



This Situation Report is jointly issued by PNG National Department of Health and World Health Organization once weekly. This Report is not comprehensive and covers information received as of reporting date.

## Situation Summary and Highlights

- ❑ As of 31 January 2021 (12:00 pm), there have been 867 COVID-19 cases and nine COVID-19 deaths reported in Papua New Guinea. From the period of 25 to 31 January, there have been 17 new cases: 11 from West New Britain, 3 from Morobe, 2 from New Ireland, and 1 from the National Capital District. The total number of provinces that have reported COVID-19 cases to date is sixteen.
- ❑ West New Britain's lock-down has been lifted and Provincial PCC are leading the ongoing management and implementation of the Nuipela Pasin measures. Domestic flights in and out of Hoskins resume as per normal schedules.
- ❑ Antigen Rapid Diagnostic Test (AgRDT) validation training sessions were conducted in Western Province.
- ❑ There is a **steady increase** in influenza-like illnesses (ILI) and severe acute respiratory infections (SARI) around the country and COVID-19 testing rates of these cases remains low.
- ❑ The Australian Government has committed PGK374Million over 3 years to support the purchase and distribution of COVID-19 Vaccines in PNG.
- ❑ Free testing for symptomatic people continues to be available at nine clinics in Port Moresby: Taurama, Badili, Tokara, Gordons, Lawes Road, Kaugere, Morata, Bomana CIS and Bomana Police College. Travellers requiring rapid tests can continue to access testing for a fee through the facilities listed in the Measures released by the Controller.
- ❑ The Controller issued a memo advising that the National Control Centre will provide an updated country list at the beginning of each week that be guided by a risk assessment prepared by NDOH. Countries will be categorised high, medium or low risk with appropriate restriction and quarantine criteria applying to each. All measures are available on the PNG National Control Centre for COVID-19 website: <https://covid19.info.gov.pg/>

**Table 1. COVID-19 IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA<sup>1</sup>**

	New Cases (25 to 31 January 2021)	Cumulative Total
National Capital District	1	368
Western	0	214
West New Britain	11	179
East New Britain	0	30
New Ireland	2	21
Eastern Highlands	0	13
Central	0	10
Western Highlands	0	10
Morobe	3	9
East Sepik	0	3
Enga	0	3
Milne Bay	0	2
West Sepik	0	2
AROB	0	1
Hela	0	1
Southern Highlands	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>867</b>

<sup>1</sup> As of 31/01/2021, 12:00 pm, PNG time

**Table 2. COVID-19 GLOBAL AND REGIONAL UPDATE<sup>2</sup>**

	Confirmed Cases	Deaths
Global	102 083 344	2 209 195
Western Pacific	1 420 027	24 588

<sup>2</sup> WHO COVID-19 Dashboard as of 31/01/2021, 4:03 pm CET

## Summary Upcoming Events and Priorities

- ❑ **Surveillance and Quarantine:** A major focus this week will be the continued Antigen Rapid Diagnostic Test (AgRDT) validation training in Western Highlands and Morobe Provinces. Additional focus will be on continuing to undertake epidemiological analysis to support whole genome sequencing (WGS) results conducted by national reference labs in Singapore and Australia for COVID-19 cases from PNG. This includes undertaking a review of the country of origin and port of departure of all incoming passengers to PNG over the past 6 months. Analysis of a healthcare worker survey will also be finalised and a report will be prepared for dissemination.
- ❑ **Health Operations:** A strategic meeting of the clinical cluster lead working group will be held to discuss strategies for integrating COVID-19 activities with other routine public health programs, such as TB, HIV and malaria.
- ❑ **Laboratory:** This week the laboratory team will focus on continuing AgRDT validation roll-out training in Morobe and Western Highlands Province. Additional genomic sequencing was conducted last week by National Public Health Laboratory (NPHL) Singapore. Laboratory team will be reviewing the findings of the report this week and prepare a summary briefing. The team will also be focusing on conduct AgRDT Validation roll-out training in Morobe and Western Highlands Provinces.
- ❑ **Case Management and Infection Prevention and Control:** Work is continuing to source additional technical assistance through the WHO Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) and RedR/Australia Assists. The NDOH is hosting an Infection Prevention Control (IPC) network workshop in Port Moresby this week on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> and Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> February.
- ❑ **Risk Communication & Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs):** The risk communication team will begin to convene Vaccine Communications planning meetings with the RCCE cluster and WHO EPI team this week. The team will also be supporting the presentation for the Joint WHO-Asian Development Bank country briefings on the COVID-19 Vaccine on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> February.
- ❑ **COVAX/Vaccine Planning & Introduction:** PNG is planning for introduction of COVID-19 vaccine in early Q2 2021. Due to logistics and refrigeration challenges in country, the vaccine will need to be a positive temperature vaccine (2-8 degrees Celsius) and use a 2-dose regimen. None of the vaccines currently approved by WHO meet this criteria. Initially health care workers and older populations will be prioritized for vaccination. Focus of the team this week will be developing National Deployment and Vaccinations Plan (NDVP) and obtaining consensus from stakeholders.
- ❑ **Logistics and Supplies:** Focus will continue on the WHO Biomedical Bundle Distribution Plan and moving items to Air Niugini for consignment and uplift to remaining provinces. Work will also be undertaken for the coordination and reception of a UNOPS delivery of Metronidazole Injection 500mg (40,800) at the warehouse.

## Transmission Assessment

Given the low rates of testing nationally, it is difficult to assess the current level of transmission at a sub-national or provincial level with any degree of certainty. Provincial testing rates from March 2020 to January 2021 range from fewer than 4 tests per 100,000 population to over 3,700 tests per 100,000 population. The number of confirmed cases tends to be higher in provinces which report doing more testing. Provinces with higher testing rates tend to have tighter border controls (e.g. testing at airports or other points of entry) and often have increased presence of private companies such as mine sites which may require all incoming workers to be tested for COVID-19 through private testing facilities.

Currently West New Britain (WNB) and the National Capital District (NCD) are in Stage 3, large-scale community transmission, with almost all infections locally acquired and not linked to specific groups or locations. New Ireland Province and Western Province remain in Stage 2, localised community transmission. Morobe Province has also been escalated to Stage 2, following reporting of new cases. Sixteen out of 22 provinces, including the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, have reported at least one COVID-19 case since March 2020. However, current rates of testing are inadequate to make a more detailed sub-national transmission assessment within these remaining areas.

More information on the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office COVID-19 transmission stages can be found here: [bit.ly/WPRODashboard](https://bit.ly/WPRODashboard)

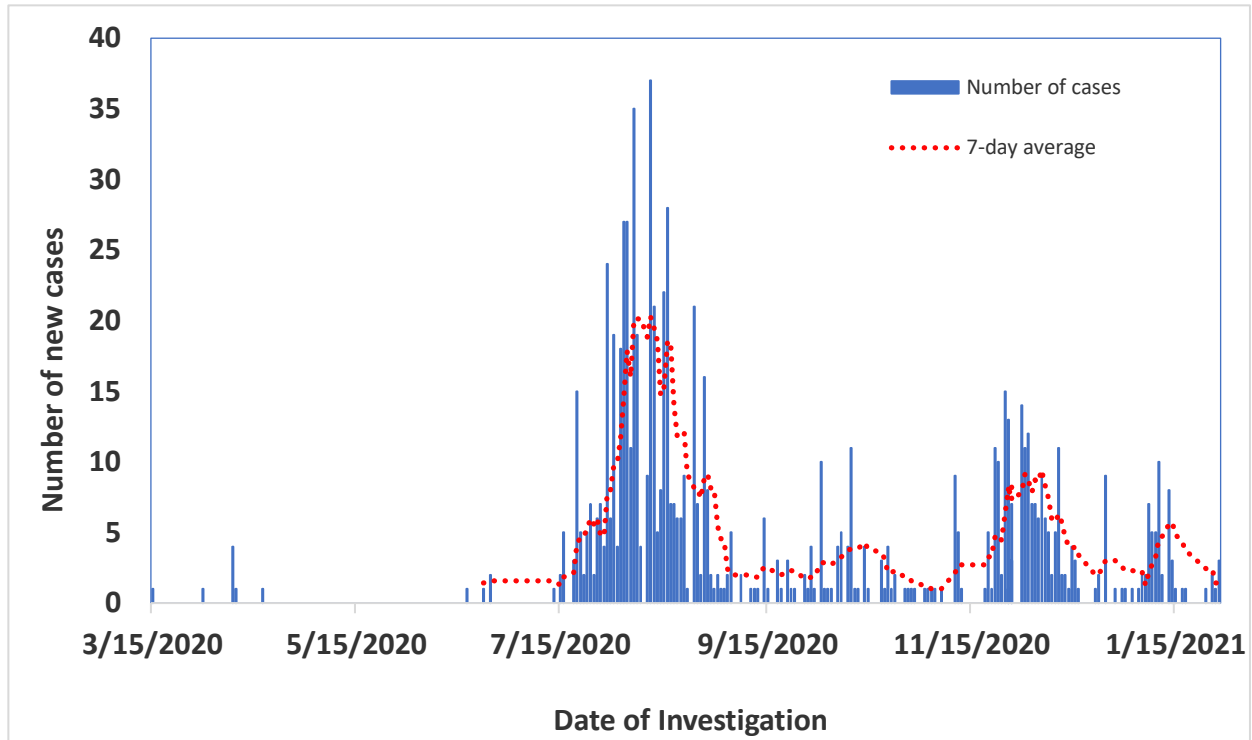
### Epi Update COVID-19

Tests	Cases	Deaths	ICU Admissions
<b>1137</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
NAT Tests past 7 days	New cases past 7 days	Deaths past 7 days	ICU Admissions past 7 days
<b>42789</b>	<b>867</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>
Cumulative NAT Tests	Cumulative Cases	Cumulative Deaths	Cumulative ICU Admissions
<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>unknown*</b>	<b>unknown*</b>
Imported Cases in past 28 days	Cases in past 7 days with no link	Active Clusters in the past 7 days	Active clusters with >3 generations

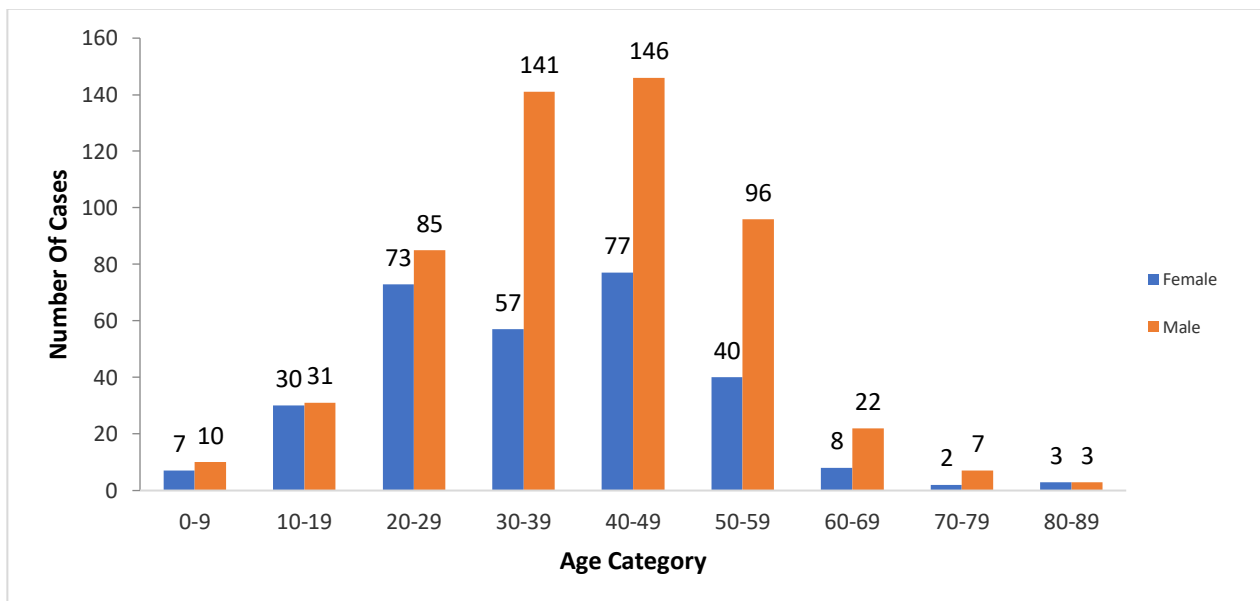
\*Case investigation ongoing

## Epidemiology

**Figure 1. Epidemiological curve of COVID-19 cases in Papua New Guinea, 15 March 2020 to 31 January 2021**



**Figure 2. COVID-19 cases by age-group and sex in Papua New Guinea, 15 March 2020 to 31 January 2021**



- For the period of 25 to 31 January, the COVID-19 National Hotline received 3,063 calls. Of these, 22 (about 0.72%) were health-related calls. 26 of these were referred to Rapid Response Team/PHA. As of 31 January, the hotline had received a total of 155,790 calls. Of these, 5,027 (3.2%) were health-related calls. A total of 1,732 calls to date have been referred to Rapid Response Team/PHAs.
- Papua Province in Indonesia is continuously reporting COVID-19 cases in areas that border Sandaun and Western Provinces. While the border is officially closed, traditional border crossing continues, and the threat of case importation remains high. As of 31 January 2021, Papua Province has reported a total of 6,727 confirmed cases and 142 deaths among people who confirmed to have COVID-19 by RT-PCR (data from <https://dinkes.papubaratprov.go.id/>).

**Table 3. Persons Screened by Point of Entry**

Total Number of Travelers Screened before SOE (until 22 March)	29,387	
Total Number of Travelers Screened during SOE (23 March – 16 June)	3,788	
Total Number of Travelers Screened after SOE (17 June – 17 January)	Air	13,251
	Sea	671
	Land	6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>13,918</b>

## Strategic Approach

### National and Provincial Public Health Response

- The Pandemic Response Coordination Group and the Health Operations Team continue to meet regularly at the National Control Centre.

### COVID-19 Prevention and Control

- Antigen rapid diagnostic test (AgRDT) validation training was conducted with 16 healthcare workers from Daru and Kiunga in Western Province. This included one day of theoretical sessions, such as using Personal Protective Equipment, using the AgRDT test kits, and procedures after conducting the test. The training also included one day of practical implementation at a local clinic while supporting the healthcare workers to test members of the public presenting with COVID-19 symptoms. The training was supported by Western PHA.
- The Travel Desk has received training on using a country risk assessment tool developed by the surveillance team to guide assessments on the risk of importing COVID-19 cases from incoming international arrivals. The list of restricted countries will be reviewed on a weekly basis in conjunction with the weekly risk assessment report. A briefing was also prepared to highlight the limitations of AgRDT for asymptomatic screening of domestic travellers.
- There is a steady increase in influenza-like illnesses and severe acute respiratory infections around the country and COVID-19 testing rates of these cases remains very low.
- The Australian Government has committed PGK374Million over 3 years to support the purchase and distribution of COVID-19 Vaccines in PNG. The funds will support the PNG Government's vaccination plan in coordination with other partners including WHO. Funding for the current financial year is available for advanced procurement. The commitment also includes an offer of

technical support through Australian Therapeutic Goods Authority (TGA) and the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance. The funding can also be used to support other implementing partners including WHO and UNICEF.

- West New Britain:** The lock-down and other restrictions in WNB have been lifted and domestic flights resume normal operations. Ongoing compliance with public health measures, implementation of Niupela Pasin and continued testing is required. The continued lack of testing of patients with suspected COVID-19, influenza-like illness and severe acute respiratory infection around the country remains a concern.
- National Capital District:** Roll out of the NCD AgRDT validation is continuing until 28<sup>th</sup> February 2021. This plan aims to collect 800 samples across 9 testing sites within 35 days and is supported by partners FHI 360 and MSF.

**Tests are free, and continue to be available at the following sites:**

1. Taurama Clinic
2. Badili Clinic
3. Tokara Clinic
4. Gordons Clinic
5. Lawes Road Clinic
6. Kaugere Clinic
7. Morata Clinic
8. Bomana Cis Clinic
9. Bomana Police College Clinic

## **Communication, Community Engagement and Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (Social Measures) – NIUPELA PASIN**

- The risk communication team will begin to convene Vaccine Communications planning meetings with the RCCE cluster and WHO EPI team this week. The team will also be supporting the presentation for the Joint WHO-Asian Development Bank country briefings on the COVID-19 Vaccine on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> February.

### **Logistics and Supplies**

- The Logistics and supplies team has now completed physical inventory stock count for January.
- WHO Biomedical bundle distribution plan has been completed and provided to Health Facilities Standard Branch (HFSB), NDOH for preparation of the devices for priority provinces. This includes oxygen concentrators and accessories.
- 3,000 Universal Transport Media devices (UTMs) were also delivered to West New Britain over the weekend.
- Biomedical bundle for West New Britain were prioritised and uplifted on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> January and received by WNB. The WHO Operational Supplies and Logistics team will continue to work closely with HFSB to move the bundles to other provinces.



## ANNEX D – Photos



Photo 1:  
Antigen rapid diagnostic test (AgRDT) validation training with healthcare workers in Daru.

-----  
For more information about this Situation Report, contact:

**Dr Daoni Esorom**

A/Executive Manager, Public Health,  
National Department of Health

Email: daoniesorom@gmail.com; Mobile: +675-72313983

**Dr Stefanie Vaccher**

Surveillance and Epidemiology Pillar Lead,  
World Health Organization

Email: vacchers@who.int