The Commonwealth of The Bahamas

74th WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY (2021)
AGENDA ITEM 20 – Enhancement of Laboratory Biosafety
REFERENCE DOCUMENTS A74/18

Madame Chair

Laboratory biosafety has come to increasing prominence globally in recent years, particularly in light of covid-19. The Bahamas' national laboratory network has benefited from several laboratory biosafety initiatives sponsored and/or co-sponsored by WHO, including IATA's infectious substances shipment training, national biosafety guidelines workshops, and participation in regional biosafety working groups. Such initiatives increases The Bahamas' compliance with the IHR, and strengthens our overall biosafety measures and measurements nationally.

Madame Chair

The Bahamas is an archipelago with a highly centralized population in it's capital, Nassau, as well as a concomitant centralization of laboratory infrastructure. From the perspective of national biosafety considerations, this means shipping potentially infectious samples and biohazardous waste from the Family Islands to Nassau. Covid-19 has resulted in expanded use of rapid antigen testing to non-laboratory settings throughout our archipelago with attendant benefit and risk.

As such there is therefore ongoing need for IATA's infectious substances shipping training for healthcare personnel throughout the archipelago, and training for local airlines and couriers. There is also need for a national biosafety policy, which was halted because of the pandemic, but which is still necessary to provide a framework for national biosafety monitoring and/or intervention. Given the current national and global focus on covid-19, enhancing laboratory biosafety is best approached strategically and pragmatically through strengthening covid-19 responsiveness: such as standardized biosafety training for covid-19 rapid antigen testing; training of national biosafety officers in containment measures; biosafety assessment tools and software.

Madame Chair

Enhancing laboratory biosafety is of utmost importance in a small island developing archipelago like The Bahamas. Emphasis should be placed on enhancing biosafety in non-laboratory settings where point of care testing is taking place, particularly in sparsely inhabited Family Islands with low infrastructure. Continuous training in IATA's shipping is vital to limiting biosafety incidents. Nationally, biosafety monitoring can be enhanced through multi-level training and improved information technology, but ultimately must be under-girded by a national biosafety policy.

Thank you