PARLIAMENTARY BRIEF BY THE HON. MINISTER OF HEALTH:

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK AND UPDATES ON GHANA’S
PREPAREDNESS; 4TH MARCH 2020

Following the declaration of the outbreak of the Novel Corona Virus Disease, christened COVID-19, as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) by the World Health Organisation on the 30th of January 2020, the Ministry of Health has led several efforts aimed at preparedness and response to any potential outbreak in Ghana.

This brief is to provide updates to the Honourable members on COVID-19 preparedness and response in Ghana.

The number of cases sharply increased from 20,604 cases as of 4th February 2020, to 90,302 as of 2nd March 2020 with 3,085 deaths.

We wish to remind ourselves of the following characteristics of the disease: Symptoms include fever, cough, difficulty in breathing and could be fatal. The disease is spread through droplets (coughing and sneezing; close personal unprotected risk by touching or contact with infected person). Currently, various treatment options are being explored, there is no cure, but treatment is mainly symptomatic. Furthermore, there is no vaccine and prevention is mainly by adherence to cough and sneezing etiquette and improved personal hygiene such as regular hand-washing with soap and water.
In line with the World Health Organization’s recommendations to member states to prepare and prevent further international spread of the outbreak by strengthening systems for containment including active surveillance, early detection, isolation, case and contact management, the following preparedness and response actions have been triggered in Ghana.

**Coordination**

- A health prevention emergency response team has been constituted by the President to handle the crises, which has been reporting to the President on a daily basis.
- The public health emergency management structures at all levels (national, regional, district) have been activated and placed on high alert
- National Technical Coordinating Committee meetings ongoing
- The Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) has been activated and have met five (5) times
- Alerts have been sent to all regions to activate Public Health Emergency Management Committees (PHEMCs) to initiate preparedness activities and enhance surveillance for respiratory diseases.
- Stakeholder engagements have been conducted with the GHS: GHS Directors – HQ RDHS; CEOs of Teaching Hospitals; CHAG; Private Sector; National Ambulance Service; Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research (NMIMR); Kumasi Centre for Collaborative Research (KCCR); Kotoka International Airport (KIA); the World Health Organisation (WHO); Donor Partners.
- The MOH has also engaged the Chinese Ambassador to Ghana to enhance information sharing and discuss monitoring/surveillance activities on returning Chinese Nationals to Ghana.
• The National Technical Coordinating Committee (NTCC) has met twice to plan coordination and preparedness activities.

• Monitoring of the national preparedness is being done through the WHO preparedness checklist.

• The national PH Emergency Preparedness Plan has been updated and a COVID-19 preparedness plan has been developed.

• The Director General of Ghana Health Service has held a meeting with all the Regional Directors of Health Services (RDHS) to discuss preparedness activities and planning for the outbreak.

• The Regional Public Health Emergency Management Committees have been activated, and all the regions have updated their plans.

• Parliamentarians and Select Committee on Health have been briefed on preparedness activities on two (2) occasions.

Points of Entry (PoE)

• Stakeholder engagements with the Ghana Airport Company Limited, Ghana Immigration Services, Customs Division of Ghana Revenue Authority etc. held to strengthen COVID 19 preparedness and surveillance.

• Screening of passengers on arrival has started using thermal scanning and a health declaration form (HDF) ongoing.

• PoE staff sensitized on case detection and Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) undertaken for the heads of the designated points of entry and all KIA staffs.

• Holding room has been identified at the Kotoka International Airport to be utilized to hold COVID 19 suspected cases.

• Training of Port Health staff from Designated points of Entry (POE) and all staff from KIA.
Surveillance

- We have adapted and circulated COVID-19 case definition to regional and lower levels.
- We have also adapted a COVID-19 case investigation form and is currently in use.
- The National Rapid Response Team has been activated
- National Level Training for Rapid Response Teams and other Health Workers on Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI) has been done
- Training of regional and district Rapid Response Teams have been planned for execution
- Clinician Sensitization (Including the private sector members) has been conducted.
- Forty (40) suspected corona virus cases have been reported and tested. All 40 have tested negative for COVID-19 from Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research (NMIMR) and Kumasi Centre for Collaborative Research (KCCR)
- Procurement of more reagents and primers for confirmation of coronavirus cases is ongoing.
- A quarantine centre has been established.
- Another remotely located 100-bed capacity facility is being secured for the purpose of quarantine for eligible persons and this will be ready for use in two weeks.

Case management / Infection Prevention and Control (IPC)

- Case management protocols for COVID-19 have been adapted from WHO protocols and disseminated to the regions for further dissemination to the districts and facilities.
- Greater Accra Regional (Ridge) hospital and Tema General Hospitals have been designated as treatment /isolation centres. All five (5) teaching and Ten (10) regional hospitals have the potential to manage COVID-19 cases.
Staff training has been conducted for case management teams.

The World Bank is supporting the completion of the Debrah Ward at the 37 Military Hospital: a 25-bed capacity infectious disease centre with modern facilities and this will be ready in three (3) weeks.

**Risk Communication/ Social Mobilization**

- Media briefing has been conducted on prepared activities.
- Key messages and educational materials on Coronavirus preparedness and preventive measures have been developed and disseminated
- Preventive messages on COVID-19 developed and being broadcast on airport screens
- Four press releases on COVID 19 issued by the Ministry/GHS.
  - Information on evolution of the outbreak globally, clinical symptoms,
  
    directions on prevention and measures being taken within the country to early detect and manage possible cases.
  
    - Updates on the country’s preparedness activities and on cases suspected and tested.
- Radio and television discussions/engagements on the outbreak and Ghana’s preparedness activities by GHS officials ongoing.
- Daily and weekly updates for public education purposes ongoing.
- Jingles have also been developed for regions and districts.
- Regional risk communication and social mobilisation training are also ongoing.
• Dedicated contact lines have been given to the general public to report suspected cases of COVID-19. The phone lines are:
  • 055 2222 004; 055 2222 005; 050 9497 700; 055 8439 868; 0800110555 (toll free)

Alternatively, text messages can be sent to the short code 199

Logistics

• So far, five thousand (5,000) PPEs have been procured and distributed to all regions and major health facilities Points of Entry (PoE), Teaching Hospitals, and treatment centres and selected health facilities.

• Additional protective equipment is being procured.

I wish to use the opportunity to provide advice to the general public that: due to the nature of this outbreak, it is imperative that the general public continue to observe the following preventive measures:

• Regular washing of hands with soap and water

• Use of alcohol hand rub where available, in the meantime or traditional handshaking culture must now be avoided as much as possible.

• Keep a distance of at least one metre from a person showing signs of fever, cough and difficulty in breathing

• When contact with a sick person or with potentially infected surfaces or objects, it is advised that you refrain from touching your eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
• People should seek treatment immediately at the nearest health facility if infection is suspected, if symptoms occur or upon advice by a health worker

• People from affected countries who develop symptoms should stay at home and call the helplines for advise and necessary action.

We strongly advise that non-essential travel to and from affected areas should be discouraged.

The Ministry of Health continues to work with the Development Partners to monitor the situation and further strengthen systems to prevent the introduction of the outbreak in Ghana, and early detect and contain it if it should occur.

In conclusion, I wish to indicate that, the Government of Ghana is doing everything possible to prevent and protect against the outbreak and spread of the infection in Ghana. This is being done in collaboration with our development partners.

I wish to express my utmost gratitude to all development partners for their continuous support.

We are in this together and therefore call on the private sector and development partners to give their support to our national effort in this period of preparedness.

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MINISTER FOR HEALTH