



**STATEMENT TO THE NATION**  
**BY**  
**HON. GASTON BROWNE**  
**PRIME MINISTER of Antigua and Barbuda**  
**On Coronavirus (COVID-19)**  
**13<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

My Fellow Citizens and Residents

It is my unfortunate duty to advise you, that our country has recorded our first confirmation of someone who has contracted the coronavirus (COVID-19).

I want to emphasize that there is no need for fear or panic, arising from this case.

The person concerned is in self isolation at home, and a regime has been put in place today, not only to continue such isolation, but also to treat the condition.

You will recall that, we publicly stated that our health officials had identified two persons displaying symptoms, that suggested infection with coronavirus.

Samples were taken and dispatched to the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) in Trinidad for testing.

Of the two samples, one was cleared and the other confirmed infection with COVID-19.

All of this happened very quickly, and it is a demonstration of how well prepared our health officials are, in identifying possible coronavirus sufferers, testing them, verifying samples and dealing with the case as appropriate.

The facts of this case are: that on March 10th, a passenger arrived from the United Kingdom aboard a British Airways aircraft.

She went directly to her mother's home that night and on March 11th, she visited a private medical clinic where the doctors, recognized symptoms of the coronavirus and immediately contacted government health officials, who took the required samples and sent them to CARPHA in Trinidad for testing.

The following day – that is yesterday – the positive results of the test were returned to Antigua and Barbuda.

In other words, from the time of the person's arrival in Antigua to the completion of the process of testing; confirmation took less than 48 hours.

No doubt, you are wondering about the possibility that others might have been infected by the subject during the last two days.

Health officials assured me, that this possibility is unlikely, since the person has been isolated at home during the entire period, in the company only of a parent.

In any event, no stone will be left unturned in testing the parent and any other persons with whom the patient and the mother has been in contact.

That exercise will be carried out today.

In the meantime, the patient and the parent will now be kept in isolation and treatment of the known case will begin while the parent is tested.

You are also aware, that I have been saying for some time, that it is not a matter of if, but when COVID-19 would reach our shores.

It is crossing borders rapidly and short of closing down every point of entry into both Antigua and Barbuda by plane, or boat; there is no way to seal our borders.

In any event, our country and our economy live by tourism and by the importation of goods; sealing our borders was no more possible for us than for any other country in the world.

That is why, very early in the development of the coronavirus in other parts of the world, even with our limited resources, my government put in place, machinery to bar planes from certain countries, turn away cruise ships with suspected cases, quarantined persons arriving from specific locations; and began testing persons with symptoms.

We have also been building special quarantine facilities on the site of the previous Holberton Hospital, which will be operational next week.

A vital piece of testing equipment arrives in Antigua shortly , and we expect to have the facility up and running in a few days.

The facility will not only quarantine and isolate patients, it will also treat them.

In other words, we hope to help patients recover and walk out of the facility in good health.

Our health officials, will be informing the nation about all the steps they have taken in relation to this patient and the parent later today.

Having advised you of this first confirmed case, which was detected, isolated, tested and is now being treated within a 48 hour time frame, I call on everyone to practice the habits we must all develop to contain the disease.

Wash your hands regularly with soap for at least 20 seconds; do not shake hands; do not kiss; refrain from touching your eyes, nose and mouth; clean surfaces around you before using them; avoid crowded places and keep a safe distance from persons who are coughing and sneezing. Should you need to cough or sneeze, cover your nose and mouth with tissue and safely discard it.

As in all things, prevention is better than cure. Therefore, I reiterate my call for personal responsibility by all citizens and residents to practice good hygiene as outlined before and to eat healthily and exercise.

We can keep our communities safe and well, if each of us exercise personal responsibility to protect not only ourselves, but each other.

Please remember that in the midst of all that is happening in the world, we have only one confirmed case.

Admittedly, there may be others. But, our health facilities and border safeguards are in place.

Let us now be sensible in our behaviour and be our brother's keeper. Let us conjoin our efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 within the domestic population.

Our country is still very safe.

Considering the challenges of COVID-19 to include the economic impact and potential threat to our food security, we have to work diligently and collectively as a nation, of one people, with a common destiny to confront these challenges.

I reiterate, we must never panic, but must work collectively with confidence and faith. I remain confident that, with our collective efforts and with the help of God, we shall surmount the challenges of COVID-19 and this disease too shall pass.

God bless you and God Bless Antigua and Barbuda.