



## THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

Dear Members of our UWI Community,

As you know, our University has been at the forefront of the monitoring, preparedness and response to the threat of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), since the news first came in January about the outbreak in China. We are now faced with the reality of confirmed cases in the Caribbean, and within our campus territories. As we stand in solidarity and ensure our readiness within reason for the likelihood that this disease may spread, I thought it necessary to provide an update on our response, how to cope, preventative measures and the way forward based on what we know now.

### **Are we READY?**

Against the context of the World Health Organization (WHO) declaring the outbreak a global pandemic, and the Caribbean Public Health Agency's (CARPHA) counsel that the Caribbean should now transition to a "readiness" phase, I want to reassure you that the University has been proactively planning, with priority attention to your health and welfare. Not only has a UWI COVID-19 Task Force been commissioned with the remit of providing overarching guidance in coordinating The UWI's internal readiness and response to the COVID-19, simultaneously, Campus COVID-19 Management Teams have also been established across the University's five campuses and Regional Headquarters. Collectively, these teams are positioned to activate their response plans, working in close collaboration with national Ministries of Health and regional health authorities, as necessary. Entities like the University Hospital of the West Indies, in Jamaica have put in place robust protocols and procedures to treat persons who may become ill. I want to encourage us as a Caribbean community to maintain strong solidarity and avoid all stigmatising behaviour. We remain in this together, and our fight is a collective one.

With regard to any closures of our campuses and/or university facilities, we will continue to be guided by our regional authorities on the basis of specific country scenarios. Where necessary, there is the provisioning for the transitioning from face-to-face modalities to online teaching as far as is possible. Business continuity plans will also allow for the remote operations of administrative functions, to support critical operations. Noting that we are approaching end of semester, the possible implication on examinations has been considered; flexible protocols have been determined and will be activated, should the need arise.

Specifically addressing the situation at our **Mona Campus at this time, the decision has been made to suspend all face-to-face teaching effective March 13, 2020 until April 14, 2020. All other administrative and business operations at the Mona Campus continue as usual until otherwise notified.** Meanwhile, our sister campuses in other Caribbean territories continue normal operations without disruption.

System-wide we have also taken the decision to, with immediate effect, cancel all major conferences and postpone any large gatherings on our respective campuses. As part of our broader regional public health and institutional responsibility programme, the University is also advising that colleagues postpone participation in any international academic obligations until further notice. In cases where study and travel grants apply, persons are asked to liaise with their respective Campus Principal and administration on the procedures to be followed to have grants refunded or reserved for use at a later date.

### **How can you cope with the threat of COVID-19?**

It is understandable to have some anxiety among members of our community at this time, but I urge the need to remain calm and exercise sensible precautions as advised by local health ministries and other relevant agencies (e.g. CARPHA/ CDEMA/WHO/CDC). It is important to remember that this is a virus whose transmission can be suppressed or interrupted by following public health advice. I'm sure you already know the most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, dry cough, tiredness, and shortness of breath. If you suspect that you may be ill or are experiencing any of these symptoms, or know someone who might be, please follow the guidelines of your local public health or campus authorities. Should you require support in managing any associated anxiety, please consult with your campus counselling unit.

### **How can you minimise your risk of contracting COVID-19?**

Remember that proper hand hygiene is our most effective defence against COVID-19 at this time. Follow the tips from the WHO to reduce your risk by cleaning your hands frequently with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitisers.

The UWI COVID-19 Task Force is currently working on providing a single source of useful information to assist the University and wider regional community in accessing relevant information as it pertains to the Caribbean and this virus. Our very own UWI tv cable channel on FLOW EVO, website at [www.uwivtv.org](http://www.uwivtv.org) and its social media channels can be counted on as a trusted source of information. In fact, the channel has just been authorised to provide direct coverage of WHO updates three times per week. We remain committed to providing you with consistent and credible information and partnering in the Caribbean's response.

To borrow the phrase from Task Force Chairman, Professor Clive Landis, I am confident that "together we will get through this."

Sincerely,

**Professor Hilary Beckles**  
**Vice-Chancellor**