

**NEWS STORY**

**TO NEWS EDITOR FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**VPA Urges Calm during Lockdown/Isolation for Coronavirus**

The Violence Prevention Alliance (VPA) is encouraging Jamaicans to remain calm, educate themselves about the coronavirus and how they can protect themselves and refrain from turning to violence.

This is as the VPA condemns the reported beating of a 38 year-old farmer from Bethel Town in Westmoreland who was beaten and thrown off a bus this week after he sneezed multiple times and was accused of carrying the deadly COVID-19.

The VPA said the actions of the passengers on the bus reflect the level of intolerance and fear that the virus has been driving but it was important that while persons are concern for their health and safety, they also need to show compassion.

Meanwhile, the Alliance also raises concerns that there is a potential risk that the lock down of families or self-isolation to prevent the spread of the virus, could increase domestic violence in the homes.

The government has ordered the closure of schools and instructed that only persons working in essential services should report for work while the private sector with remote-access capabilities should direct employees to work from home.

The Alliance however noted that the situation can be breeding ground for domestic violence as the confinement will encourage the abuser to leverage control. The VPA is encouraging friends and family to be on the alert for signs of coercive controlling behaviour during the pandemic and to alert the relevant authorities.

Research shows that violence against women increases during times of stress or anxiety, and experts say the next few months are likely to be particularly acute due to financial insecurity, alcohol consumption and health concerns.

In the meantime, the VPA is encouraging persons to engage in constructive activities to cope with the isolation. This include starting a backyard garden by cultivating cash crops such as callaloo, tomatoes, peas and peppers.

“These are plants that can grow over a short period of time in containers or along a fence and you can reap enough to share with your neighbours,” said the Alliance.

The organisation is also offering the following tips to deal with isolation:

* Take time to talk with your child or teen about the COVID-19 outbreak. Answer questions and share facts about COVID-19 in a way that your child or teen can understand.
* Reassure your child or teen that they are safe. Let them know it is ok if they feel upset. Share with them how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn how to cope from you.
* Try to keep up with regular routines. If schools are closed, create a schedule for learning activities and relaxing or fun activities.
* Be a role model.  Take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat well. Connect with your friends and family members.

Meanwhile persons are urged to practice the necessary steps issued by the Ministry of Health & Wellness to limit personal risk of infection. These include:

* Washing hands thoroughly and frequently for at least 20 seconds each time
* Using an alcohol-based sanitizer if water is not available, with no less than 60% alcohol
* Practicing social distancing, recommended as one metre (three feet or two steps) away from other persons and avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
* Avoid physical contact, such as handshakes, hugging and cheek kissing.

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