



## MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SMALL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Levels 5 & 6 Tower C, International Waterfront Centre,  
#1 Wrightson Road, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago  
Telephone No: (868) 625-8478; Fax: 624-4091; Website: <http://www.molsed.gov.tt>

### Media Conference

**Sunday March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020, 10.00 a.m.**

### **Opening Remarks by Senator the Honourable Jennifer Baptiste Primus, Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development.**

### **SUBJECT: WORKPLACE GUIDELINES ON THE CLOSURE OF SCHOOLS**

- Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development – Senator the Honourable Jennifer Baptiste Primus
- Minister of Communications – Senator the Honourable Donna Cox
- Ms Natalie Willis Permanent Secretary - Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development
- Mr Vel Lewis Permanent Secretary – Ministry of National Security
- Commander Darryl Dindial – Chief Personnel Officer
- Dr. Alana Best – Chief Medical Officer, Ministry of Health
- Major **General** (Ret'd) **Rodney Smart** - Chief Executive Officer Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management
- Ms. Carolyn Sancho – Executive Director – Occupational Safety and Health Authority

Good morning and welcome to you all.

We cannot commence this Media Conference without, first of all, expressing our deep appreciation to all of you and especially to the Members of the Media, for responding so readily to our invitation, not only to be here on this Sunday Morning, but to have done so at such short notice. It is cogent manifestation of your patriotism, your dedication and your commitment to the overall welfare and wellbeing of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We are deeply grateful.

Members of the Media,



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COVID - 19 has plunged the world at large into an extraordinary difficult dilemma. On exceptionally rare occasions like these, Governments all over the world - irrespective of socio-economic standing, abundance of power or capacity of might – Governments, the world over, are all called upon to take very difficult, demanding, bold and decisive decisions in defence of the safety, security and protection of their citizenry. We the Government of Trinidad and Tobago never exempt ourselves. We have become renowned and respected at sparing no effort in rallying to each and every call.

And so, in keeping with the policy of this Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and in particular the well-established determination of the Hon Prime Minister, Dr Keith Rowley to lead by example, we are here once again, this time to provide Guidelines to the Citizens of Trinidad and Tobago as the Country continues to grapple with the unusual and unfortunate circumstances forced upon us by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The guidelines which we are about to share with the population at large are designed to mitigate the obvious personal and family logistical inconveniences and the consequential significant workplace adjustments which are expected to be faced as a result of the inevitable decision which had to be taken to have our schools and universities closed for one week in the first instance.

Further to the statement of the Honourable Prime Minister on March 13, 2020 that all schools will be closed for one week, in the first instance, starting on Saturday March 14, 2020, it is recognized that there are parents who are also workers who on Monday March 16, 2020 will be faced with the question of what to do with respect to their children who will be out of school, and there are employers who will be faced with requests from employees to bring their children to work or stay at home.

In dealing with this situation at the workplace, employers and employees in the Public Service, State Enterprises/Private Sector are advised to utilize the following guidelines:

1. At this time it is not advised that children be allowed onto work places/facilities, inclusive of company vehicles or compounds as they too need to be protected;
2. All parents are encouraged to use their support systems in the first instance to take care of their children to allow them to report for duty;



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3. Employers are encouraged to implement remote work policies, where possible, to minimize the need for employees with children to physically attend work;
4. Where it is not possible for employees with children to work from home, recognized majority unions/employees and employers are required to explore options of shift work, staggered hours of work and/or rostering;
5. Where there are both parents in a family, one parent is encouraged to stay at home with the children whilst the other reports for duty;
6. Where alternative work arrangements cannot be made the employee is to be allowed to stay at home with his/her children without being penalized by either disciplinary action or by non-payment of salary;
7. Where discussions between the recognized majority unions/employees and employers have failed to resolve the issue either the employer or recognized majority unions/employees can contact the Conciliation, Advisory and Advocacy Division at [conciliation.mol@gov.tt](mailto:conciliation.mol@gov.tt) or call 299-0300 ext. 2043 or 2124.
8. Employees are advised that if you are not sick do not stay at home.

For the duration of the COVID-19 Pandemic employers are required to implement Pandemic Leave provisions within their organizations in a compassionate manner which ensures business continuity whilst securing the national interest.

In light of the pandemic facing Trinidad and Tobago officers who will be eligible for Pandemic Leave within the Public Service are as follows:

1. *Public Officers – Permanent, temporary, monthly paid and daily rated;*
2. *Fixed Term Contract Employees;*
3. *Short Term Contract Employees;*
4. *On the Job Trainees (OJTS);*
5. *Office Holders within the purview of the Salaries Review Commission (SRC) - (whose Office falls in the Public Service such as Top Managers, Judiciary and Legal Services).*

Employers are encouraged to develop appropriate arrangements to ensure business continuity during this pandemic.



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Let's face the reality. We are all in this together. The perils of COVID - 19 and the attendant dislocations brought upon our country demand that we, the Government and the Citizenry, join forces with one another to combat the menace. Together, we must grapple with the unprecedented peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of this unusual virus which is sweeping the world as we speak.

And so, with an abiding spirit of collaboration, cooperation and commitment on the part of all citizens whatever our personal persuasions, let us lift our hearts and double our efforts as we journey through these turbulent waters together.

On the bright side, with the Grace of Almighty God, and with that relentless spirit of togetherness, we will emerge out of this pandemic, a Nation excessively stronger in purposefulness and more abundantly enlightened and enriched from the experience.

We thank you members of the Media for continuing to be on the ball with us. We invite your assistance in communicating to the population at large the information which we are about to share with you this morning.

Thank you and May Almighty God continue to guide, bless and protect us all.