

**STATEMENT**  
**BY THE HON. MATTHEW SAMUDA**  
**MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO**  
**CONTROLLED ENTRY PROGRAMME**  
**JUNE 19, 2020**

Mr. President

I rise this morning to give a brief statement which relates to the Controlled Entry Programme and in general our border management. The arrangements related to our borders have gone through several iterations since the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in Jamaica, under the Disaster Risk Management Act with the various orders. It is important that this information be put on the record of the Senate and that the country be kept updated.

Mr. President, I believe before diving in to the substance of the statement it is important that I acknowledge the hardworking men and women who have worked countless hours to facilitate this process, even in challenging circumstances. I wish to mention the teams at the Public Health Department at Ministry of Health & Wellness, Passport Immigration & Citizenship Agency, Jamaica Customs Agency, Jamaica Defence Force, Jamaica Constabulary Force, Port Authority of Jamaica, Airports Authority of Jamaica, Office of Disaster Preparedness Emergency & Management, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Jamaica Urban Transit Company, Jamaica Tourist Board & the individual team at each port – Norman Manley International Airport, Sangster’s International Airport.. I have had the pleasure of working with these patriotic professionals through the Task Force charged with this controlled entry programme.

From the very beginning our focus has been on protecting the health and safety of all of our citizens here and abroad. Members of the Senate will recall that when our borders were closed there was a mad rush to find over 5000 Jamaicans who would have returned home in the last couple days prior to that closure. That experience forced the Government to put in place procedures and a system that will allow us to manage in a controlled way the return of our citizens as well as the entry of non-nationals. The measures allow the Ministry of Health and Wellness to monitor for the period of 14 days and longer if necessary all returning residents. The 14-day period is consistent with international standards and best practices as it relates to the COVID.

### **The System**

To manage this process, we launched a website and app dubbed JAMCOVID hosted by the Office of the Prime Minister, which facilitates an application process, which brings together critical information for PICA & MOHW that allows a risk assessment to be done, before travel is approved. It also allows the tracking of persons during their quarantine period regardless of where they are under quarantine. This system has also now been introduced through [visitjamaica.com](http://visitjamaica.com) which allows non-residents to apply there. The process and the questions for residents and non-residents are the same and although they are two separate portals, the information is housed and risk assessment done in the same place. Though they have been acknowledged in another place by PM, I wish to acknowledge the Amber Group who would have donated to the people of Jamaica their time and skills sets to build this system. It is also important that I acknowledge the team at ITEL BPO who have provided free of cost to the people of Jamaica, so far, the call centre support that guides people through the process.

As at today, we have managed 19,312 applications from residents through the JAMCOVID portal and just over 2700 from non-residents through the Visit Jamaica portal. As at close of business yesterday, 6,898 persons had returned to Jamaica and been landed since the start of the controlled reentry programme. We have 13,846 persons approved for travel in the JAMCOVID system, and 976 persons who have registered but not yet completed the application process.

Important to note there have been foreign nationals who have been rejected, based on the risk assessment of the health team. The assessment for Jamaicans determines their quarantine arrangements opposed to whether they can travel.

### **The Application Process**

So Mr. President allow me to share with you the process, so that the Senate is apprised of how it works. Someone seeking entry go to the portal, residents go to JAMCOVID and non-residents/visitors go to visit Ja. They fill out the application, which asks questions which would be asked on C5 form, when entering Jamaican normally and asks the questions related to your exposure and current health condition as required by MOHW. Questions related to suitability for home quarantine are also asked. When persons have completed the process, their applications are reviewed by PICA and MOHW for approval.

When approved they are issued a certificate of approval digitally, this certificate is mandatory for persons to check in on flights coming to Jamaica. This requirement has been accepted by IATA and is disseminated to airlines through their Timatic System as such persons are asked by all airlines to provide this approval before they are allowed to check in on any flight in Jamaica.

### **The Process at Ports of Entry**

I think it is important to make the point Mr. President that the process at our ports of entry, sea or air, is the same for all persons entering Jamaica, resident or non-resident, except for persons coming from countries which have been designated a part of the ‘travel bubble’. The countries in this ‘bubble’ are the countries that MOHW have assessed to cause very little risk as they have little to no spread and generally very low case numbers in their countries. However, allow me to take you through the process:

You land or dock at the port, persons disembark and are greeted first by a team from MOHW, which conducts the first health screening, takes temperature and confirm person’s name and information. You then proceed to the second and more in-depth health screening which confirms the information entered on travel application and allows the health professionals to complete risk assessment. At this stage, persons are given their orders deemed appropriate which can either be, government quarantine, home quarantine, stay at home/intended address and stay in zones orders for non-nationals. Once this is completed, persons coming from countries within the bubble go to a PICA officer to be landed, persons coming from outside the bubble proceed to third health check where they are sampled for COVID. Once sampled, this group proceeds to immigration and then customs as we would all be accustomed to. Once landed and cleared by Customs, the monitoring process commences based on the order that would have been signed by the person with the health team. It is at this step that persons where they are to be tracked whether app on the phone or tracking bands, that a team managed collaboratively by JDF, JCF either confirm the app is working on the phone or the person who is banded if it is deemed appropriate. That arrangement with JCF and JDF officers is slated to change this morning, we have recruited 50 youngsters who are tech savvy through the HOPE programme to assist with this process under the supervision of the JCF JDF, they will earn a stipend and be beneficiaries of training modules especially related to

customer service. The MOHW will assist these youngsters everyday with provision of PPE and ensure they are wearing it correctly to limit risk. So, colleagues even in crisis there are opportunities that we must embrace within the new normal. Persons arrange their own transportation unless they have been listed for government quarantined, where the MOHW takes the lead at this stage.

### **The Monitoring**

It is done at a command centre set up at the Commissioner of Police's office. This is where when there are breaches, the appropriate public health officials and police station are notified. In the few cases where there has been difficulty, physical checks are done by public health and JCF officers to ensure persons are maintaining the terms of their quarantine arrangements. Persons who have completed their process, are cleared from the system and tracking ceases.

### **Current Situation**

Since the 15<sup>th</sup> of June, we are averaging 10 flights a day split between NMIA and SIA, and one can imagine the deployment of staff from varying agencies are extensive to manage these numbers. Colleague Senators would have seen a crew ship in Kingston Harbour on their way to Parliament this morning, the Government has secured and finalised arrangements for approximately 300 Jamaican crew members to arrive in the Island from as early as 6:30 am on Saturday June 20. The crew members are onboard the Royal Caribbean's - Rhapsody of the Seas and Disney's - Wonder cruise vessels. The Rhapsody of the Seas has approximately 250 crew members onboard, while the Disney Wonder has approximately 50 Jamaican workers. The vessels will come alongside the Seawalk for debarkation. The Debarkation of Rhapsody of the Seas is expected to begin at 7:00

am and end at around noon. It will then weight anchor and allow for Disney to come alongside to debark its crew. Because of the risk assessment, these workers will be held in government quarantine until their test results are available before they are sent home to complete their 14-day period. We have asked the Port Authority and MFAFT to compare list of persons who are still at sea who have asked to come home and engagements continue with other ship owners to make arrangements for their return. I cannot provide you with an exact number at this moment, but with these latest two vessels that number is expected to be very small.

### **Conclusion**

In closing, it is now safe to say that all Jamaicans who wish to come home, can do so. But they must follow the process that we have put in place to safeguard their health of all Jamaicans. It is a matter of public record that the process of reopening our tourism sector is underway with the opening of our borders to non-nationals. Members of the Senate should indeed be proud of the work of the member agencies to the Task Force, who contend daily with the challenges with the new normal brought on by COVID pandemic. . We are working assiduously to continue to improve efficiencies through automation of the varying systems. The process may be lengthy, but it is a robust one that we believe helps to mitigate the risks The people of Jamaica, Mr. President, deserve nothing less to keep them safe.