



NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS (NDC)
COVID-19 TECHNICAL TEAM –MEDIA STATEMENT
RECENT INCREASES IN NUMBERS OF CONFIRMED CASES
& EASING OF RESTRICTIONS

ACCRA, 11/06/2020 – 9th June, 2020, marked an alarming turning point in Ghana’s fight against Covid-19 as we crossed the threshold to 10,201 confirmed cases, as published on the Ghana Health Service (GHS) official website. As at today – 11th June 2020, the cumulative count is now at 10,358. This situation is of major concern and should be foremost on the minds of all Ghanaians regardless of their political affiliations and preferences. Our current trajectory - with cases rising at an increasing rate - demands of Government a comprehensive, dispassionate reassessment of key aspects of its strategy for managing the epidemic. The Team also presents this information to the public in the interest of risk perception and risk awareness. It is crucial that all citizens adhere to the individual preventive behaviours and to take additional precautionary measures to protect themselves and their families as community spread accelerates.

Data available from the GHS shows rapid increases in the daily rate of new cases over the last few weeks. In May, Ghana recorded an average of 245 new cases a day. So far, for June 2020, that rate of increase is up to 272, despite the slowing pace of testing and tracing. The disaggregated data for the Routine Surveillance puts the matter in starker context, as these are the cases in our communities that would go undetected if the patients had not sought care on their own volition. For this group, the rate of increase was 48 new cases per update in April and 92 new cases per update in May. For June 2020, that figure is up to 133 newly reported cases in each update. This pace is not sustainable given the limitations of our health system and public health infrastructure. We note, for example, increasing numbers in certain regions with low health system capacity that still do not have dedicated testing facilities. This is a combination that portends the risk of missing many cases and precipitating silent hotspots.

In light of this evidence of increasing community spread, we wish to focus specific attention on Government’s stated position on the reopening of educational institutions to final year students in secondary and tertiary institutions. It is our view that Government should give greater consideration to the worrying trends in community spread and the self-evident challenges in managing the COVID-19 crisis as part of broader efforts to slow the rising rate of spread.

The daily updates from GHS over the last four weeks tell a story of an expanding epidemic and rising risks in our communities. These facts do not suggest that students, teaching and non-

teaching staff can avoid significant risk of exposure to the virus as the epidemic is not under control. This is the reality, and it must be acknowledged if we are to avoid any further acceleration in the rate of new cases. We offer the following recommendations for urgent action, as Government implements plans for final year students to return to school:

- 1. Testing Protocols for Students, Teachers and Non-Teaching Staff:** We recommend that all persons in the groups stated above, be tested for COVID-19 to preempt any potential spread on secondary schools and university campuses. We acknowledge the limitations of our testing capacity in this respect, but urge Government to - at the very least - delineate a quarantine and testing protocol for returning students heading to residential facilities to limit importation of infections onto campuses. Protocols around identifying, isolating and commencing treatment must be developed and implemented across all academic institutions that are to receive students. While noting Government's plans to disinfect academic institutions, we strongly advise that those efforts executed in isolation will not constitute a strategic plan and must be combined with the actions recommended above for better outcomes in risks of exposure to the virus on academic institutions.
- 2. Provision of Infirmaries/ Sick Bays/ University Hospitals:** The adequacy of medicines, PPE's, COVID-19 specific equipment and other relevant health infrastructure for infirmaries, sick bays and university hospitals across all academic institutions must also be holistically addressed. Protocols around access to students by their parents and guardian must be absolutely clarified should incidents of infections occur.
- 3. Provision of Isolation Centres:** In addition to medical facilities on campus, provision must be made available for isolation centres within academic institutions again, as a mitigating strategy against the spread of the virus in the event of local outbreaks.
- 4. Social Distancing Protocols in Boarding Houses and Classrooms:** Developing, implementing and constantly monitoring adherence to social distancing in the known communal life of students on campus is another requirement to check increased risk to the virus. Government's plans in this regard and resources to execute the plans should be available to all stakeholders.

Our children are our nation's greatest asset for the future of our country. Their safety and well-being must take precedence over all other considerations. We wish to state for the record that even if these recommendations are implemented, they are still not a guarantee of minimized risk to students, teachers and non-teaching staff in the context of an uncontrolled epidemic. As such, we reiterate the call on Government to pursue these interventions until such a time as the data shows a consistent decrease in the pace of new cases.

In referencing the various technical recommendations we have offered Government from March 2020 to date, we have remained consistent and reiterate the following:

1. Government should articulate a strategic public health crisis management plan with focus on shortfalls in public education around COVID-19;
2. Mass testing as the surest path to securing clarity on the full extent of COVID-19 prevalence nationwide;
3. WHO-certified protocols for reducing the spread of infection must prevail and borders should remain closed.

Finally, and of great concern, the current trajectory of the COVID-19 in Ghana lays bare the reality that our public and private health facilities will shortly begin to struggle to keep up with the demands of the epidemic. We caution all Ghanaians to avoid a false sense of security following the further easing of restrictions, as the footprint of COVID-19 on the ground is only getting bigger. We urge the public to stay at home as much as possible, to avoid non-essential movement, and to respect all health protocols outlined from the onset, as these are more pragmatic interventions given the case numbers we currently have.

Signed for and on behalf of the NDC COVID-19 Technical Team.



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