



JOINT NDOH and WHO MEDIA RELEASE

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COVID-19 threat remains real in PNG Pandemic – not even close to being over

30 June 2020, Port Moresby. Today marks six months since the World Health Organization received the first reports of a cluster of cases of pneumonia-like illness in China, that we now know as COVID-19.

This milestone of the pandemic coincides with reaching a sombre landmark of 10 million cases and 500,000 deaths globally. Today, the World Health Organization warned this pandemic is **not even close to being over**.

COVID-19 continues to rage across the world, with almost 200,000 new cases reported each day.

When the first case was reported in Papua New Guinea, the country implemented unprecedented measures to suppress transmission and save lives. This involved by locking down borders, restricting movement of people and introducing physical distancing measures. This has helped the country minimize the spread of the virus – with 11 cases reported as of today.

However, the COVID -19 threat to our community remains very real. Recently, the country has identified three new cases in the capital city of Port Moresby. The investigation and contract tracing are ongoing to find, isolate and test people who may have been infected.

The Acting Secretary of the National Department of Health Dr Paison Dakulala cautioned the public to remain vigilant, and that the pandemic is not over yet. “We have active cases in the country that we are following up. We should learn a lesson from our neighbours who are seeing resurgence in cases after easing their restrictions. We need to remain aware and alert and always follow health advice.”

“The six-month milestone in the global response reminds us all that the fight against COVID-19 will be for a long haul and we need to sustain the efforts to save lives,” said Dr Luo Dapeng, WHO Representative to Papua New Guinea. “WHO and our partners have worked relentlessly to support the PNG Government prepare for and respond to COVID-19, and we will remain committed to ensure we protect people and save lives’, Dr Luo added.

There is no cure and no vaccine for COVID-19 and the Government is promoting the new normal way of life, locally referred to as “niupela pasin”. “It may be sometime until a vaccine is found, produced and distributed globally, and until then, we are all responsible for keeping ourselves, our families and community safe by following health measures, added Dr Dakulala.

Dr Dakulala also cautioned against stigma that hampers the work of the frontline health staff “There have also been concerning reports of stigma and discrimination attached to this pandemic, especially towards our health workers. My warning today is that nobody is invincible from COVID19. We share the same risk as the virus does not discriminate” he said.

“Our health workers in Papua New Guinea are critical in the fight against COVID-19”, said Dr Luo. “I appeal to the public to support our frontline workers. They are the key sectors looking after our health – they need to be supported, not stigmatized.”

The public is reminded that the now more than ever, it is imperative to follow the health messages on niupela pasin.

You can reduce your chances of being infected or spreading COVID-19 by taking some simple precautions:

- Stay away from crowded places and maintain at least 1.5 metre distance from others.
- Wear a mask if physical distancing is not possible.
- Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
- Cover your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, call the COVID-19 toll-free hotline 1-800200 immediately.