

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 16 May 2021 (12:00 pm), there have been 14,205 COVID-19 cases and 136 COVID-19 deaths reported in Papua New Guinea. From the period of 10 to 16 May, there were 1,730 new cases and 15 new deaths reported. **This is the highest weekly number of cases reported for the last six weeks.**
- ❑ A team of 2 NDoH and 3 WHO experts visited Gulf province, 11-15 May 2021 to support the ongoing COVID-19 response.
- ❑ Heart to Heart International (HHI)'s 10-person Emergency Medical Team arrived in PNG on 9 May with most of the team deploying to Goroka.
- ❑ A total of 39 vaccination sites have started vaccinations, out of 182 sites planned to provide COVID-19 vaccinations nationwide.
- ❑ As of 16 May 2021, a total of 13,420 people have been vaccinated in PNG.
- ❑ An additional 10,000 doses of AZ vaccine arrived in country from Australian government donation on 15 May 2021.
- ❑ The COVID-19 National Pandemic Response Controller issued 12 new measures under the National Pandemic Act 2020 on Thursday 13 May which ease a number of restrictions imposed over the last six weeks to contain the pandemic. Full details of the measures can be found at www.covid19.info.gov.pg

Table 1. Newly reported COVID-19 cases in PNG¹

	New Cases (10 to 16 May 2021)	Cumulative Total
AROB	28	330
Central	47	244
East New Britain	410	902
East Sepik	20	225
Eastern Highlands	11	607
Enga	60	231
Gulf	19	76
Hela	31	86
Jiwaka	8	123
Madang	77	308
Manus	32	141
Milne Bay	5	130
Morobe	216	1060
National Capital District	248	4913
New Ireland	152	326
Northern (Oro)	89	160
Simbu	1	174
Southern Highlands	17	146
West New Britain	15	417
West Sepik	9	418
Western ²	24	2377
Western Highlands	211	811
TOTAL	1730	14205

¹ As of 16/05/2021, 12:00 pm, PNG time

² 2058 cases (87%) from North Fly; 2 cases Middle Fly; 67 cases South Fly; 248 have no district stated

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

Table 2. COVID-19 GLOBAL AND REGIONAL UPDATE²

	Confirmed Cases	Deaths
Global	162 177 376	3 364 178
Western Pacific	2 729 555	40 927

² WHO COVID-19 Dashboard as of 16/05/2021, 15:02 CEST

Pillar Updates & Priorities

Surveillance:

- A backlog of positive cases which had not been previously reported were received from one laboratory. During this reporting period (10-16 May), the median number of days between the case being swabbed and the result being reported by the National Control Centre was 30. 73% of cases were reported with a delay of 14 days or more, meaning the case was no longer infectious by the time the infection was reported.
- Over 14,000 test results have been reported from swabs taken in April 2021. This equates to an overall testing rate in PNG in April of 154 tests per 100,000 people. While this is an improvement on previous months, this still reflect low levels of testing nationally.
- Additional COVID-19 samples have been sequenced by the team at MDU in Melbourne, Australia, **with no variants of concern identified to date**. There has been further development of the whole genome sequencing sampling strategy and estimates of the sampling requirements for PNG.
- The final report for the antigen rapid diagnostic test (Ag-RDT) validation continues to be developed, with input from partners including NDoH and IMR Goroka.
- This week the team will develop a plan for the coming month on the key areas of support that provincial surveillance teams need. This may include training around completing the new CIF, Ag-RDT implementation, Go.Data rollout, and general surveillance data analysis and reporting.

Laboratory:

- The team are continuing to advance arrangements to establish additional testing and sequencing capacity in Australia.
- Arrangements have been made for CPHL to ship consumables and test reagents to IMR Goroka or POM? which will allow testing to recommence this week.
- Parts of the equipment, reagents and personnel for the mobile testing lab (air lab) have arrived in the country.
- A private company has been engaged to support the renovation of the PCR laboratory at the School of Medicine.
- This week the team will plan to visit to private laboratories involved with AgRDT to assess their testing procedures as requested by the chief pathologist.

Quarantine & Port of Entry:

- 597 passengers were screened at POE over the last 7 days.
- As of 16 May, there were 597 people under quarantine (PUQ) of which 91 were in home quarantine, 389 in hotels, 87 in company sites and 30 in company apartments.
- There were no reported positive COVID-19 cases in quarantine during this reporting period.
- Due to unresolved payment of staff salaries from NDoH, only 3 monitoring staff are reporting to work on any given day. This means that only approximately 25% of POQ are being monitored and the team are relying on the hotel staffs and other facilities to monitor the remaining 75%.

Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs)

- International Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs) continue to provide care for COVID and non-COVID patients in the Highlands and West New Britain.
- Team Rubicon continues to support Mt Hagen General Hospital in the Western Highlands, focusing on COVID case management, paediatrics and training. The team has also undertaken outreach work to district hospitals and clinics.
- MSF have also deployed EMT team to Oro Province.
- Heart to Heart International (HHI)'s 10-person Emergency Medical Team arrived in PNG on 9 May with most of the team deploying to Goroka. Due to a nurse's strike at the hospital they have redeployed to simbu and outreach to other clinics. In addition, two members were sent to WNB in response to a call for help due to an increase cases and decreased workforce.

Clinical Management and Infection Prevention and Control:

- The team has continued to support the provinces and EMTs in country. Most of the team work last week was focused on finalising job aids for clinical management and IPC as well as on clarifying the COVID-19 referral pathway in NCD.
- This week the team will focus on providing additional support to West New Britain Province.

Risk Communication & Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs):

- An advocacy meeting with the council of churches was conducted last week and the team will continue to work with the church network to support and strengthen the advocacy extend the advocacy program through the DEFAT church partnership.
- An additional advocacy meeting was held last week with disciplinary forces. All were in support of the vaccine after the brief advocacy meeting. The most common concern was on vaccine safety which was clarified. The disciplinary forces are happy to work with NCC and Health Department to implement the government's priority but need more collaboration and capacity building.
- An advocacy meeting was held with the media Councils, editors and the Health reporters to ensure strong support from the media in working together with government to manage information on the pandemic and address negative social media influences, myths and misinformation that is causing a high level of fear and vaccine hesitancy.

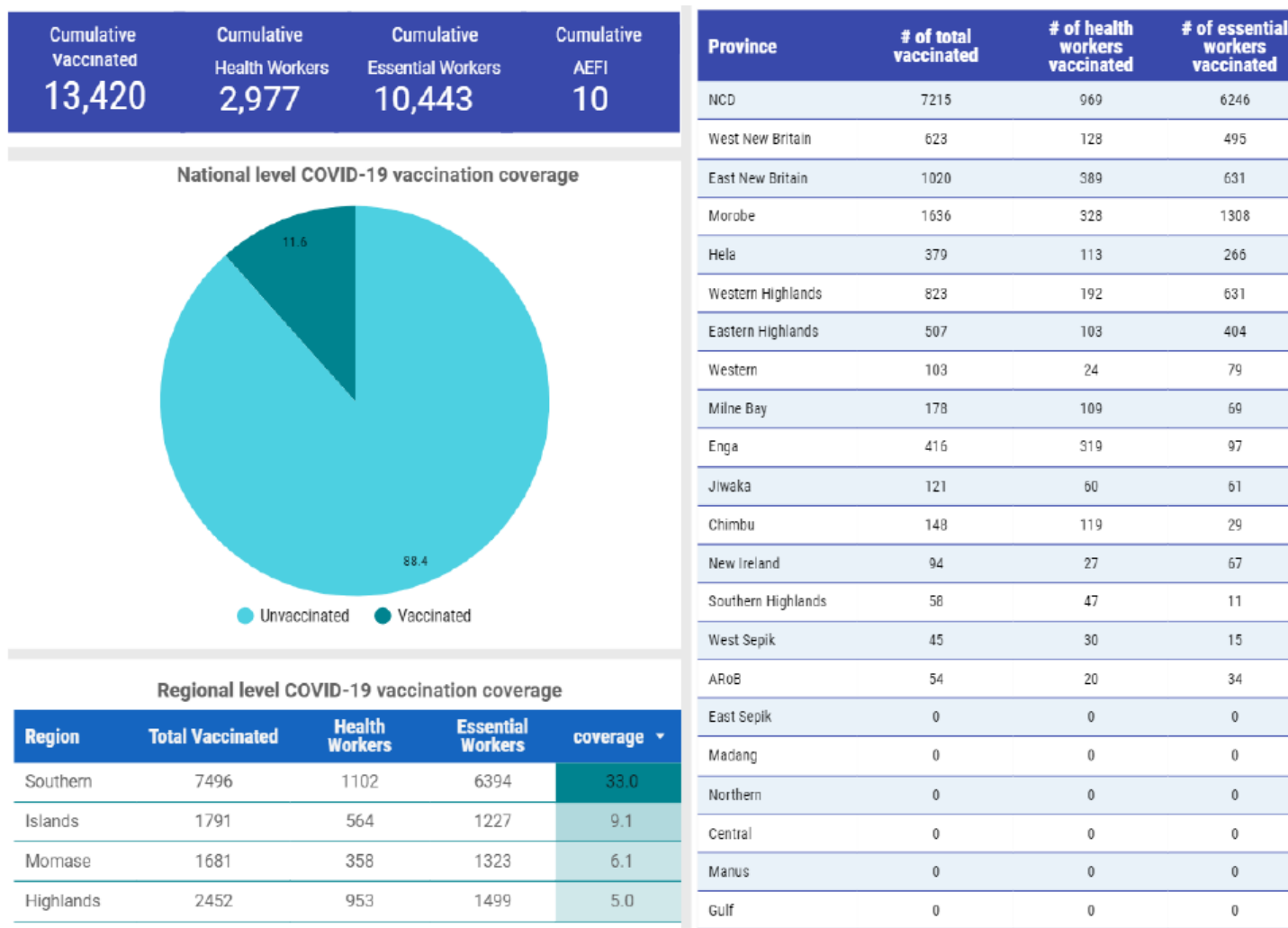
Logistics and Supplies:

- Last week team dispatched 3 tons of COVID 19 supplies including PPE, Lab and support materials to Simbu, West Sepik, Manus, AROB, Milne Bay and ORO provinces.
- Supplies were also dispatched to the Port Moresby General Hospital, NCC, Port of Entry, Laloki, and the Minderoo Foundation.
- The team also commenced PPE distributions to 10 provinces.
- Last week PNG received 1,238 cartons of gloves (100 pairs) from the Asian Development Bank, and an additional 538 cartons are expected in the coming week.
- 50,000 Antigen Rapid Diagnostic tests were also received from the Australian Government.
- An additional delivery of PPE donations including masks, googles and face shield is expected to arrive from Australia this week.

National Vaccine Rollout

- ❑ A total of 39 vaccination sites have started vaccinations, out of 182 sites planned to provide COVID-19 vaccinations nationwide.
- ❑ As of 16 May 2021, a total of 13,420 people have been vaccinated in PNG. This includes 2,977 health workers and 10,442 essential workers.
- ❑ The majority of people receiving the vaccination to date (4,897) are males between the age of 25-49 years.
- ❑ An additional 10,000 doses of AZ vaccine arrived in country from Australian government donation on 15 May 2021.

Figure 1. Cumulative number of persons vaccinated by Region and Province



National and Provincial Public Health Response

COVID-19 Control Measures

- The COVID-19 National Pandemic Response Controller issued 12 new measures under the National Pandemic Act 2020 on Thursday 13 May which ease a number of restrictions imposed over the last six weeks to contain the pandemic.
- Notable changes are in Control Measure 9 relating to 'Business and Social Measures' which have been eased to allow for the re-opening of larger church congregations around the country so people can worship as communities.
- A ban is placed on gatherings of over 10 people, while funerals, haus kraiss and church services may include 100 people.
- Nightclubs and drinking venue that do not serve food are to remain closed, and the sale of takeaway alcohol can now occur on Mondays to Thursdays.
- A ban is placed on recreational or professional sporting matches which include more than 4 people.
- Full details of the measures can be found at www.covid19.info.gov.pg

Support to Gulf Province

- A team of 2 NDoH and 3 WHO experts visited the Gulf province, 11-15 May 2021 to support ongoing COVID-19 response.
- The team met with the Gulf Provincial IMT to review and support their operational plans and activities with recommendations to improve overall coordination and on specific response pillars. Site visits were conducted to the triage center, the provincial hospital including laboratory, newly constructed COVID-19 isolation center and the Kerema high School.
- At the school the team provided COVID-19 awareness and guidance on preventing and managing cases in the school and ensuring continuity of school in a safe environment. The school had reported 21 cases of COVID-19 and was contemplating mass testing and closure of school.
- Training was also provided over 2 days to build and establish a multidisciplinary Rapid Response Team for the Gulf province. A total of 15 individuals comprising of surveillance officers, laboratory, clinicians including nurses, immunization experts, communication, environmental officers, logistics/ finance officers were trained. Partners from the Oil Search were also part of the training.

Transmission Assessment

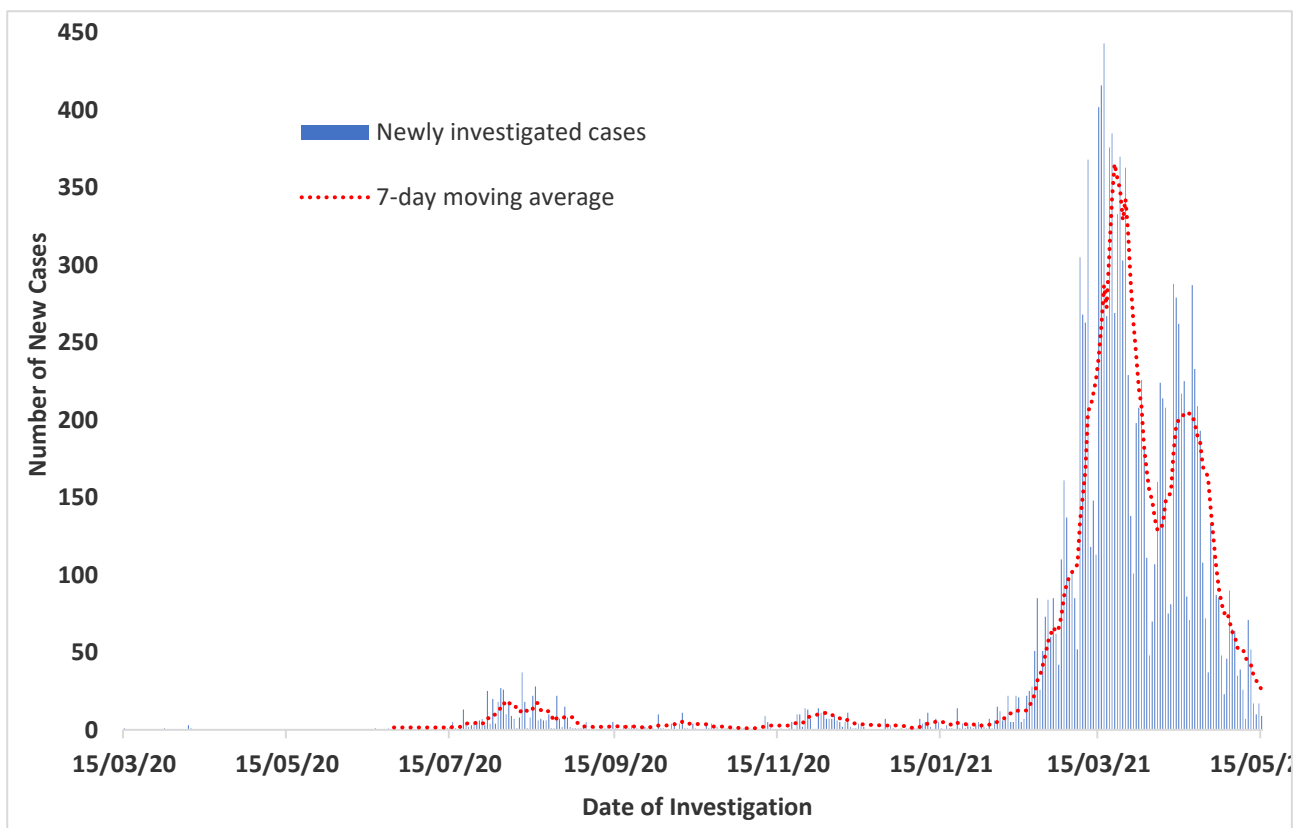
There are currently COVID-19 cases being reported from across PNG, with cases reported from all 22 provinces, including the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (AROB) in the previous seven days. The increase in cases this week compared to recent weeks is partially attributed to delayed receipt of a large number of test results. This highlights some of the ongoing challenges in swabbing, testing, and reporting COVID-19 cases in PNG.

While there continue to be low rates of testing and limited contact tracing, it is believed that community transmission of COVID-19 is occurring throughout much of PNG. With a low level of confidence based on the available data, National Capital District (NCD), Morobe, East New Britain and Western Highlands appear to be in Stage 3, widespread community transmission. In addition, AROB, Central, East Sepik, Enga, Hela, Madang, Manus, New Ireland, Northern, 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

Epidemiology

Figure 2. Epidemiological curve of COVID-19 cases in Papua New Guinea, 15 March 2020 to 16 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 3. Percentage age distribution of COVID-19 cases (64% male, n=8842), 15 March 2020 to 16 May 2021

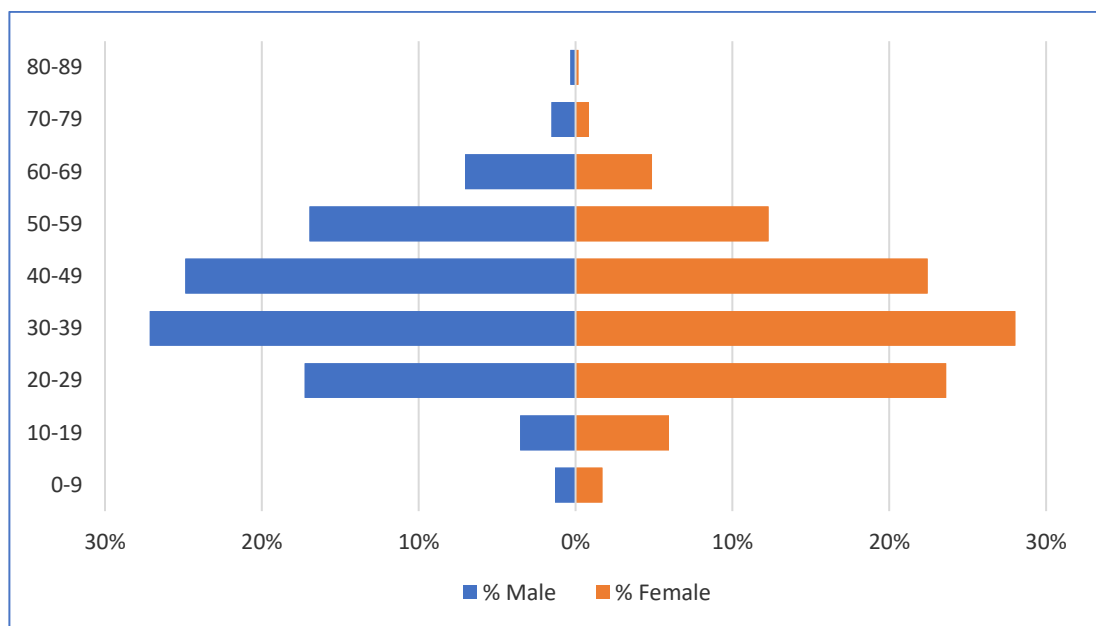


Table 3. Number of swabs taken (tests) in April 2021*, by type of test and province

Province	RT-PCR Tests	GeneXpert Tests	Antigen Rapid Diagnostic Tests	Total tests per 100,000 population
AROB	720	20	1	222
Central	465	6	6	150
East New Britain	973	202	26	320
East Sepik	241	2	34	43
Eastern Highlands	119	185	63	51
Enga	501	184	1	143
Gulf	203	45		130
Hela	248	164		137
Jiwaka	17	86	27	39
Madang	47	28		10
Manus	755	65	216	1,548
Milne Bay	308	64	1	107
Morobe	963	45	605	174
NCD	2449	402	338	710
New Ireland	199	0		94
Northern	455	0		192
Simbu	13	44		15
Southern Highlands	45	3		7
West New Britain	328	249	331	260
West Sepik	131	17		47
Western	216	0		72
Western Highlands	1158	3		262
Total	10554	1814	1649	154

***Please note: This update is based on test results received at the National Control Centre by 14 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 – 15 May 2021)	Air	20,287
	Sea	671
	Land	6
	Total	20,944

COVID-19 Hotline

- For the period of 10 May to 16 May, the COVID-19 National Hotline received 4063 calls.
- Of these, 71 (about 1.75%) were health-related calls. 47 of these were referred to the Rapid Response Team/PHA.
- As of 16 May, the hotline had received a total of 233,687 calls. Of these, 6,024 (2.6%) were health-related calls. A total of 2431 calls to date have been referred to Rapid Response Team/PHAs.

ANNEX A – Photos



Photos 1: Swabbers and Ag-RDT training for 6 new FHI360 recruits with support from WHO and NDoH



Photo 2-3: NDoH & WHO staff visit to Gulf Province.



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