



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

INTERNAL COMMUNIQUÉ

March 2, 2020

COVID-19 Information for The UWI Community

The following communiqué from Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, includes details on The UWI's actions to protect the health of the community and general information about COVID-19:

The health and safety of our community is very important. University leadership is working closely with government and public health agencies and continues to follow guidelines from the relevant authorities including the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) and the World Health Organization (WHO). We are committed to keeping our campuses healthy and informed of significant new developments and will share information, pertinent to our community, as it arises.

As you may be aware, on February 28, 2020, WHO epidemiologists increased the assessment of the risk of spread and the risk of impact of COVID-19 to very high at a global level. CARPHA has subsequently upgraded the threat assessment from the Caribbean region from low to moderate to high.

THE UWI RESPONSE

Once again, The UWI is launching a Task Force to assist with the mobilisation of the region's public health providers to deal with an incoming virus. Four years ago, the Zika virus triggered the response; today it is SARS-CoV-2, the causative agent of the COVID-19 disease.

Again, the Task Force will be chaired by Professor Clive Landis, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Undergraduate Studies and former Director of the George Alleyne Chronic Disease Research Centre, who has considerable experience in the field of Caribbean public health.

Membership of the Task Force is drawn from the regional UWI campuses, comprising multi-discipline specialists, scientists, researchers and public health professionals with combined expertise in in virology, epidemiology, laboratory diagnostics, critical care, respiratory medicine, veterinary medicine, tourism, trade, international relations and communication. **Read more:** <https://sta.uwi.edu/news/releases/release.asp?id=22057>

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

The responses to the following frequently asked questions contain useful information issued by the WHO and is intended to inform about COVID-19. The UWI, CARPHA, WHO, and Ministries of Health across the region are all reliable sources of information regarding COVID-19.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, and dry cough. Some patients may have aches and pains, nasal congestion, runny nose, sore throat or diarrhoea. These symptoms are usually mild and begin gradually. Some people become infected but don't develop any symptoms and don't feel unwell.

Most people (about 80%) recover from the disease without needing special treatment. Around 1 out of every 6 people who gets COVID-19 becomes seriously ill and develops difficulty breathing. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like high blood pressure, heart problems or diabetes, are more likely to develop serious illness. About 2% of people with the disease have died. People with fever, cough and difficulty breathing should seek medical attention.

How is COVID-19 spread?

People can catch COVID-19 from others who have the virus. The disease can spread from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth which are spread when a person with COVID-19 coughs or exhales. These droplets land on objects and surfaces around the person. Other people then catch COVID-19 by touching these objects or surfaces, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. People can also catch COVID-19 if they breathe in droplets from a person with COVID-19 who coughs out or exhales droplets. This is why it is important to stay more than 1 metre (3 feet) away from a person who is sick.

Should I wear a mask?

People with no respiratory symptoms, such as cough, do not need to wear a medical mask. WHO recommends the use of masks for people who have symptoms of COVID-19 and for those caring for individuals who have symptoms, such as cough and fever. The use of masks is crucial for health workers and people who are taking care of someone (at home or in a health care facility).

The most effective ways to protect yourself and others against COVID-19 are to frequently clean your hands, cover your cough with the bend of elbow or tissue (which should be discarded immediately) and maintain a distance of at least 1 metre (3 feet) from people who are coughing or sneezing.

Some WHO tips for minimising risk:

1. Clean hands reduce your risk. Clean your hands frequently with soap and water or alcohol based hand rubs.

2. Clean your work areas with disinfectants regularly (desks etc.)
3. Keep yourself informed from reliable sources and avoid the spread of false information. *(Reliable sources include The UWI, CARPHA, WHO, Ministries of Health.)*
4. Avoid travelling if you have a fever and cough; seek medical attention if required.
5. Manage your coughs and sneezes. Cough or sneeze into your sleeve or a tissue. Dispose of tissues immediately and clean your hands.
6. The elderly or persons with cardiovascular disease, diabetes or respiratory conditions should avoid crowded places.
7. If you have fevers and are coughing or sneezing, seek medical attention and stay at home.
8. If you are sick and are at home, sleep separately from other family members, use different cutlery and utensils.
9. If you develop shortness of breath, seek medical attention immediately.

Professor Sir Hilary Beckles
Vice-Chancellor
The University of the West Indies