



PRESS STATEMENT

24th March, 2020

Novel coronavirus (COVID19) testing at the Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research

On 30 January, World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID19 a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, activating a global response to the outbreak. The Government of Papua New Guinea through the National Department of Health immediately appointed the Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research (PNGIMR) to conduct all COVID19 related testing for the country.

PNGIMR is a WHO accredited National Influenza Centre and as such, routinely conducts testing for a wide range of respiratory pathogens. PNGIMR adopted a laboratory testing protocol for COVID19 detection that was recommended for National Influenza Centres within the WHO network. This protocol involves the detection of two specific gene targets for the novel coronavirus. The Director of PNGIMR, Professor William Pomat said today, “We conduct laboratory testing according to stringent guidelines for scientific rigor and biosafety that are consistent with the Institute’s WHO accreditation.”

Since 31 January, PNGIMR has received samples for COVID19 testing from clinicians throughout PNG. These samples have been collected from patients who display appropriate symptoms (cough, fever and/or shortness of breath) suggestive of COVID19 and who have travelled into PNG from countries where COVID19 has been detected. While all testing is conducted at PNGIMR, test results and all COVID19 related updates are released by the Ministry of Health and the National Department of Health.

On 18 March, PNGIMR detected the country’s first positive case for COVID19, which has now prompted the Government of Papua New Guinea to declare a State of Emergency, effective 24 March. To date, PNGIMR has tested a total of 38 samples. Currently, there is no evidence yet of widespread and sustained community transmission in PNG, however the public is strongly advised to practice social distancing, regular handwashing, disinfection of commonly touched surfaces, and self-isolation if symptomatic.

More information can be found on the WHO website (www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/). Or contact the Government hotline number on (+675) 7196 0813.