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Updated: Grenada moves to contain a Covid outbreak connected to Sandals resort

By Christina Jelski   | By Gay Nagle Myers   | Dec 14, 2020



The pool area at Sandals Grenada. Photo Credit: Gay Nagle Myers

Updated Dec. 15.

Grenada's Ministry of Health says it's taking "aggressive efforts" to contain an outbreak of Covid-19 cases connected to the Sandals Grenada all-inclusive resort.

Keith Mitchell, prime minister of Grenada, in an address on Dec. 14 outlined several temporary measures to contain the spread of Covid-19 on the island.

Effective Dec. 15, all social gatherings, including weddings and funerals, are limited to 10 participants for the next seven days. Community events and gatherings are postponed for seven days; business operations, including public transportation, must stop at 10 p.m.; and restaurants are limited to takeout service only.

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"The sudden spike in Covid cases originated at Sandals Grenada and demonstrates the grave dangers we face," Mitchell said. "The grim reality is that 13 people from one household have tested positive, based on a staff member's exposure to Covid. It cannot be determined at this time that this was due to a breakdown in the application of the resort's protocols, but we must enforce the law.

"The Ministry of Health is revisiting the protocols for all hotels and resorts," Mitchell said. "The magnitude of this new cluster of cases means it is not business as usual during this holiday season."

He said that this was a "difficult time to enforce restrictions, but I need everyone's full cooperation in mask wearing, social distancing and sanitizing, because a nationwide shutdown is not the preferred option."

The cluster comprises 26 positive Covid-19 cases found among Sandals Grenada guests, staff and their contacts, though during a press conference on Sunday, the ministry's acting chief medical officer, Dr. Shawn Charles, emphasized that number "is likely to increase significantly, once we have the final results of all of the testing that is being conducted."

Sandals Grenada is "open and operational with guests in house," Sandals said in a statement Dec. 15.

New guest arrivals have been paused for several days, and those guests who were due to arrive at the resort this week have been relocated to other resorts.

"Grenada's situation is an isolated one, the asymptomatic individuals were quickly identified and we are collaborating with public health authorities to develop key learnings further," Sandals said earlier. "Our Sandals Platinum Protocols of Cleanliness are working as they should to ensure our resorts are doing everything possible to keep risks to a minimum for our valued guests and team members."

According to the ministry, the outbreak was discovered through the island's "proactive testing" efforts, which have focused on frequent testing of frontline staff who work in sectors related to tourism, travel and health.

"The Sandals resort has now been deemed to be a place of screening and assessment," said the Ministry of Health in a statement posted online Sunday. "Entire households related to the confirmed cases have also been quarantined,

and contact tracers are actively working to source other potentially exposed people in other areas of public life and activity."

The Ministry added that the outbreak is "a rapidly evolving situation," and that it expects "a further tightening of measures related to activities and daily life" in the wake of the event.

Grenada has had a total of 69 confirmed Covid-19 cases since the pandemic began, according to John Hopkins University & Medicine.

Though Grenada's border status remains open, visitors to the island are required to obtain a negative PCR Covid-19 test taken within 72 hours of travel and complete a Pure Safe Travel Certificate prior to arrival, among other requirements.

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MINISTRY OF HEALTH COVID-19 UPDATE

St. George's: December 13, 2020: The Ministry of Health informs that a cluster of twenty-six (26) positive COVID-19 cases have been diagnosed, originating from the Sandals Resort. The positive cases include guests and employees, as well as their contacts. The discovery was made following proactive testing of employees and guests on Friday and Saturday, as part of the Ministry's continuous testing of frontline staff in sectors directly related to tourism, travel and health.

Given the health emergency that this situation warrants, the Government of Grenada, through the Ministry of Health, has deployed all efforts, including personnel and resources, to address this grave threat to public health, safety, order and the maintenance of medical and other supplies and services essential to life in Grenada. Unprecedented, aggressive efforts have been taken to further contain this outbreak of COVID-19.

The Sandals Resort has now been deemed to be a place of screening and assessment. Entire households related to the confirmed cases have also been quarantined, and contact tracers are actively working to source other potentially exposed people in other areas of public life and activity.

This is a rapidly evolving situation and Health officials will continue to update the public as circumstances warrant. In the coming hours and days, the Ministry anticipates a further tightening of measures related to activities and daily life in order to protect public health and safety.

The Ministry has been consistent in urging the public to maintain vigilance in daily life, as a virus outbreak was always probable in Grenada—just as elsewhere around the region and world.

Nevertheless, throughout this pandemic, there has never been a greater need for public cooperation than now. The Ministry is again calling on all citizens and visitors to join the effort in observing the health and safety protocols, including exercising enhanced caution in daily activities, especially when using public transportation and participating in social activities.

The Ministry of Health cannot stress enough the magnitude of the problem that Grenada is currently confronting. This is about public health and safety and we urge the public to be extremely careful and to do its part in helping to curb this outbreak.

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In consideration of the current grave situation that we face, the Government of Grenada, through the Ministry of Health, must ask that members of the public limit all social gatherings. The Chief Medical Officer has also advised that permission previously granted to organizers for upcoming social events is under review. The Government's first responsibility is to protect the lives of our people and we are resolute in taking all necessary steps to do so.

Everyone is reminded to adhere to the guidelines and mandates by wearing masks that cover the nose and mouth when in public spaces, practising good hygiene, and maintaining physical distancing of at least six feet from others.

This outbreak can be contained, if we all work together.

If you believe that you have been exposed to the virus, or you are displaying symptoms consistent with those of the Coronavirus, isolate yourself immediately, and contact the COVID Hotline at 473 538 4787, or your nearest health centre.

