

September 3, 2010

STATEMENT
BY
HON. RUDYARD SPENCER
MINISTER OF HEALTH
PRESS BRIEFING

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning

This morning I would like to update you on three important issues affecting the health sector:

1. Absenteeism of nurses at public health facilities
2. The current dengue outbreak and
3. Security of our facilities

Absenteeism by Nurses

The Ministry of Health has noticed an unusually high level of Absenteeism by Registered Nurses in the public health sector since Wednesday, September 1, 2010. To date, the Ministry has not been notified of any industrial action by the Executive of the Nurses Association of Jamaica.

However based on the pattern of absences our ability to carry out normal activities at some facilities has been compromised. Consequently the Ministry has activated our standard emergency protocols.

For the 7a.m. to 3:00 p.m. shift On Wednesday, September 1, 2010, the institutions with the highest levels of absenteeism were Port Maria (55%), Port Antonio (64%), Mandeville (83%), Linstead (50%), Annotto Bay (40%), St. Ann's Bay (61%) and Victoria Jubilee (51%) hospitals.

On the 2:00p.m. to 10:00p.m. shift some of the same institutions continue to be affected as follows: Port Maria (80%), St. Ann's Bay (39%), Port Antonio (64%), Victoria Jubilee (62%), Mandeville (72%) and Linstead (75%) hospitals.

On Thursday, September 2, 2010, we continued to receive reports of high levels of absenteeism. For the 7:00a.m. to 3:00p.m. shift the affected institutions were Port Maria (73%), St. Ann's Bay (42%), Victoria Jubilee (50%), and Mandeville (47%) hospitals.

The Ministry has taken the following action in respect of those institutions that have been adversely affected:

- Only emergency cases are being dealt with.
- Non critical patients are being discharged
- Elective surgeries have been cancelled.
- Senior nursing staff are manning the critical areas of hospital operations.

Our regions have been instructed that the affected institutions should communicate with their patients and the population that they serve on any measure or intervention that they are taking in light of any disruption to service.

The Ministry of Health has an obligation to the people of Jamaica to provide health care that is accessible. We intend to do everything to ensure that that we fulfill this obligation to the people of Jamaica particularly those who are sick and poor and have no choice but to use the public health facilities.

I would like to thank our health workers who have been working extremely hard to ensure the delivery of health services to the public. I urge persons to contact their nearest hospitals regarding services being offered and relatives who may need to be discharged.

We will continue to keep the nation informed.

Dengue Outbreak

At the beginning of August, Cabinet was brought up-to-date on the Emergency Vector Control Programme and Dengue Outbreak, in light of the Dengue Alerts that were issued by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) in March and July 2010 for the Latin America and Caribbean Region and the higher than normal number of dengue cases that were reported in Jamaica since the start of this year.

The Government has provided additional support to the tune of Sixty million dollars (\$60M) to fund the Ministry's intervention strategies in the following areas:

1. Heightened Surveillance
2. Public Education
3. Clinical Management according to WHO / PAHO guidelines
4. Vector Control
5. Laboratory Capacity Strengthening
6. Training
7. Social Mobilization
8. Inter-sectoral Collaboration
9. International Cooperation and
10. Resource Mobilization

All parishes are reporting dengue cases. The parishes of Kingston and St. Andrew, Manchester, St. Ann and St. Mary are showing the highest number of cases.

As at September 1, we have one hundred and twenty three (123) laboratory confirmed cases of dengue fever and an additional seven hundred and twenty nine (729) suspected cases.

There are four (4) laboratory confirmed cases of dengue haemorrhagic fever and an additional thirty seven (37) suspected cases. Unfortunately, we have one reported death from this severe form of dengue.

We have intensified vector control activities including fogging and oiling activities in all parishes. We will continue our intensified intervention until we are satisfied that the outbreak is under control.

The start of the new school year presents additional challenges with large school populations at risk from infected mosquitoes. Parish Health Departments are working closely with school administrators to carry out the necessary vector control and public education activities to minimize the risk of exposure to the youth population.

Given the current dengue situation, all efforts must be taken to ensure that children returning to school enjoy a health environment and so the Ministry is urging school administrators to ensure that their school grounds are free of mosquito breeding sites.

Administrators may call the Health Department in their parish if they need additional assistance to identify and eliminate breeding sites and get rid of adult mosquitoes.

Community and Individual Responsibility

I wish to remind communities and individuals that the female *Aedes aegypti* mosquito that carries the dengue virus breeds mainly in and around their homes and communities.

The main breeding sites that were identified were the forty-five (45) gallon drums used to store water at home. You have a responsibility to your household to treat or destroy breeding sites.

For more information, the Ministry's EOC can be reached by calling 1-888-663-5683 or 1-888-ONE-LOVE.

Security at Health Facilities

Some time ago I indicated that the Ministry would be undertaking a review of the security arrangements at our health facilities. We completed reviews at those institutions that experienced breaches to their security. These facilities include the Spanish Town Hospital, Bustamante Hospital for Children, Princess Margaret Hospital, Bellevue Hospital and some health centres.

We have developed a strategic security plan which when implemented we hope should result in enhanced security for our patients and workers. The Ministry of Health has taken a decision to tailor security contracts to the security profile of individual health facilities having regard to the fact that the security needs of one institution might be different from that of the other.

I would like to say something generally about the security situation in the broader environment. We have seen in recent years a blatant disregard for institutions that were afforded some level of immunity from criminal activity. I speak of our places of worship, our schools and our health facilities. The reality is that the security environment in the country has changed dramatically.

Our facilities will be hard pressed in this challenging environment to provide immunity from security breaches and criminal activity. Nonetheless, we intend to focus initially on enhancing our security arrangements in three specific areas namely technology, lighting and manpower.

We will also be working more closely with the security forces especially in those facilities that we deem to be high risk. We are reviewing the specifications for security contracts based on the reviews that we have done and our strategic plan.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you and promise that I will continue to keep the nation updated on developments as we work to protect the health of our people.

Thank you.