

Government to introduce COVID-19 travel card for Family Islands

The Government will introduce a COVID-19 Travel Authorization Card that will allow individuals to travel to approved Family Islands as part of a gradual re-opening of inter-island travel, Prime Minister the Most Hon. Dr. Hubert Minnis announced on Sunday in a live televised COVID-19 National Address.

Under this gradual re-opening, travel to Family Islands cleared to resume normal commercial activity must be approved and monitored under a policy and protocols developed by the Ministry of Health, said Prime Minister Minnis.

This policy and protocol will require individuals to register with the Ministry of Health by emailing covid19travel@bahamas.gov.bs.

Individuals must also submit to an evaluation by a Ministry of Health-authorized physician, in the public or private sector.

This evaluation will include a risk assessment via a questionnaire to determine the individuals level of risk for COVID-19 infection, and a physical exam to determine the presence of any symptoms consistent with COVID-19, the Prime Minister explained.

If deemed low risk and the physical exam does not reveal any symptoms, it is expected that the person will be issued a COVID-19 Travel Authorization Card that will allow travel to the Family Island.

If the individual is deemed a higher risk or has symptoms that may be consistent with COVID-19, the individual will be referred for testing to definitively determine their COVID-19 status.

However, the healthcare provider may still decide that a person who is considered low risk may need to be tested for COVID-19.

Individuals travelling on behalf of their workplace will be subjected to similar requirements, said Prime Minister Minnis. To facilitate these arrangements, the Ministry of Health is collaborating closely with the Civil Aviation Authority.

The Prime Minister said policies and procedures have been developed to enhance communication between the two organizations for decisions regarding who can travel; and where they can travel in the Family Islands or Grand Bahama.

In the first phase of inter-island travel, residents of cleared Family Islands who are in New Providence may travel back home after going through the process outlined.

Individuals may start applying on Wednesday 20 May.

Once cleared for travel, each traveler must present the COVID-19 Travel Authorization Card to the relevant ticket agent.

The card grants approval from the Ministry of Health for inter-island travel. Each person must also present a Government-issued ID.

Residents of the cleared Family Islands may travel between those islands by plane or boat, said Prime Minister Minnis.

For example, a resident of Long Island may travel to Cat Island or any other island included on the list. These residents may travel without the COVID-19 Travel Authorization Card, said the Prime Minister.

Those on the Family Islands cleared for commercial activity may also travel to New Providence and Grand Bahama. But in order to return to their respective islands they must complete the procedures and processes outlined.

Boaters aboard pleasure craft anchored offshore in Bahamian waters for at 14 days will also be allowed to come ashore to conduct routine business, while practicing physical distancing protocols at all times, said Prime Minister Minnis.