

COVID-19 uptick in Belize and Cayo

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masks be worn in public. The release urges the public to wear masks indoors and in crowded spaces, to wash and/or sanitize hands regularly and to practice social distancing in light of the rising numbers being recorded after GoB's lifting of the major Covid-19-prevention restrictions and the resulting increase in movement and interaction among the populace.

“We haven't identified any specific clusters in these districts as yet, but definitely it is, first, the decrease of the public health measures, the use of the masks, the use of the social distancing, and more socializing. When we look at the data over the last two weeks, we know that persons between the ages of 20 and 39 were the persons who are testing positive, so that is the workforce and that is more than likely persons going out and socializing a little bit more, followed by the age group of 40 to 59. When you look at persons 80 and over and 60 and over, the positivity rate is much less, so it tells us that it's due to moving. We know already how COVID spread, and this is just the proof of what we have been saying in regards to the benefits of the public health measures,” Dr. Melissa Diaz-Musa, Director of Public

Belize City centenarian Leonora Patnett dies at 108

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she told News5 reporters on her 106th birthday in 2019.

She also gave credit to not drinking, not smoking, and making healthy food choices.

Last year, on her 108th birthday, Patnett was visited by Prime Minister of Belize, Hon. John Briceño; Albert area representative, Hon. Tracy Pantón, and Belize City mayor, Hon. Bernard Wagner at her Wagner's Lane residence—the place where she spent much of her life, including during 1961's Hurricane Hattie. She was gifted with a birthday cake, a card, balloons, and a special care package containing grocery items, vitamins, and other products.

Up until the time of her death, Miss Leonora Patnett, who was the aunt of musical legend Wilfred Peters, was Belize's oldest woman. She passed away peacefully in her home on Wagner's Lane.

Her grandson, Lindbergh Sedacy, wrote the following about her passing:

“May she have a peaceful journey back to the stars from where she came. I love you granny, may Yahweh welcome you home.”

Health and Wellness, stated during a ZOOM press conference yesterday.

The Covid-19 positivity rate has doubled over the past couple of days, and the Health Ministry is now rolling out increased surveillance to pinpoint the source of the outbreak and any cluster of cases that might require isolation. In the meantime, the health experts are encouraging the public to continue to wear masks and practice the prevention guidelines, despite the relaxation of restrictions.

“I can speak personally, I wear masks everywhere, all day,” Dr. Natalia Beer, an advisor in the Ministry of Health, said. “I know it had been lifted....yes, the numbers justify the removal of the face mask, but I mean you have to protect yourself, and we have enough information. Every person has enough information right now to know that if you are going into an environment where there is a lot of persons, they can't maintain physical distance, but on your masks I mean, it become a habit now soh...” she added.

While the use of masks has, as Dr. Beer outlined, become embedded in muscle memory for many, a large number of Belizeans, after the lifting of the mask mandate, have opted to leave the masks behind altogether, while using public transportation, and attending large social events. There have been numerous instances recently of large numbers of citizens gathered indoors, in close proximity to each other, and maskless.

“With regards to masks, I think many of us, especially in the health sector, continue wearing our masks. We know the risk. We know how COVID spreads, and we know how we can mitigate some of the spread, and like Dr. Beer said, especially if you are at an indoor place that is very crowded and you can't maintain the distance that you would like to, the safest thing is to put your masks on.” Dr. Diaz-Musa remarked.

Dr. Beer, in her presentation, spoke about the ongoing COVID-19 vaccination campaign and noted that 49% of the population have completed the primary series of COVID-19 vaccination, which consists of the first two shots. While this is far from the goal of vaccinating 85% of the population, Dr. Beer said that 68.7% of persons eligible to receive vaccines (persons 12 years of age and older) have already gotten the jab, and in some cases boosters.

“What we did was look back at the data from June 1, 2021, to up to date, and we used the standard method of age-adjusted mortality rates to compare the risk of death between being vaccinated or an unvaccinated person....because our figures are small we used the 10,000 as the denominator, and you all can see the COVID-19 mortality rate or deaths for every 10,000 persons in Belize who



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are fully vaccinated is 1.9% ; for persons who are not vaccinated it's 48.43%. “ said Dr. Beer.

She suggested that looking at the data in this manner gives a clearer and more meaningful view of the benefits of being vaccinated, and the risks of being unvaccinated. “That means that an unvaccinated person is 24 times more likely to die compared to a completely vaccinated person,” Dr. Beer said.

Dr. Beer agrees that this data, however, while providing general numbers on mortality during the pandemic, needs to be disaggregated in order to give a clearer view of the mortalities and risk factors for those who are unvaccinated, taking into consideration age and pre-existing conditions. The Ministry of Health and Wellness is calling on citizens to

continue taking advantage of the vaccinations that are still within the country at this time, and has noted that at the end of May, the remaining Pfizer vaccines will expire and be discarded, leaving only Johnson and Johnson vaccines available within the country. The Ministry has plans to acquire a new supply of Pfizer vaccines to continue the vaccination of those in the 11-17 age category and to start the inoculation of children between 5 and 11 years old.

“We continue to liaise with other countries and COVAX and through the CARICOM to access more vaccines, but, umm, at this point it is still in negotiations, so I have no specific data to share with you all as to when we will restock for Pfizer vaccines,” Dr. Beer said.