UK supports overseas territories in coronavirus (COVID-19) battle

The UK is boosting support for 14 British Overseas Territories during the coronavirus pandemic, utilising cutting-edge technology and Britain's talent for creative invention to help 270,000 people in some of the world's most isolated communities fight coronavirus.

The package includes:

- former oxygen machines used for fighter jets repurposed into hospital-grade units for the Falkland Islands
- a 24/7 hotline connecting Overseas Territories (OT) medics with health experts around the globe to ensure they can access world-leading medical advice
- new testing machines to enable 6 Territories to test for coronavirus for the first time
- new technology rolled out to a further 3 Territories to bolster their existing testing capability
- funding for an Oxygen Generator Unit in the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Anguilla to provide increased capacity for future emergencies

The testing technology has been provided by the UK government to test for coronavirus, but will also provide long term local capacity to test for other viruses, such as Zika and dengue, which continue to impact communities across the Caribbean.

Previously, tests had to be shipped overseas, sometimes thousands of miles back to the UK, from OTs such as the Falkland Islands. The 13 new testing machines and extra medical equipment will now enable OT health services to receive same-day results and respond to transmissions in real time.

The UK government is working with each Overseas Territory Government to respond to their individual needs – this work has included public health support, bolstering security, keeping access routes open for vital supplies, and supporting British people who are unable to get home, as well as providing UK aid to the most vulnerable Territories.

Minister for the Overseas Territories, Baroness Sugg, said:

> In times of crisis the UK family always stands together and our package of support for the Overseas Territories not only benefits communities in the fight against coronavirus, but also in the long term.
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> Whether that is helping them test for viruses, such as Zika and dengue, or supplying critical medical equipment to provide life-saving support to British people who live in some of the most remote locations in the world.

As part of the UK's support, military aircraft specialists have devised a way to adapt aircraft oxygen units to provide life-saving support for the Falkland Islands.

Air Separation Units (ASUs), used previously to generate oxygen for aircrew on Tornado and Hercules operations in the Royal Air Force from the 1990s to around 2016, were identified by aircraft engineering specialists at Defence Equipment and Support as offering the potential to adapt to produce oxygen for coronavirus patients. Working with the Defence Electronics and Components Agency (DECA) and RAF personnel, the machines were sourced, customised and then quickly deployed.

Minister for Defence Procurement, Jeremy Quin said:

> Our Armed Forces have been core to the support provided to Overseas Territories during the coronavirus outbreak, from delivering vital medical supplies to dedicated military teams offering security and planning advice.
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> Repurposing parts originally destined for fighter jets demonstrates the versatility of what our military can offer our partners in the Overseas Territories: Air Separation Units having been turned into life-saving oxygen machines.

Personnel from 5001 Squadron at RAF Wittering were trained to operate the oxygen equipment, and deployed 2 of their own technicians to install the equipment at RAF Mount Pleasant on the Falkland Islands.

Meanwhile, a UK-funded Oxygen Generator Unit has been commissioned in the compound of Anguilla's hospital, the Princess Alexandra Hospital, to provide resilience to the island and save local health authorities hundreds of thousands of pounds. The generator and storage facility will save the island around £10,000 a month and provide increased capacity during the coronavirus crisis and any future national emergencies.

The Overseas Territories have played an important part in the UK's coronavirus crisis response, with the Falklands allowing 3 cruise ships to dock to enable hundreds of British passengers to return home, and the Cayman police helicopter delivering medicines to stranded British nationals on the MV Braemar cruise ship in April.