



**MINISTRY OF HEALTH,
WELLNESS AND THE
ENVIRONMENT**

**Ministerial Building, Kingstown,
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**

March 22, 2020

**HEOC/COVID-19 TASK FORCE ADVISORY: SOCIAL DISTANCING AND MASS
GATHERINGS**

The COVID-19 disease has spread around the globe to the Caribbean, including St Vincent and the Grenadines where there is still only one confirmed case. In order to reduce the likelihood of further spread within St. Vincent and the Grenadines, WHO has recommended “social distancing”. Social distancing is a non-medical tactic used to keep people physically apart from each other, as close contact helps to spread the virus. Social distancing is particularly important to prevent the spread of COVID-19 because there is no vaccine to protect against the virus which causes this disease. Therefore, the Ministry of Health, Wellness and the Environment issues the following advisory to Faith Leaders, Event Organizers and the general public:

1. Faith leaders are asked to be socially, culturally and spiritually flexible at this time and be proactive to protect themselves and their congregation. The following measures are advised:
 - a. As far as is possible reduce the number of church services and conduct services virtually if possible.
 - b. Limit those attending church functions to a number that allows between 3 and 6 feet of space between persons in a seated group (typically 25 or less).
 - c. Keep already planned weddings to a limited gathering of a maximum of 10 persons for the ceremony. The reception could be postponed.
 - d. Postpone or cancel all non-essential social and cultural gatherings.
 - e. Avoid visiting the house bound members especially the elderly. In this regard it is suggested that phone contact would be most appropriate. This will reduce the risk of infecting the vulnerable, sick and elderly.
 - f. Limit those attending funerals to immediate family members (between 10 and 25 persons). An attendance by invitation only approach can be utilized.
 - g. Keep members informed consistently with official, accurate and up-to-date information.
2. Event Organizers and the general public:
 - a. Ensure no overcrowding at events and maintain at least three feet (six feet if possible) between people.
 - b. Hygiene and physical distancing must be combined. Shaking hands, kissing and hugging as forms of greeting should be avoided. Consider smiling, waving or bumping elbows.
 - c. Keep patrons informed consistently and constantly.

- d. Avoid the lunchroom rush if you eat in the employee dining room, cafeteria, or a restaurant. Eat earlier or later, eat at home or eat with just a few people in a quiet area, inside or out.
- e. Avoid using public pens at the retail counter, at the building or hotel guest registration, at the bank, in the revenue office, and other public places. Use your own pen. In conference rooms, don't use the public whiteboard markers. Carry your own.
- f. Avoid the commuter rush periods where possible if you use public transportation. Employers should consider staggering start times for work and allowing work from homes. Avoid times when you'll be exposed to crowds.
- g. Find a quiet place if you are in a public space such as a business office or restaurant.
- h. Substitute tele-meetings for face-to-face meetings and reducing the number or duration of face-to-face meetings. Shift as much of the agenda as possible to email or teleconference.
- i. Use larger conference rooms if you must meet face-to-face.

These recommendations for limiting non-essential contact are guided by scientific evidence, and will go a long way to reduce the spread of COVID-19. To date, St. Vincent and the Grenadines has recorded one confirmed case of COVID-19. The support and co-operation of all citizens are needed at this time, if we are to minimize any further spread of COVID-19.

Dr. Simone Keizer-Beache
Chief Medical Officer
HEOC/COVID-19