



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

### **Guidelines for the Transfer of Patients into Antigua and Barbuda During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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#### **Background**

Antigua and Barbuda is currently responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministry of Health Wellness and the Environment's response has been to quickly detect, diagnose and manage cases. In order to reduce the risk of introducing the disease in the country the government of Antigua and Barbuda closed its borders to commercial flights. However, commercial flights resumed on June 4 2020.

As part of its measures to control COVID-19, the government of Antigua and Barbuda's Quarantine Authority has established Quarantine Guidelines. These were developed in accordance with the Quarantine Act, Cap 361, Laws of Antigua and Barbuda. The guidelines mandate a 14 day quarantine period for all persons arriving into Antigua and Barbuda by sea or air.

Antigua and Barbuda is a member of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and has for many years provided medical treatment for patients from other OECS member states. Many patients also travel to Antigua and Barbuda for diagnostic investigations that are not available in their countries. Patients transferred to Antigua and Barbuda for treatment and investigations are a potential source of COVID-19. Measures must be taken to reduce the risk of importation of the disease through patient transfers. Additionally, special considerations must be given since patient care would necessitate deviation from the Quarantine Guidelines.

#### **Introduction**

Medical services are provided in Antigua and Barbuda in both the public and private sectors. In the public sector, primary care services are provided through a network of 26 community health clinics. Secondary and tertiary care are provided at the country's only public hospital, the Mount St. John's Medical Center (MSJMC). In addition to patient treatment, the hospital also provides radiology and laboratory services. There are several private practitioners providing primary and secondary health care. There are also private laboratory and radiology services available.

COVID-19 is spread from person to person by respiratory droplets and by contact with contaminated surfaces. Health care settings can be a potential source of COVID-19

infections. Health care workers are also at a higher risk of contracting the disease. Every effort must be made to ensure COVID-19 is not transferred to medical institutions. Early detection and isolation of COVID-19 cases along with the proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE) can reduce the number of cases of COVID-19 in hospital settings. These guidelines are to ensure that there is a timely and smooth transfer of patients who need medical care into Antigua and Barbuda. They have been developed in accordance with the current scientific information on COVID-19 and the laws of Antigua and Barbuda. They will be updated as necessary.

### **Medical Transfers in the Context of COVID-19**

The government of Antigua and Barbuda and the Quarantine Authority recognizes the need for the safe transfer of persons requiring medical attention in Antigua and Barbuda. In order to protect the patient, the public, health care providers and health care institutions the following procedures must be followed for persons entering the country for medical attention.

1. Requests for medical transfers must be sent from the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) of the originating country to the CMO of Antigua and Barbuda who is also the Quarantine Authority.
2. Requests must also be accompanied by:
  - A medical report detailing the person's medical condition, the treatment/investigation required and the urgency of the situation.
  - A COVID-19 RNA PCR test done 72 hours prior to transfer.
  - A letter from the receiving institution stating that the patient has been accepted for care as well as the physician that will be managing the patient.
3. The intended address in Antigua and Barbuda should be provided along with a name and telephone number of a local contact if available.

The above are required to ensure that patients do not arrive without the knowledge of physicians and medical institutions. Once all the above are provided a decision will be communicated to the CMO of the patient's country of origin who would have made the request.

Patients entering Antigua and Barbuda for medical attention must abide by the public health measures for controlling COVID-19 such as the wearing of masks and social and physical distancing.