Good afternoon.

I will start today’s press conference with the status of on island testing for COVID-19. Following that I will give an overview of an EMO meeting held earlier today. We will discuss matters relating to self-quarantine and the requirements for social distancing.

I am pleased to announce that on-island testing for COVID-19 has commenced and they are being provided with a maximum 48-hour turnaround for results here on-island.

This is a significant step and a partnership between the Ministry of Health, Helix Laboratories and the Bermuda Hospitals Board (BHB) and I’m sure this is relieving news for the community.

The Ministry of Health is being guided by Public Health England (PHE) and the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) every step of the way.

In past weeks, there has been an increasing demand for on-island testing but I think it prudent to remind people to be guided by science and international evidence-based best practice and not be swept into the panic-buying of inaccurate tests results.

The Ministry of Health is to be commended for securing this capability which will speed the Government’s ability to detect any community spread which may be taking place on-island. Samples were collected yesterday in the hospital, there were processed earlier today and the processing will finish tomorrow and hopefully we will have results on Sunday.

I want to make sure we caution members of the public against purchasing COVID-19 point of care blood tests which promise instant results in only a few minutes.
The Ministry of Health is unaware of any validated rapid point of care tests for COVID-19 that have been independently, scientifically validated to give reliable results. The use of non-validated testing can produce a false negative result, which could lull people into a false sense of security and could unconsciously lead to more spreading of COVID-19.

The public are reminded that the testing criteria for Bermuda is guided by the World Health Organization and will be updated if and when that guidance is updated.

This does mean that not every person in Bermuda will be eligible to be tested for COVID-19. There is limited testing supply in Bermuda. The guidance that is going to be followed is from the World Health Organization.

However the Ministry of Health may be testing people who have been exposed to persons who have tested positive for COVID-19.

There are currently only 150 tests on island. However the total order that was initially placed was 950. The additional with 800 more tests to arrive on island over the next two weeks. In addition, the Ministry has placed an additional order to make sure there is increased testing capacity as we go forward over the next few weeks.

Now an update from EMO.

Earlier today, the EMO met to get a full assessment from its public and private sector members.

**Docks:**
We continue to received goods into the island and we have normal cargo operations.

**Airport:**
As of 11.59 p.m., tonight, the L.F. Wade International Airport will close for scheduled commercial passenger flights.

In conjunction with the US Consul General, a Delta Airlines flight will arrive in Bermuda tomorrow afternoon, bringing some returning residents. US citizens wishing to return to the US may catch the flight back to the US.

Yesterday, the Canadian Consulate contacted our office to ask permission for a West Jet plane to arrive in Bermuda on Sunday. Their intention was to come to Bermuda, as a ferry. It would come to Bermuda empty and return with Canadian citizens who may wish to endure this global pandemic in their country of citizenship or residence. We made the request that given there still
may be some Bermudians in Canada that we extend the opportunity for Bermudians who may be in Canada to return as well.

They have accepted that request. At 2:00 pm on Sunday 22 March, West Jet (WS 2710) will depart from Toronto, Canada, Pearson Airport (YYZ) bound for Bermuda and is scheduled to depart that evening at 6:30 pm to return to Toronto.

There are five flights coming in today with returning residents. Customs and Public Health Officers will follow the same self-quarantine protocols that were in place yesterday for returning residents.

Last evening, the Minister for National Security, Wayne Caines went to the airport to observe the process and by all accounts the process was a smooth one.

I thank the Royal Bermuda Regiment for their critical assistance in helping to maintain social distance of arriving passengers.

**Government:**
We will be releasing a full list of government departments that are fully open, partially open or are not operational at all. These matters will be reviewed.

**Post Office**
As of 1pm today all post office locations have closed. No local mail is currently being processed.

**Public Transportation**
Recognizing that public transportation has been suspended for now and that we have a number of health professionals who use public transportation, the Department of Public Transportation will put on a special pick up service for our key health workers such as nurses, health technicians and care givers. Those details will be shared when finalized.

The public was advised earlier today, all essential services within the Department of Works and Engineering are currently operating normally. This includes public access to the Tynes Bay Waste to Energy Facility. We do understand there are some challenges with trash collection currently. It is expected that trash collection will continue to operate normally. The Minister of Public Works is currently at a meeting at the Marsh Folly facility and I will provide a more detailed update when we are able to do so.

It is important to note when it comes to the issue of public transportation and the decision which the Government made when it came to the suspension of Education and other matters. Given that we did not have on-island testing capability here, we took decisions, out of an abundance of
caution, to ensure there was no possibility or community spread here on island. Now we have testing capability on-island, we can better assess what the potential community spread is and we will be reexamining any potential public services that may be able to restart at a limited basis, based upon where we stand currently. However, those decisions will only be made based upon the available evidence and dealing with the testing we have here on island.

Education:
I want to emphasize to all of our school leaders and educators the important role they play in keeping our children engaged while schools are closed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

As teachers and school staff engage students in remote learning experiences, it will keep our students focused on learning, and off the streets.

All school staff are expected to engage students in remote learning experiences during the entire week of March 23rd, 2020, using a variety of online learning platforms. This method of learning is aligned with 21st century practices and it also supports the Ministry of Health's COVID-19 guidelines of heightening social distancing and Government’s call for national participation in this regard.

The main objectives during school closure are:
   a. Ensuring Quality learning experiences for students
   b. Maintaining routines similar to school routines
   c. Providing ongoing Communication to students, parents and school staff

Finally, it is important to reemphasize the important messages from the Ministry of Health regarding social distancing and self-quarantine.

Clearly these are extremely difficult and uncomfortable circumstances but these steps are being taken to preserve life on island.

The Government will also be releasing a series of items speaking about the Public Health guidelines and the social distancing guidelines. What is important is that there is news that is going to be made today. The businesses which will be asked to close their operation for the time being and those are operations which can speed the spread of any community transmission of COVID-19.

(Guidelines attached)
It is important to note that these items and the following businesses can be enforced under regulations and enforcement officers will request businesses to close if they are not following these regulations. It makes sense for companies to follow the regulations versus them being ordered to be shut down by the Minister of Health.

We recognize there are powers to close liquor licensed establishments if liquor licensed establishments are not following the social distancing rules, they will be ordered to close.

We are watching and learning from other nations on how to tackle this pandemic. And despite the dreadful developments that we have witnessed – there are pockets of good news. For example, earlier this week, China closed down its last coronavirus hospital, as there were not enough new cases to support them.

In South Korea, the number of new cases has been declining. Even here in Bermuda, the two positive imported cases were never hospitalized and are recovering.

So, if we follow the instructions and rules, if we all do our part, we can make sure we are a success story and not a story that is covered for the wrong reasons.

However I want everyone to know, business owner, person of faith, communities of faith, all of us have a role to play. The government with the new regulations that were issued today will not hesitate to ensure that these regulations are enforced. It is the responsibility of all of us to keep our country safe and I am going to ask that everyone police themselves, police their neighbours, encourage each other and let us get through this pandemic together. United, Bermuda is strong and I expect us to continue to be united so we can come through this particular pandemic strong and ready to have a next chapter of our history.

Thank you.