



# BELIZE PRESS OFFICE

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Ministry of Health Announces First Case of COVID-19**

*Belmopan. March 23, 2020.* The Ministry of Health announces the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Belize. The patient is a 38-year-old female, Belizean national who resides in San Pedro.

The patient arrived in Belize on Thursday, March 19<sup>th</sup>, and sought medical attention at a private health facility with symptoms on Friday, March 20<sup>th</sup>. Her recent travel history shows she travelled from Los Angeles, California and transited through Texas. Based on this travel history and symptoms she exhibited, Belize's health system was alerted and due process and protocol started. All necessary precautions were taken on the Ministry's end.

The sample was processed for other flu viruses and an initial screening for COVID-19 was carried out at the same time. It was confirmed as positive for COVID-19 at approximately 10:45 p.m. on Sunday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>.

The patient's infection seems to be travel-related and the necessary steps are being taken to contain community spread. The initial measures include:

- Dispatch of two health teams to San Pedro to continue with the mapping exercise of all potential contacts;
- The timely identification and contact tracing for all potentially exposed persons; and
- Shifting of health tasks at the San Pedro Polyclinic.

In addition to the restrictions already implemented, the Government of Belize will now scale-up restrictions and recommendations for residents/non-residents of the island of San Pedro to prevent community spread.

In accordance with international standards, the Ministry of Health will proceed to notify the World Health Organization and Pan American Health Organization through the International Health Regulations platform.

At this time, the surveillance team is still conducting investigations with the patient to determine the level of contact she may have had with other individuals. Those persons may now be isolated, tested and closely monitored for 14 days, and it may include mandatory quarantine.

The Ministry continues to investigate and report on any suspected cases. There is ongoing monitoring of Belize's points of entry, and the reviewing and adjusting of methods or protocols to further strengthen prevention and precaution methods, insisting on self-isolation methods and mandatory quarantine as the cases may require.

The public is hereby advised to remain calm and to continue to follow all the necessary prevention messages. Continue to wash hands frequently with soap and clean water, cover the mouth when coughing and sneezing, and to avoid close contact with those who are ill. All persons having flu-like symptoms are asked to stay home, self-isolate, and call the hotline at 0-800-MOH-CARE for further guidance.

**Ends**