



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 28 March 2021 (12:00 pm), there have been 5349 COVID-19 cases and 49 COVID-19 deaths reported in Papua New Guinea. From the period of 22 to 28 March, there were 1786 new cases and 13 new deaths reported. **This is the eighth consecutive week of increasing cases.**
- ❑ The total number of provinces that have reported COVID-19 cases to date is twenty. Only Manus and Oro (Northern) Provinces have not reported cases to date.
- ❑ The COVID-19 Hotline has experienced a 24% increase in calls since the last fortnight. and the rate of health-related calls being referred to the Rapid Response Teams and PHAs has also increased by 33% from the prior week.
- ❑ 8,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccines donated by Australia arrived in Port Moresby on Tuesday 23 March. The Vaccines were delivered by the Australian Airforce along with other donated medical supplies.
- ❑ An advance team of The Australian Medical Assistance Team (AUSMAT) also arrived and have begun working with national health teams and WHO to undertake assessments and critical planning for a potential full deployment of a clinical care team to support the health system in PNG.
- ❑ The French Airforce are expected to deliver a shipment 60 tents this Tuesday which have been donated by the French Republic.

### Summary of Activities and Upcoming Priorities

#### Surveillance:

- ❑ Last week the Surveillance team finalised Antigen rapid diagnostic test (AgRDT) training and a distribution plan. 30,000 AgRDTs have been packed and prepared for uplift in coming days, with all 22 provinces to receive testing kits.
- ❑ The team have also been addressing misinformation circulating in the media, including preparing briefs and reports on new variants and genome sequencing for the Prime Minister,

**Table 1. Newly reported COVID-19 cases in PNG<sup>1</sup>**

	New Cases (22 to 28 March 2021)	Cumulative Total
National Capital District	874	2524
Western <sup>2</sup>	510	1005
West Sepik	0	334
Eastern Highlands	89	251
Morobe	66	206
West New Britain	4	200
East New Britain	64	167
Western Highlands	18	118
AROB	42	101
New Ireland	32	77
Madang	11	70
East Sepik	16	51
Enga	1	50
Central	7	44
Simbu	11	42
Southern Highlands	22	39
Jiwaka	6	26
Hela	1	20
Milne Bay	0	11
Gulf	12	13
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1786</b>	<b>5349</b>

<sup>1</sup> As of 28/03/2021, 12:00 pm, PNG time

<sup>2</sup> 856 cases (85%) from North Fly; 8 Middle/South Fly; 142 have no district stated

Please note: Due to data cleaning, the number of cases may not add up exactly from last week.

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

	Confirmed Cases	Deaths
Global	126 359 540	2 769 473
Western Pacific	1 859 851	31 361

<sup>2</sup> WHO COVID-19 Dashboard as of 28/03/2021, 13:30 CEST

Controller, Health Secretary and Minister, and other senior members of the PNG COVID-19 response.

- Additional data entry clerks have been recruited, with technological support provided by Pacifica HR.
- Work is also continuing with local and international modelling teams to get better estimates of the current rates of transmission in PNG through provision of more precise data
- This week the team will continue to support the provinces in undertaking swabbing, contact tracing, surveillance activities, and analysis of data.
- An audit will be undertaken of all confirmed COVID-19 cases per province to date to cross-check against the totals being reported by NCC.
- Training for provinces on the use of AgRDT will also continue, along with CPHL and IMR Goroka.

#### **Quarantine & Port of Entry:**

- 635 passengers were screened at POE over the last 7 days.
- As of 28 March, there were 715 people in quarantine of which 81 were in home quarantine, 584 in hotels, 29 in company sites and 21 in managed apartments.
- 24 persons in quarantine have requested for early release so they can fly directly back to their country of origin, noting concerns around the current surge of cases in PNG.

#### **Laboratory:**

- 655 Ag-RDT validation results have been obtained and had preliminary analysis completed on which will be sent to IMR Goroka.
- This week the team will continue to provide support for Ag-RDT validation analysis.
- The team will also continue to provide support for the testing at provincial laboratories.
- Last week 1000 samples were sent to Australia for PCR testing and 1200 samples to Singapore.
- Whole Genomic Sequencing (WGS) of the samples sent overseas indicated the following:
  - 41% B.1
  - 30% B.6
  - 20% B.1. 459
- All these have been associated with milder form of infection and originated from South East Asia, Australia, Singapore, India.
- A stock on hand assessment of laboratory commodities throughout the country was conducted last week and provided the following stock levels:
  - UTM's 51,1000
  - Ag RDT 29, 000
  - GeneXpert Cartridges 3240
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- This week the team are working on establishing an Emergency Lab Team as a standby team that can be deployed to provinces to support provincial testing.

#### **Clinical Management and Infection Prevention and Control:**

- The Clinical management team has been supporting NCD PHA with the clinical management of the current surge in positive COVID-19 cases.
- There was a focus this week on supporting TAC with technical guidance on CM and IPC as well as training staff in CM and IPC.

- The team continues to provide CM and IPC support to Provinces predominately experiencing a surge in COVID cases. This week the team created a CM network with a focus to share information and better support Provinces.
- The team has developed an isolation SOP for health care settings as well as home isolation guidance which will be disseminated to Provinces this week.
- This week the team will also deliver IPC training for nursing students at UPNG as well as continue to provide CM and IPC support to Provinces experiencing a surge in cases.

#### **Risk Communication & Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs):**

- Last week the second COVID-19 Champions Campaign film was published featuring Gary Juffa. Planning is now underway to source additional champions within and outside NCD.
- An Advocacy meeting with NCH PHA and all stakeholders including senior management of Port Moresby General Hospital was held in preparation for vaccine rollout in the National Capital District.
- Facebook has reached out to support PNG and discussions to commence next week on a way forward on how they can support.
- The draft COVID-19 Vaccine Communication Strategy completed and submitted to NDoH management for endorsement and training module for health managers was also finalised.
- The FAQs on COVID-19 Vaccine developed and disseminated but still yet to disseminate widely as they are now being updated to address mis/disinformation which is circulating.
- The vaccination campaign/Social Mobilization Flyers, Posters and Brochures have been completed and are ready for distribution starting with NCD.
- A training module and guide is in development to support airport staff on IPC/Risk Communication on handling and Repatriation of COVID-19 remains.
- Support is also being provided to the Electoral Commission on COVID-19 Risk Communication messages and development of Posters and training in preparation for the Moresby North West Bi-Election.

#### **Niuplea Pasin**

- The Niuplea Pasin team have been focusing on disseminating of Niupela Pasin Guidelines to Stakeholders nationwide through the National Control Centre and the PHAs to guide the implementation of Niupela Pasin Protocols.
- The team are also working in close collaboration with the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary (RPNGC) in monitoring the Niupela Pasin Measures currently being enforced, with special focus on the main city bus stops in Port Moresby.
- Monitoring visits to several business settings have identified high compliance to Measure 9 on Business and Social with the closing of venues or part of venues that provide night club or pub and gambling activities.

#### **COVAX/Vaccine Planning & Introduction:**

- Work continues on the planning and preparations for the rollout of the AstraZeneca vaccination which will target the 3% of total population of PNG.
- The National Technical Working Group meeting was conducted, and the subcommittees presented progress in their respective areas of responsibility.

- A training workshop was conducted with provincial health leaders to review the operational plan framework and requirements for developing the provincial micro plans in addition to information about the vaccine to be introduced.
- Prime Minister and leaders of the medical community held a press conference Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> March afternoon endorsing the roll out of the AstraZeneca vaccine.
- This week the team will focus support on the roll out of the AstraZeneca vaccine in NCD as well as supporting provinces with developing their micro plans, reviewing plan which have already been submitted and providing feedback to provinces on revisions if required.

#### **Logistics and Supplies:**

- Last week PPE supplies were consigned to Air Niugini for dispatch to: Enga, ESP, Jwaka, AROB, WSP, Hela, Daru and Kiunga.
- UTMs were also dispatched as per distribution plan for ENB, WNB, WHP, ESP, WSP, AROB, Enga, EHP, Morobe, Madang, Jiwaka, Simbu, Milne Bay, Kiunga, Daru, NIP, Oro, Hela, Central, Gulf, SHP, and Marius.
- Antigen RDT distribution was also completed for all provinces.
- The logistics team received feedback from the Conservation and Environment Protection Agency (CEPA) on A waste area project, however the team are still awaiting layouts from WHO GVA Technical Network and will require CEPA approval before implementation of the project.
- A meeting was held with BOC in relation to the Medical Oxygen project to discuss issue with transportation and surge capacity. A concept note will be drafted this week for the procurement of additional oxygen plant.
- The French Airforce are expected to deliver a shipment 60 tents this Tuesday which have been donated by the French Republic. A second shipment of COVID 19 kits is expected to arrive at a later date.

## Transmission Assessment

There are currently surges occurring in several provinces across PNG, with outbreaks in the National Capital District (NCD), Western, West Sepik, Morobe, Eastern Highlands, Western Highlands, East New Britain, Morobe, and Simbu. While each province is responsible for their own contact tracing and determining chains of transmission, there appears to be a large increase in the number of clusters, with people from a wide variety of occupations, age groups, districts and other demographic variables represented in the case numbers. Large-scale population-level testing remains low across most of PNG, and testing kit shortages and logistical difficulties are common. Despite this, test positivity is high, with some facilities recording over 30% of tests returning positive results.

Currently NCD and Western, are in Stage 3, large-scale community transmission, with almost all infections locally acquired and not linked to specific groups or locations. In addition, New Ireland, Jiwaka, Simbu, East New Britain, East Sepik, Madang, Morobe, Eastern Highlands, Southern Highlands, Western Highlands, and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (AROB) are in Stage 2, localised community transmission, with cases locally acquired but localised to specific areas or populations. Hela and Enga are in Stage 1, imported cases, with recent transmission imported from another province or area, or linked to imported cases. These localised outbreaks continue to be closely followed to watch for signs of increasing community transmission.

Twenty out of 22 provinces, including AROB have reported at least one COVID-19 case since March 2020. However, current testing rates and contact tracing data are inadequate to make more detailed sub-national transmission assessments within all provinces.

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
NAT Tests past 7 days	<b>7061</b>	<b>1786</b>	<b>13</b>
		New cases past 7 days	Deaths past 7 days
Cumulative NAT Tests	<b>67741</b>	<b>5349</b>	<b>49</b>
		Cumulative Cases	Cumulative Deaths
Imported Cases in past 28 days	<b>0</b>	<b>1338</b>	<b>41*</b>
		Cases in past 7 days with no link	Active Clusters in the past 7 days

\*Case investigation ongoing

Due to critical shortages of GeneXpert cartridges in PNG, and limited supply globally, new guidance was issued on 10 March 2021. Until further notice, **SARS-CoV-2 testing via the GeneXpert platform should only be conducted if the individual meets one of the two following criteria:**

1. Symptomatic healthcare workers providing direct care to a known COVID-19 case
2. Serious Acute Respiratory Infection (SARI) presentations

The National COVID-19 Surveillance Guidelines should be referred to for the full case definition, including symptomatic and SARI cases.

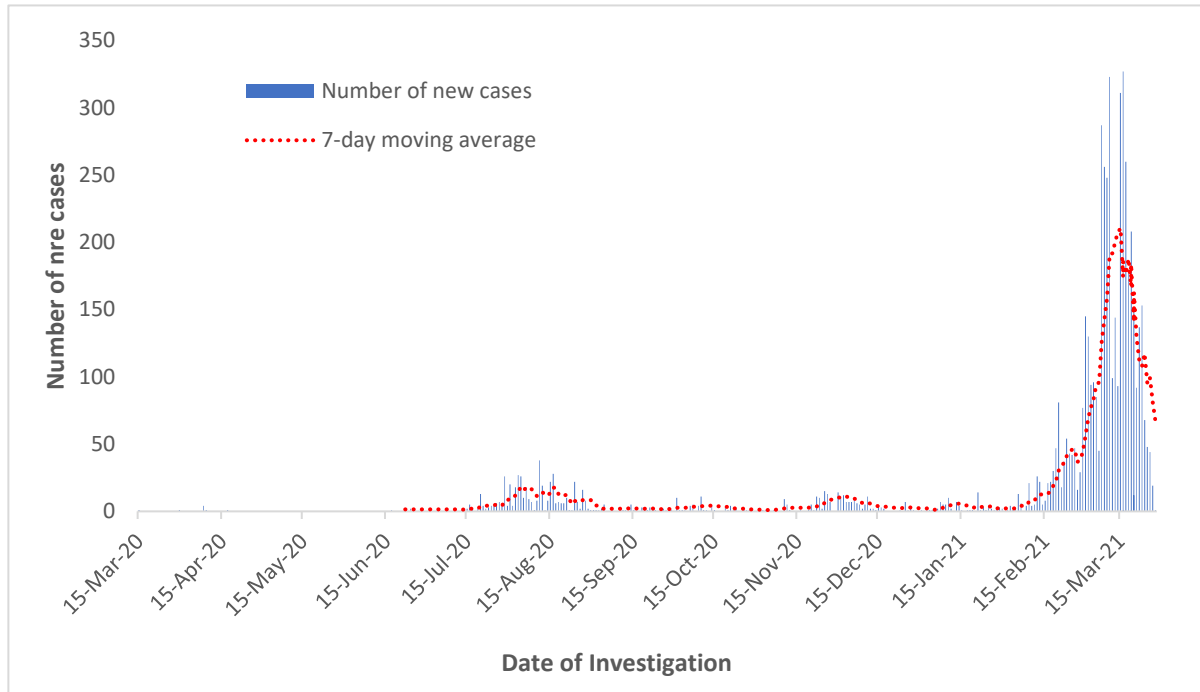
**Table 3. Number of GeneXpert and RT-PCR tests\* conducted from 1 February – 27 March 2021, by province**

Province	GeneXpert Tests	RT-PCR Tests	Tests per 100,000 population
AROB	746	342	252
Central	0	114	27
East New Britain	625	567	57
East Sepik	0	430	60
Eastern Highlands	127	1258	146
Enga	405	226	124
Gulf	42	34	15
Hela	88	158	72
Jiwaka	119	0	15
Madang	733	0	65
Manus	0	289	362
Milne Bay	230	91	58
Morobe	249	1021	107
NCD	1366	3092	487
New Ireland	0	12	-
Northern	0	0	-
Simbu	173	14	8
Southern Highlands	0	102	4
West New Britain	36	1208	357
West Sepik	465	654	315
Western	266	216	70
Western Highlands	458	895	204
<b>Total</b>	<b>6128</b>	<b>10723</b>	<b>121</b>

\*Please note, this information is based on the test results received by Sunday 28 March 2021. Some provinces may have conducted additional testing but have not reported their results to the National Control Centre.

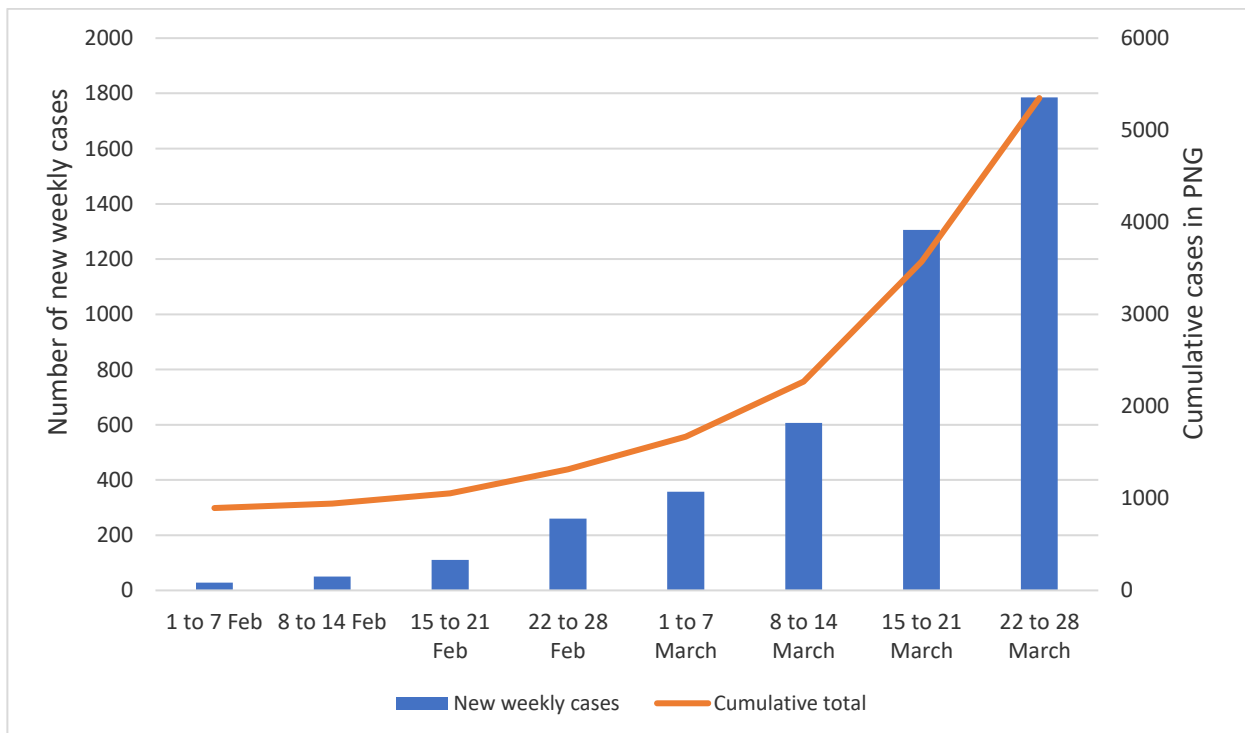
## Epidemiology

**Figure 1. Epidemiological curve of COVID-19 cases in Papua New Guinea, 15 March 2020 to 28 March 2021**

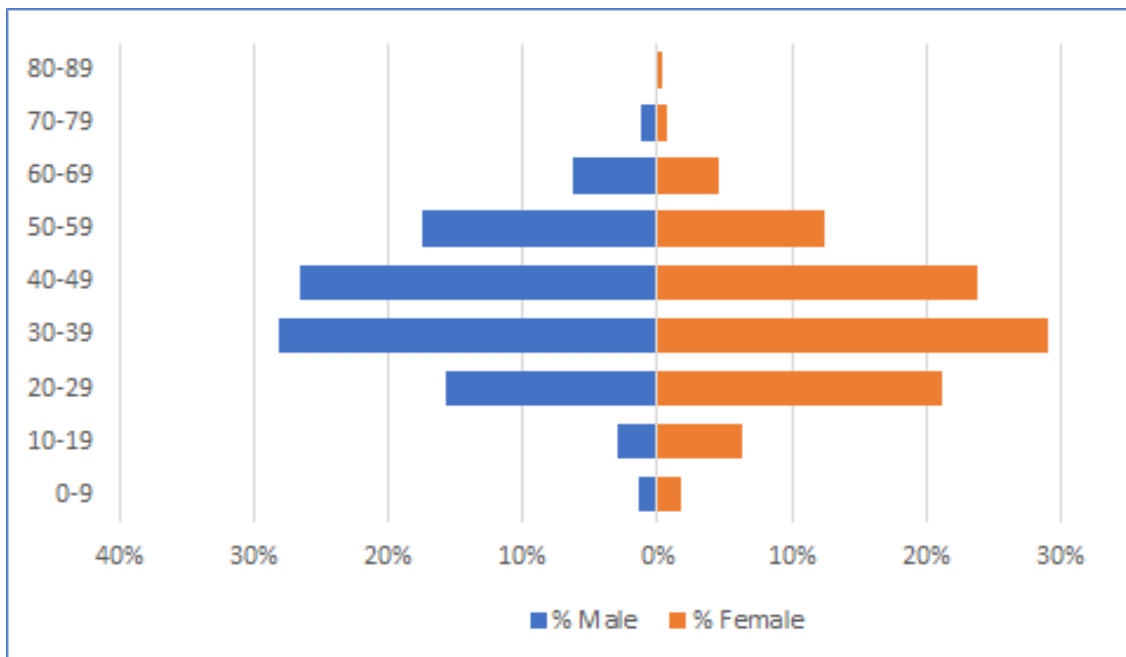


Please note: The decreasing trend must be interpreted with caution as there are delays in receiving and reporting results from provinces.

**Figure 2. Number of new weekly and cumulative COVID-19 cases, 1 Feb to 28 March 2021**



**Figure 3. Percentage age distribution of COVID-19 cases (62% male, n=3214), 15 March 2020 to 28 March 2021**



### COVID-19 Hotline

- ❑ For the period of 22 March to 28 March, the COVID-19 National Hotline received 8715 calls. **This is a 24% increase in calls in the last 7 days.** Of these, 126 (about 2%) were health-related calls. 89 of these were referred to the Rapid Response Team/PHA.
- ❑ As of 21 March, the hotline had received a total of 195,916 calls. Of these, 5,602 (3%) were health-related calls. A total of 2138 calls to date have been referred to Rapid Response Team/PHAs.

## 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.
- ❑ Focus continues to be on supporting PHAs with Surveillance, Clinical Management and Testing.
- ❑ A meeting of Heads of Missions, UN agencies and Humanitarian Cluster lead agencies will be held on Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> March and will be co-hosted by the National Controller and the United Nations Resident Coordinator. The purpose of the meeting is to provide Heads of Diplomatic Missions with an overall situational update on COVID-19, including priorities of the National Control Centre, and discuss possible areas of continued and coordinated support by international partners.



## ANNEX A – Photos



Photos 1-3 arrival of 8,000 doses of the AstraZeneca from the Australian Government

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