Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), Dr. Joy St. John, which noted that since the outbreak in March 2020, the Caribbean has recorded more than 300,000 confirmed cases with more than 6,700 deaths.

The sources quoted Dr. St John as stressing that the percentage of deaths was “exceedingly” high among unvaccinated people with less than 1 percent of deaths recorded by persons who were vaccinated.

The CARICOM leaders expressed dismay at the rate of vaccination in the 15-member grouping and the significant incidence of vaccine hesitancy.

According to CARPHA, as of September 3, vaccine coverage ranged from 58.7 per cent in Bermuda to 0.1 percent in Haiti.

The meeting was told that no country was close to herd immunity and the regional leaders are strongly urging Caribbean people to get vaccinated, noting that failure to do so puts the health sector at great risk of being overwhelmed by the surge of Covid-19 cases.

The sources told CMC that the regional leaders called particularly on the frontline workers, such as nurses, doctors, security personnel and teachers to avail themselves of the vaccines given their critical roles in the society.

CARICOM leaders also warned that the threat to the health, economic, education and security sectors was real, and called on all stakeholders to come together on this issue in the interest of the stability of the member states and the community on a whole.

In this context, the regional leaders are to consider the harmonization of travel protocols, including for cruise ships, the sources said, adding that the leaders also agreed to the design of a community public relations strategy to supplement national campaigns to encourage citizens to vaccinate.

There was also agreement by the CARICOM leaders to share excess vaccines, personal protective equipment and test kits. The sources said the leaders also agreed to approach the COVAX Facility to grant CARICOM an exemption, which would allow vaccine doses from the facility to be reallocated among member states.

The sources told CMC that given the critical situation, CARICOM leaders met with representatives of the United States and the United Kingdom to convey the “gravity of the situation,” and to make specific requests for assistance.

The sources said that the regional leaders requested that the United States deliver the next batch of Pfizer vaccines donated to the region earlier than originally planned and asked for field hospitals and the accompanying equipment to help ease the current strain on health facilities in member states.

The request to the United Kingdom centered on the negative impact of traffic light listing of countries which determines requirements for re-entry to the UK given the importance of that tourism market to the region, the sources told CMC.

On Monday, during a news conference in which she announced the appointment of a National Covid-19 Public Advisor, Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley told reporters that she held talks with Cuba's President Miguel Mario Díaz-Canel Bermúdez as well as participating in the CARICOM summit.

"I was also in discussions with the president of Ghana (Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo) with respect to additional nurses and at the CARICOM level I think we have all agreed ...for a deeper cooperation where possible particularly given the fact that all of us effectively are facing challenges with the Covid variant as we go forward and all of us are also hoping to see how we can reach out."

She said the regional leaders were also looking at the Caribbean diaspora, "because we have a lot of medical officials who live...overseas, but who may want to come home for short periods of time to be able to assist as the region goes through this surge that we are confronted."