



## **NEW PROTOCOLS FOR CONTROLLED RE-ENTRY OF JAMAICAN RESIDENTS STRANDED OVERSEAS**

### **IMPORTANT CONTEXT AND PRINCIPLES**

As has been the case in several countries across the world, including the Caribbean, Jamaica's borders have been closed to incoming passenger traffic in response to the COVID-19 pandemic since March 24, 2020. They remain generally closed to incoming passenger traffic at this time.

The Government of Jamaica has now however established new protocols to facilitate the return of Jamaicans only, at this stage. Focus will be placed on those ordinarily resident in Jamaica who had travelled overseas prior to the closure of our borders. Their **return will need to be phased and gradual** in light of the principles set out below.

Acknowledging that we cannot keep our borders closed indefinitely, the new protocols recognise are primarily based on three important principles:

1. The right of our citizens to return to their homeland;
2. The re-entry of our citizens overseas must be done in a manner that protects the health of all Jamaican citizens and must therefore be within the capacity of our public healthcare system to address this highly infectious disease; and

3. Given the limited capacity of our public healthcare system, we must at this time give priority to those Jamaicans who are the most vulnerable and are facing the most hardship.

### **Mandatory Testing and State Quarantine**

Based on the advice of our public health authorities, at this time, **all returning residents must be tested for COVID-19 on arrival and remain in a state quarantine facility for 14 days** after their arrival or such further period as considered necessary by the Ministry of Health and Wellness. Should they test positive for COVID-19 during this period, they will be transferred to a state isolation facility for treatment.

### **Making and Paying for your Travel Arrangements**

Furthermore, with the demands of managing the treatment and risk of further spread of the coronavirus, Jamaica does not have the resources to charter flights or to pay for the return of our citizens. **Persons applying will therefore be responsible to make their own arrangements for travel.**

### **Airline Information and Bookings**

Many of our residents who are stranded would have had return tickets for which flights were cancelled or have employers willing to charter flights. We have already started to inform airlines of the new protocols for controlled re-entry, and that nationals who still hold tickets for their airlines will now be seeking to re-book.

**Please do not finalize travel arrangements before a conditional approval has been granted through the application process on the Jamcovid19 site or mobile app. The airline will also request to see the final electronic Travel Authorization at prior to boarding. (please see details of process below)**

## **Please be Patient**

Please remember that applying for travel authorization to return does not automatically mean approval to return immediately as our health system can currently only accommodate relatively small numbers in each quarantine cohort until circumstances change to give more flexibility and capacity.

We are also receiving a large number of queries and applications so there may be some delays associated with the review and processing of applications. We ask for your patience and understanding.

## **More Information on Quarantine Protocols**

Given the complexities of managing the logistics and testing as well as ensuring that groups of persons at different stages of the 14-day quarantine cycle do not co-mingle, the **controlled re-entry will be done in cohorts with an entire cohort being quarantined at a single location**. To explain further the need to keep cohorts separate, take for example Person A who, on Day 13 of his or her quarantine, comes into contact with Person B who is only on Day 5 but Person B develops symptoms and tests positive, Person A would have to start his or her 14-day quarantine period all over as a result of the exposure to Person B.

## **Why Home Quarantine Is Not Being Allowed At This Time**

Quarantine is used to reduce the risk of spread of the virus by restricting the movement of persons and interaction with others who may or may not have Covid-19. It also requires monitoring of a person's health status.

In a home environment, it requires the individual to not only stay home and away from public spaces, but also to be separate from the members of their household to reduce risk of infecting these persons if they do turn out to have the virus. As experienced before, this creates another level of risk in managing the spread of the virus and must therefore be managed effectively. Regrettably, the level of

compliance required of persons who were previously allowed home quarantine arrangements before, was not satisfactory.

### **Conditions Under Which Home Quarantine May Be Permitted in Future**

We are exploring solutions to facilitate home quarantine of returning residents who do not have any visible symptoms of being unwell on arrival at our borders. This would require the health authorities to track the location and movement of persons to ensure that they do not leave home. This would not only include approval of the home as a quarantine location which must allow separation from others as is necessary for quarantine to be effective, but may also be through GPS tracking of mobile phone locations or some other means to ensure the terms of quarantine or isolation are being adhered to.