

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 2 May 2021 (12:00 pm), there have been 11, 273 COVID-19 cases including 121 COVID-19 deaths reported in Papua New Guinea. From the period of 26 April to 2 May, there were 438 new cases and 16 new deaths reported.
- Since EMT deployments began in mid-April, the 47 deployed international EMT clinicians and support volunteers have contributed over 700 person-days of work in support of PNG's COVID-19 response, providing over 1,400 patient consultations. All teams are also providing training in COVID case management, infection prevention and control and other clinical areas.
- A national launch of COVID-19 Vaccine Communication Campaign will be held in Port Moresby, on the 4th of May, linking in all governors, ahead of the provincial rollout of the vaccines on the May 5th.
- For the period of 26 April to 02 May, the COVID-19 National Hotline received 5438 calls. This is a 10% increase of calls from the previous week. 54 (about 1%) were health-related calls and 41 were referred to the Rapid Response Team/PHA.

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

	New Cases (26 April – 2 May 2021)	Cumulative Total
AROB	10	243
Central	8	182
East New Britain	5	386
East Sepik	25	146
Eastern Highlands	31	518
Enga	3	163
Gulf	10	40
Hela	1	44
Jiwaka	11	105
Madang	70	225
Manus	37	74
Milne Bay	13	95
Morobe	21	583
National Capital District	99	4458
New Ireland	1	137
Northern (Oro)	0	21
Simbu	29	143
Southern Highlands	3	96
West New Britain	31	376
West Sepik	0	409
Western <sup>2</sup>	2	2350
Western Highlands	20	471
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>430</b>	<b>11265</b>

<sup>1</sup> As of 02/05/2021, 12:00 pm, PNG time  
<sup>2</sup> 2042 cases (87%) from North Fly; 2 cases Middle Fly; 56 cases South Fly; 250 have no district stated

## Pillar Updates & Priorities

### Surveillance:

- Over 103,000 PCR tests and over 600 Ag-RDTs have been conducted to date. While there are delays in receiving testing data, there appears to be a substantial decline in swabbing and reporting of test results in April compared to March 2021.
- There continue to be delays in reporting COVID-19 related deaths, with most recent deaths reported more than one month after they occurred. Deaths have been reported from 12 of 22 provinces, with 61% of deaths reported from NCD
- Over 1,100 samples that have been sent to MDU in Melbourne, Australia for Whole Genome Sequencing have now been sequenced. To date, no variants of concern have been detected.

**Note:** Due to additional data cleaning, provincial case numbers may not add up from last week.

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

	Confirmed Cases	Deaths
Global	151 803 822	3 186 538
Western Pacific	2 469 292	37 481

<sup>2</sup> WHO COVID-19 Dashboard as of 02/05/2021, 15:09 CEST

- The epi/surveillance and lab teams continue to work with the team conducting the sequencing to develop more informative transmission chains and phylogenetic maps.
- International risk assessment for incoming arrivals to PNG has been updated based on epidemic information from the 14 most common countries of arrival into PNG.
- Utilisation of enhanced multisource surveillance tools such as data from the National COVID-19 hotline, testing data from the extractive industry, clinical/death data, and test positivity to gain a better understanding of the changing COVID-19 epidemic in PNG.
- Cleaning and analysis of all COVID-19 positive case data and testing data is ongoing. Audits of provincial line lists against the national case line list to ensure accurate reporting also continues to be undertaken routinely by the surveillance team.
- This week the team will complete the consultation and review process for the COVID-19 case investigation form with key counterparts from other pillars and provincial representatives.

#### **Laboratory:**

- Last week the team met with the School of Medicine and Health Sciences to identify spaces for the anticipated laboratories. Equipment that needs servicing and replacement was also identified.
- Available GenExpert cartridges as well as AgRDT have been distributed to all laboratory facilities.
- The laboratory results in most of the laboratories have seen an improvement in turnaround time (TAT) as they reported testing samples received same day and result dissemination within 24 hours. This is likely due to the current availability of GeneXpert cartridges and AgRDT and the constant contact with the laboratory managers.
- The issue of human resources in laboratories keeps posing a challenge in all the provinces which may affect TAT if not resolved now.
- The discussion on the air laboratory from the Mindero foundation has reached an advanced stage and shipment of the reagents and most likely the equipment is expected this week.

#### **Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs)**

- International Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs) continue to provide care for COVID and non-COVID patients in both Port Moresby and in the Western Highlands.
- Since EMT deployments began in mid-April, the 47 deployed international EMT clinicians and support volunteers have contributed over 700 person-days of work in support of PNG's COVID-19 response, providing over 1,400 patient consultations. All teams are also providing training in COVID case management, infection prevention and control and other clinical areas.
- AUSMAT continues to support Port Moresby General Hospital (PMGH) - screening patients at the hospital entry and supporting the COVID ward/ICU, obstetric ward and emergency department. In addition to direct clinical care, AUSMAT physicians and nurses are also providing training for PMGH clinicians. AUSMAT will be departing PNG on 7 May.
- Team Rubicon continues to support Mt Hagen General Hospital in the Western Highlands, focusing on COVID case management, paediatrics and training. Team Rubicon's Bravo rotation arrived in PNG on 29 April, and the Alpha rotation will be departing on 5 May. Team Rubicon is exploring potential extension support to Wabag General Hospital in Enga Province from mid-May.

- Johanniter continues to work with St John Ambulance in caring for COVID patients in the Nightingale field hospital at Taurama Aquatic Centre. In addition, Johanniter and St John initiated outreach support to Health Centres in the Central Province on 29 April.
- An additional EMT, Heart to Heart International (HHI), is expected to deploy to PNG in the next week, with likely tasking to support Eastern Highlands, Simbu and Jiwaka Provinces.

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

- Last week the Clinical Management team and EMT coordinator visited 5 provinces in the highlands to review clinical management and IPC pathways and to provide technical assistance as well as to assess the need for further EMT support.
- The team have also been working on finalising job aids for health facilities on COVID-19 management which will be finalised this week for distribution.

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

- A national training of trainers (TOT) for COVID-19 Risk Communication and Advocacy was conducted in Port Moresby last week, for staff of the National Department of Health and the National Control Centre in preparation for the nationwide rollout of the AstraZeneca vaccine, planned for the 5th of May.
- A total of 22 technical officers from NCC and NDoH received the training supported by UNICEF and WHO. The training will help build their capacity and confidence to support the provinces in the vaccine and communications in the provinces.
- Trained staff will be dispatched to the provinces to conduct a similar TOT with provincial representatives to create awareness on vaccine safety and efficacy, as well as generate demand among the target groups of health workers and other essential workers at the frontline.
- Parallel to this training was a presentation to a Governor's Briefing held by the Prime Minister, Hon. James Marape and the NCC, where the Sleeves Up campaign was introduced to encourage ownership and leadership by leaders to become champions for the Vaccines and Niupela Pasin measures.
- The team also conducted advocacy and Q&A sessions on Vaccine for Kinabank staff in Port Moresby on the 27 April for 50 staff. Many concerns and doubts on vaccine safety and myths were clarified with positive outcomes.
- A national launch of Vaccine Communication Campaign will be held in Port Moresby, on the 4th of May, linking in all governors, ahead of the provincial rollout of the vaccines on the May 5th.
- Communication packages for film, radio and print are being put together to launch under the Sleeves Up campaign at the event - which will be released on mass media, as well as distributed to all partners and stakeholders to use in their community engagement activities.
- The launch is planned to convene on Tuesday 4 May at the APEC Haus and will be followed by the provincial PHAs vaccine launching on the 5th May.

#### **Niuplea Pasin**

- Niuplea Pasin compliance activities are ongoing although visibility of the implementation of the measures in the provinces is limited to NCD.
- The NCC team are currently planning to visit Provinces to assess compliance with Niuplea Pasin and provide support to provincial teams.
- A continued priority of the team is to ensure compliance of Niuplea Pasin during the upcoming Moresby North West byelection as well as in the planning for the general election later in the year.

### COVAX/Vaccine Planning & Introduction:

- Last week the National AEFI Committee was reactivated, and the Committee participated in a workshop on Causality.
- Training for the NDOH Health Promotions team was conducted as well as training for health care workers of NCD PHA.
- Funds to support operational costs were released to all Provinces.
- This week the team will be launching of the National COVID19 vaccine rollout planned on 4 May.
- The National COVID-19 vaccination campaign for health care workers and essential front-line workers will also commence on 5 May.

### Logistics and Supplies:

- Last week team dispatched 2.2 tons of COVID 19 supplies including PPE, Lab and support materials to Western Highlands, NCD, Madang, ENB, Hela, Morobe, Kiunga, AROD, MANUS, NIP, ORO, Central and WNB.
- Supplies were also dispatched to the NCC, NDOH PNGDF and the Rita Flynn facility.
- The team finalized guidance notes for Logistics in detention centres for setting up Isolation facilities.
- The New Zealand Government confirmed they will provide 100 flights hours (Helicopter and Plane) with their partner MAF International to support COVID 19 activities at remote areas, available from Mid-May.
- This week the team will complete laboratory supplies distribution to provinces as well as focusing on the coordination of a donated shipment of 36,800 Ag-RDT tests from French Polynesia.

## Transmission Assessment

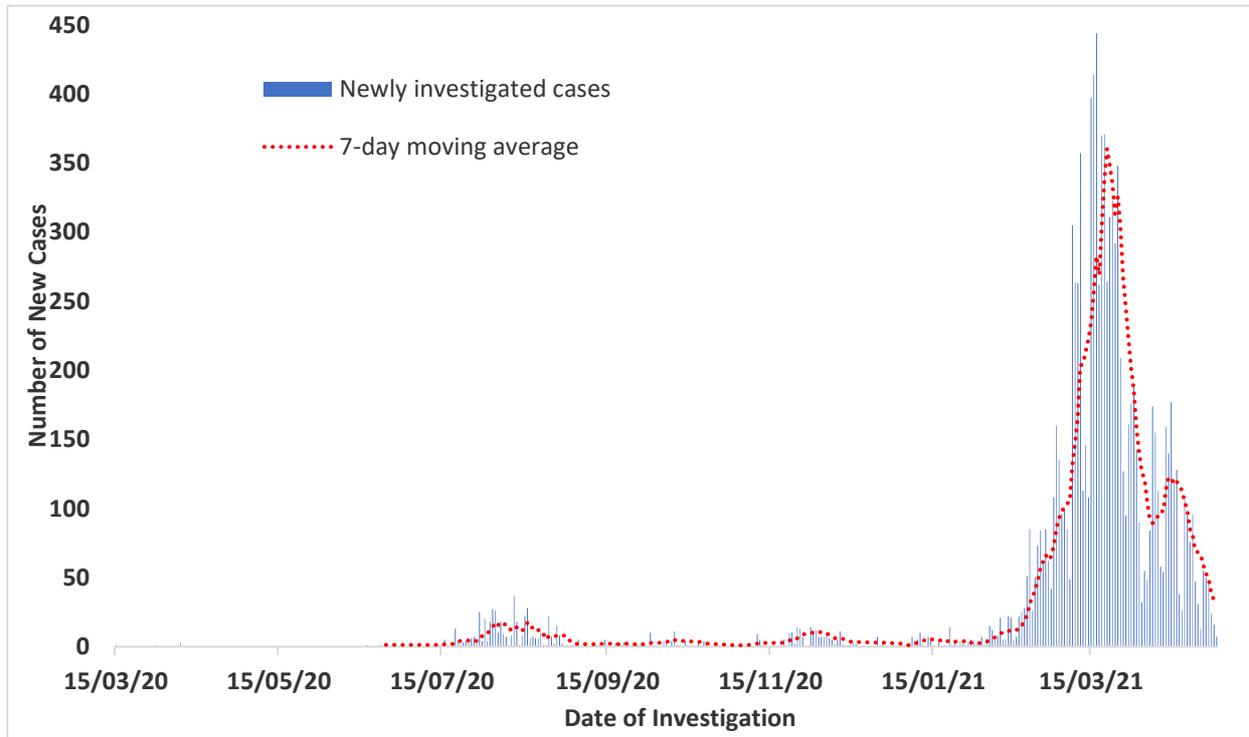
COVID-19 cases continue to be reported from across PNG, with 20 of 22 provinces reporting COVID-19 cases in the previous seven days. There are reports from many provinces about the lack of access to testing, with swabbing often limited to extremely ill individuals who need to be admitted to hospital.

Acknowledging these limitations with swabbing, testing, and contact tracing, it is difficult to determine the extent of COVID-19 spread throughout PNG, particularly in more rural and remote areas. However, it is believed that community transmission is occurring throughout much of PNG. With a low level of confidence based on the available data, National Capital District (NCD), Madang, Morobe, Eastern Highlands, and Western Highlands appear to be in Stage 3, widespread community transmission. In addition, East Sepik, Manus, Milne Bay, Northern, Simbu, West New Britain, and Western appear to have localised community transmission (stage 2).

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

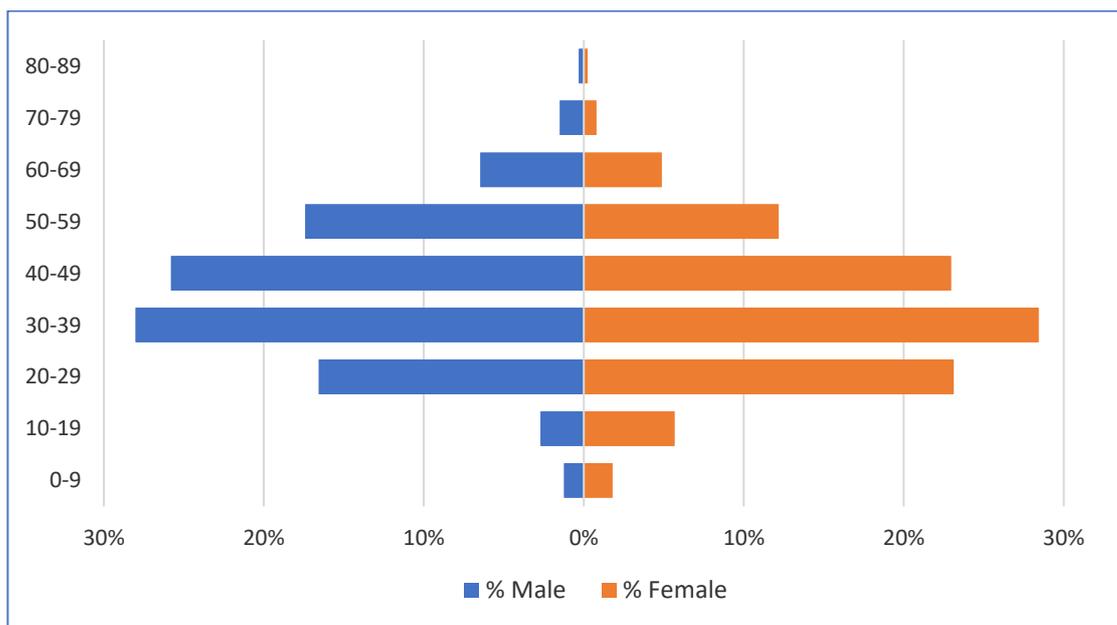
## Epidemiology

**Figure 1. Epidemiological curve of COVID-19 cases in Papua New Guinea, 15 March 2020 to 2 May 2021**

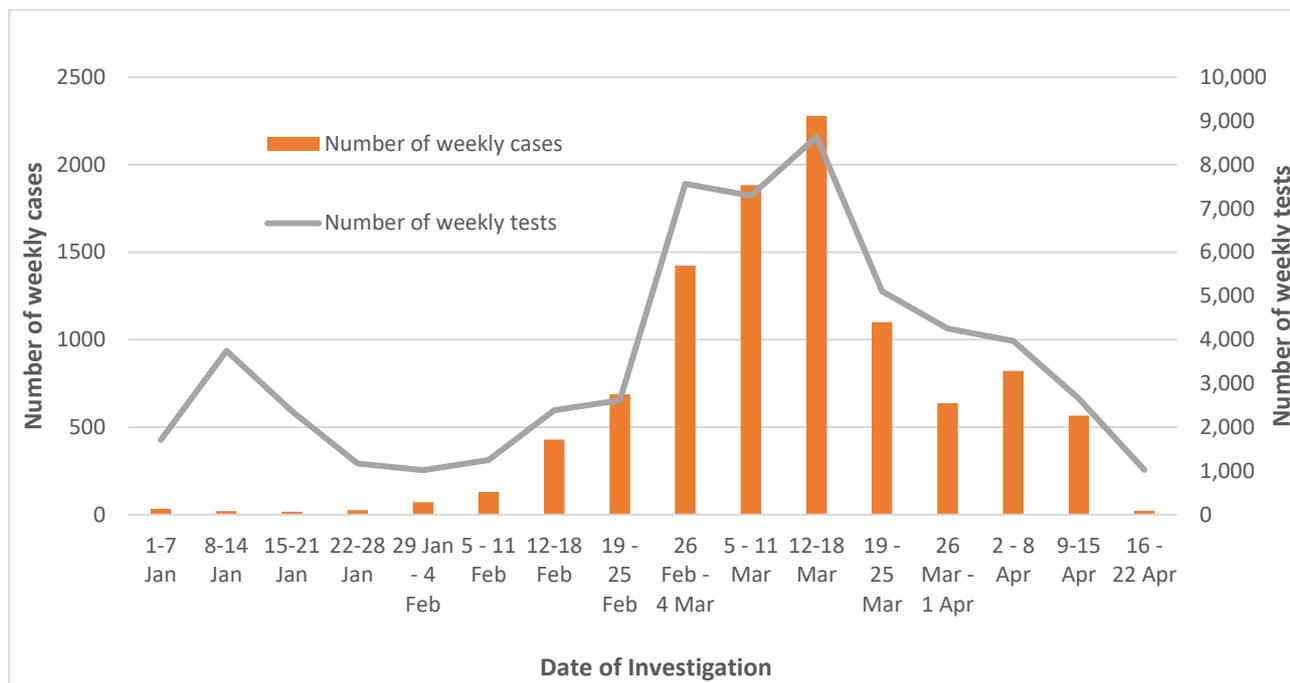


Please note: The true extent of the decreasing trend must be interpreted with caution as there are delays in receiving and reporting results from provinces.

**Figure 2. Percentage age distribution of COVID-19 cases (64% male, n=6970), 15 March 2020 to 2 May 2021**



**Figure 3. Weekly number of cases investigated compared to swabs taken, 1 January to 2 May 2021**



**Table 4. Persons Screened by Point of Entry**

Total Number of Travelers Screened before SOE (until 22 March 2020)	29,387	
Total Number of Travelers Screened during SOE (23 March – 16 June 2020)	3,788	
Total Number of Travelers Screened after SOE (17 June 2020 – 1 May 2021)	Air	19,324
	Sea	671
	Land	6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>19,981</b>

### COVID-19 Hotline

- For the period of 26 April to 02 May, the COVID-19 National Hotline received 5438 calls. This is a 10% increase of calls from the previous week.
- Of these, 54 (about 1%) were health-related calls. 41 of these were referred to the Rapid Response Team/PHA.
- As of 02 May, the hotline had received a total of 225,598 calls. Of these, 5,993 (2.6%) were health-related calls. A total of 2373 calls to date have been referred to Rapid Response Team/PHAs.

## ANNEX A – Photos



Photos 1 -2: National training on vaccine management and communications.



Photo 3-4: Advocacy and Q&A session with Kina Bank staff.

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