



PAPUA NEW GUINEA  
JOINT AGENCY TASK FORCE  
NATIONAL OPERATIONS CENTRE 19  
(JATFNOC19)



**STATE OF EMERGENCY  
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY CONTROLLER  
Dr Paison Dakulala  
Acting Secretary for Health**

**MEDIA STATEMENT**  
Tuesday 31st March 2020  
COVID-19 Update on Day 9

**Health sector response to COVID-19 - Day 9**

**AS OF TODAY PNG has only one confirmed imported case of COVID-19.**

That has been referred to as the index case, and the patient has since been repatriated outside of PNG confirmed Dr Paison Dakulala, Acting Secretary of the Department of Health and Deputy Controller of the State of Emergency.

Mr Dakulala said this case was quickly identified in the country and this demonstrates that PNG's disease surveillance system is working and can detect cases in a timely manner.

"Since then our surveillance officers have been taking aggressive contact tracing – identifying those who have come in contact and test everyone who has symptoms," Dr Dakulala said.

He said that the highlight over the last nine days includes the fact that of the 114 total contacts the health team has been able to reach a majority of them and that those who had symptoms have been tested.

Other points to note include:

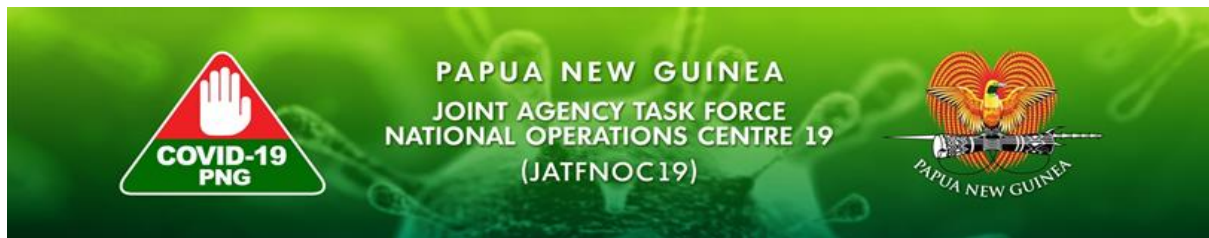
- All the 15 passengers from the charter flight from Lae to Bulolo and mine site have all tested negative as announced on Sunday.
- All 4 health workers who came into contact with the index case at the airport have all been cleared.
- Fifty-two of the 54 passengers who were on board PX 208 from Port Moresby to Lae, Rabaul and Hoskins with the index case have been cleared.
- These are the numbers in terms of the surveillance at the points of entry:

o 29,232 who arrived in our airport since end of January until yesterday. We also take into account the health workers, the pilots and the crew and we continue to monitor and screen flights currently airlifting cargoes.

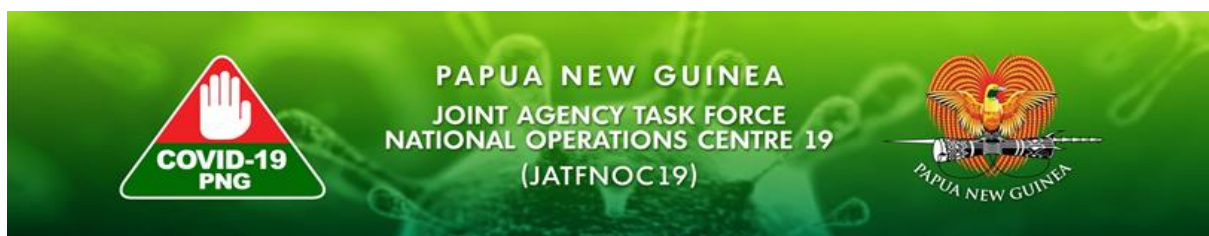


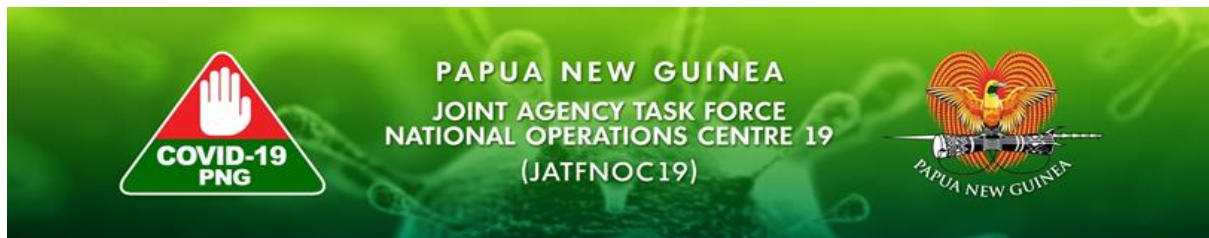
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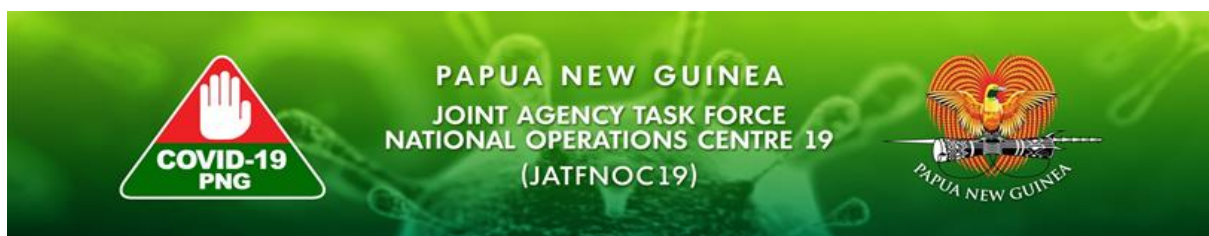


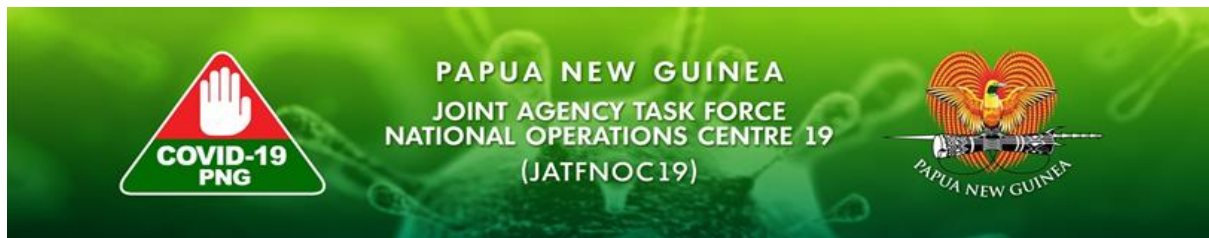
- o 6,431 have travel history to COVID-19 affected countries monitored by the surveillance team and this include Australia, China, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea and Thailand.
- o 4,825 have completed the monitoring and have been cleared.
- o 1,606 are still under active monitoring.
  - In the last 24 hours, there have been 28 flights scheduled to transport medical supplies cargoes and health workers throughout the country. These flights passengers comprised of pilots, crew members and the screening team on the ground. These crew members are also being monitored.
  - In the last 24 hours, we have received 1,781 calls through the hotline. Our rapid response teams verify them and continue to follow up.
- o Our laboratory, the Institute of Medical Research (IMR) has so far conducted 94 tests done as of 27 March, 86 negative except the index case.
- o There are 10 samples received by the PNG Institute of Medical Research (PNGIMR). This includes the specimens from Port Moresby, Lae, Jiwaka and Nonga.
- o We are aware of the rumours circulating around Wewak, Moreguina and Chimbu and would like to assure the public that the team from the Health Department are working around the clock to ensure we verify these rumours. We will continue to update you as we gather more information.
- o We have also trained 10 Lab Personnel who will boost the capacity of the laboratory testing in Port Moresby.
  - Our testing capacity at PNGIMR can conduct 300 tests a day and we are looking to further increase our tests this week.
  - Starting Wednesday 1 April, the UPNG Medical School Laboratory will start testing after the ongoing training. That will improve our capacity to test additional 200 samples a day.
  - On the Universal Transport Mediums (UTMs) Status, we have identified the need for 120,000 UTMs in the country. Right now, we have:
    - o 160 UTMs distributed to 16 provinces.





- o 580 UTM's currently in Port Moresby.
- o 4,200 UTM's to arrive in Port Moresby this afternoon from Australia.
- On the capacity to care for patients:
  - o Rita Flynn Complex is an Isolation Centre in Port Moresby and will be in operation next week.
  - o People with cold and flu symptoms are advised to call the toll free number 1800200 to report and they will be advised accordingly.
  - o Only those who are tested positive with COVID-19 will be sent to the Rita Flynn Isolation Centre.
  - o Provinces through the PHAs are also doing the same preparations at the provincial level.
    - On the logistics and supplies, especially personal protective equipment (PPE), health teams have deployed supplies to the provinces including the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. These provinces have each received 200 pieces of PPE each.
    - In terms of communication and awareness the Government and non-government partners assistance in raising awareness is appreciated.
      - o With support from the World Health Organization (WHO), we have communication materials with prevention messages sent to the provinces and partners. These are available on social media (Facebook pages of National Department Of Health, World Health Organization, Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary (RPNGC) and Joint Agency Task Force National Operations Centre19 (JATF NOC19).
      - o 100,000 printed (sent or on the way to the provinces).
      - o Radio messaging (Talk Back) currently utilized by FM100.
      - o WHO is developing information to correct rumours and myths about COVID-19.





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o The Department of Information, Communication and Technology have a COVID-19 website that is disseminating all Joint Agency Task Force statements. These include press statements from the Prime Minister, SOE Controller and the Health Minister.

o Sign boards have been produced by the Health Minister's Office and are erected at the airport and Vision City.

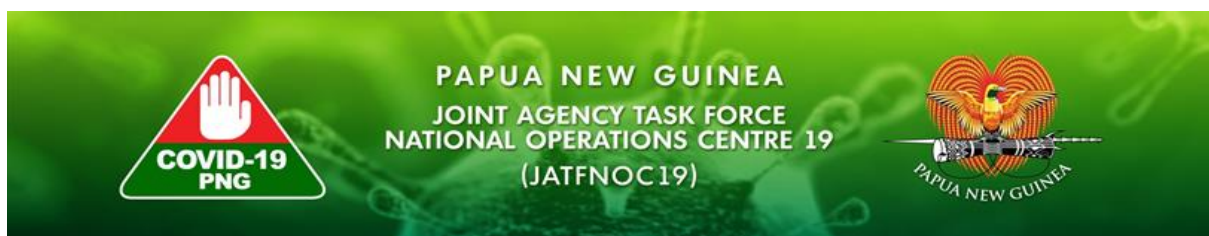
o With support from WHO, NDOH continues to develop messages. UNICEF is supporting to print copies of the posters that will be sent to the provinces.

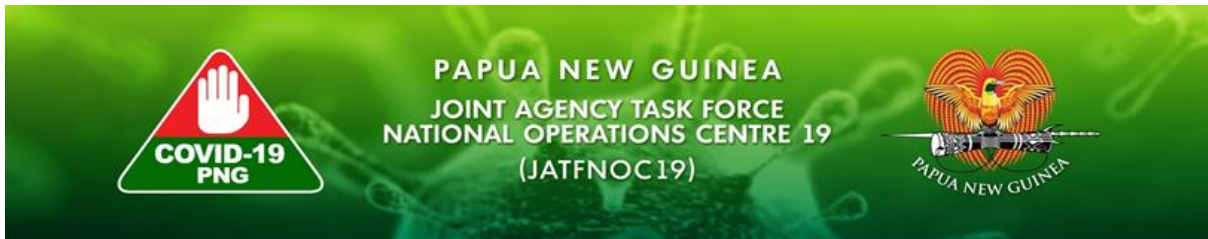
o 2 million people have been reached by SMS messaging as of yesterday. This is being monitored and updates to be made available on a daily basis.

Dr Dakulala said that whilst COVID-19 may cause fear and anxiety within the public the best thing everyone can do is to protect each other. He said we are all in this together and we all have a role to play.

He said every Papua New Guinea citizen and resident can do something to help by becoming a promoter and doer of prevention measures:

1. Practice basic personal hygiene. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water (after coughing or sneezing; when caring for the sick; before, during and after you prepare food; before eating; after toilet use; and whenever hands are dirty);
2. Avoid close contact with people who are unwell. Stay at home and take that opportunity to reconnect with your family;
3. Avoid mass gathering, crowded places or congregating in groups. Practice physical distancing – keep 1m distance away from others.
4. If you have cough, fever, and shortness of breath and have recently travelled to a country with COVID-19 transmission, call the hotline at 1800200.





Dr Dakulala said COVID-19 is a disease that has never been seen before in the world. To date, there are 203 countries all over the world fighting the pandemic, with 697,244 cases and more than 33,000 deaths. Even countries with strong health system are also facing challenges.

“We do not know how this virus will behave in PNG so I am encouraging you to support your Government in facing this enemy. Our enemy is the virus, not each other. Our solidarity can make a big difference in making us win this war against the disease.

“Remember the virus doesn’t move, unless people move it. When we stop moving, the virus stops moving,” said Acting Secretary Dr Dakulala.

