



COVID-19 Response Level Escalated to Level 2 RED

Two Positive Test Results Identified in Individuals in Quarantine

Key messages

- Two recent arrivals, both of which were in compulsory isolation, have tested positive for COVID-19.
- Both individuals are asymptomatic and otherwise well.
- There is minimal risk of community spread, with no known or suspected cases in the community.
- The Response Level has been escalated to Level 2 RED as a precautionary measure.
- Members of the public should remain alert, continue to practise good cough and hand hygiene, observe social distancing and avoid large gatherings
- Anybody who develops a new persistent dry cough, a fever or experiences unexpected shortness of breath should go home, self-isolate and telephone Georgetown Hospital on 66252 for further advice

On Sunday 06 September two positive COVID-19 test results were returned following routine testing of individuals currently subject to compulsory isolation measures. As a consequence of the two positive test results, the Ascension COVID-19 Response Level was escalated on Sunday afternoon to Level 2 RED. This escalation is in line with the Response Level Protocol.

Under Level 2 RED measures, public venues and facilities remain open. As it is expected that the introduction of COVID-19 into the wider community has not occurred, this escalation is a precautionary measure and serves to ensure that a higher level of alertness is observed by authorities on the island and the general public.

Members of the public should continue to practise good cough and hand hygiene. Social distancing is to be encouraged and unnecessarily large gatherings discouraged. As an additional precaution, members of the public may wish to minimise interactions with individuals from outside of their households where possible.

When additional testing confirms negative results and the Senior Medical Officer is satisfied that there is no longer a COVID-19 presence on the island, the Response Level will return to Level 1 AMBER.

Further information regarding this matter will be made available to the public in the coming days.

As ever, anyone who develops a new persistent dry cough, a fever or experiences unexpected shortness of breath should go home, self-isolate and telephone Georgetown Hospital on 66252 for further advice.

Background

The two individuals in question had arrived at Ascension on Friday 04 September. They had both previously returned negative COVID-19 test results on Tuesday 01 September prior to their departure for the island. Both individuals are otherwise well and healthy and are not currently displaying any obvious symptoms. They have now been placed into individual isolation and will have their conditions monitored by medical staff.

The staff at Georgetown Hospital remain in constant liaison with experts in Public Health England to ensure that the two individuals who have tested positive receive appropriate support. As the test results were low-level positives, further testing will take place over the coming days to confirm the level of infection.

This is a scenario that AIG had planned and prepared for. Robust measures for effectively managing arrivals to Ascension have been in place throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. These protocols have been developed in liaison with experts from Public Health England and are designed to ensure that any person arriving at the island is kept separate from the general public until the Senior Medical Officer can be assured that they do not pose a risk of introducing COVID-19 into the community.

As a result, the individuals who have tested positive have not had any contact with the wider public. Authorities are therefore confident that the virus has been effectively contained and so has not been spread to others in the community.

Office of the Administrator
07 September 2020

Further Information

Are members of the public at risk?

AIG have planned and prepared for this scenario, with robust protocols in place to manage all arrivals to Ascension. These have been designed in liaison with experts in Public Health England to ensure that the risk posed to the island by those arriving from affected areas is reduced to the lowest level possible.

Due to the procedures and protocols in place, the risk posed to the general public by someone who is already in quarantine testing positive for COVID-19 is therefore very low. However, members of the public are encouraged to be on a heightened state of alert until the Response Level returns to Level 1 AMBER, to practise good hand and cough hygiene and to consider practising social distancing.

When will the Response Level return to Level 1 AMBER?

The Response Level will be de-escalated once authorities are satisfied that testing has determined there is no longer a threat of COVID-19 from the individuals who tested positive. Further testing will be conducted over the coming days, and the response level may be reduced as a result of these tests.

Where and when were the cases identified?

The cases were identified on Sunday 06 September in two individuals who were already in compulsory isolation following their arrival at Ascension on Friday 04 September. They were tested as part of AIGs routine testing protocols for those who enter small group isolation with others from outside of their own household. They returned low-level positive results with neither displaying any symptoms, and are otherwise currently well and healthy.

What is a low-level positive test result?

The testing platform used in Ascension is a molecular diagnostic tool. As a consequence, results are not black and white but rather fall on a scale of probability. These results are viewed by medical staff and interpreted. If it appears that one may be positive further analysis is conducted by experts in Public Health England.

A low-level positive result is therefore one which identifies the presence of COVID-19 but only in small amounts. This might mean that the individuals are yet to fully develop an illness or that they might be only slightly affected. Although they therefore pose no significant risk to the community, they will nonetheless be observed and isolated as per AIGs protocols.

What will happen to the two individuals now?

The two people have been placed into individual isolation and will be monitored by medical staff. At present they are asymptomatic, so are not displaying any symptoms of COVID-19, and are otherwise fit and well.

What about the other people who were on the plane with them?

The two individuals were identified during routine testing, which all arrivals from that plane were undergoing. At present, no other people who travelled on the plane

with them have tested positive. However, all will be subject to further testing during the 14 day compulsory isolation period and if any further positives are identified these will be appropriately managed by medical staff.

What about staff who worked at the airhead when the plane arrived?

Strict protocols are in place to ensure that for all arriving planes the risk to those who are required to work at the airhead is effectively and appropriately managed. As a result of these procedures there is no need for isolation or further testing of any staff members.