

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 14 March 2021 (12:00 pm), there have been 2269 COVID-19 cases and 21 COVID-19 deaths reported in Papua New Guinea. From the period of 8 to 14 March, there were 606 new cases and 5 new deaths reported. This is the sixth consecutive week of increasing cases, and **the highest number of cases in a single week in PNG since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.**
- ❑ The COVID-19 Hotline has experienced a 55.89% increase in calls since the last fortnight and the rate of health-related calls being referred to the Rapid Response Teams and PHAs has increased by 97% from the prior week.
- ❑ Regulatory approval and import clearance for the AstraZeneca (Serum Institute of India) vaccine was approved last week and the purchase order for the first allocation of vaccines has been placed with the manufacturer.
- ❑ The National Control Centre will host a series of meetings with multiple agencies this week to devise options for additional control measures which are expected to be announced via media release later in the weeks.

Table 1. COVID-19 IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA¹

	New Cases (8 to 14 March 2021)	Cumulative Total
National Capital District	351	1055
Western	0	324
West Sepik	32	206
West New Britain	1	197
Morobe	56	94
Eastern Highlands	53	77
East New Britain	14	52
AROB	9	48
Madang	1	44
Western Highlands	18	37
Central	7	26
Enga	26	29
New Ireland	0	23
East Sepik	3	16
Jiwaka	16	16
Milne Bay	8	10
Hela	7	8
Simbu	4	4
Southern Highlands	0	3
TOTAL	606	2269

¹ As of 14/03/2021, 12:00 pm, PNG time

Summary of Activities and Upcoming Priorities

Surveillance:

- ❑ Last week the surveillance team undertook new epidemiological investigations to highlight the scale of the current outbreak, including more detailed assessments of data over the past 7 days at the provincial level. Additional data cleaning undertaken to identify duplicate cases and ensure accurate reporting of provincial case numbers and two new data entry clerks were recruited and trained to assist with the high number of cases that are being reported each day.
- ❑ Technical support continued to be provided to NCD PHA in their current surge response, which included data analysis, creating materials for dissemination, and assisting with planning and operational activities and a template was finalised and shared with NCD PHA for monitoring incoming domestic passengers at the airport. Documents were also created for business houses

Table 2. COVID-19 GLOBAL AND REGIONAL UPDATE²

	Confirmed Cases	Deaths
Global	119 220 681	2 642 826
Western Pacific	1 711 455	30 357

² WHO COVID-19 Dashboard as of 14/03/2021, 2:03 pm CET

to use providing clear explanations and pathways for what to do if they identify a case at their workplace. A similar document is also being created for housing complexes.

- The team also produced datasets for local and international modelling teams to build on to estimate future surges and the extent of missed cases and deaths to date.
- Training funded by FHI380 was also provided to 12 additional swabbers for NCDPHA.
- This week the team will continue to support the provinces in undertaking swabbing, contact tracing, surveillance activities, and analysis of data and additional training of swabbers will be provided on Wednesday 17th March to further increase the number of healthcare workers who are confident to take Covid-19 swabs

Quarantine & Port of Entry:

- Staff responsible for monitoring incoming travellers are no longer reporting to work due to non-payment of salaries for 4 months.

Laboratory:

- Work is continuing linking antigen rapid diagnostic test and PCR data to continue to determine the sensitivity and specificity of the AgRDT validation and make a recommendation regarding the widespread use of AgRDT testing in PNG. 2 out of 6 provinces are yet to submit their data. Data from East New Brittan, Morobe and NCD are still outstanding.
- Last week CPHL sent 1600 samples to Brisbane for PCR testing. This week 158 positive samples will be sent this week to Victorian Infectious Disease Reference Laboratory (VIDRL) for genomic sequencing

Clinical Management and Infection Prevention and Control:

- The clinical management (CM) and Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) team has been supporting NCD PHA with the clinical management of the current surge in positive COVID-19 cases.
- Activities have included ongoing support to Rita Flynn and Gerehu Hospital in CM and IPC and clinics in NCD to provide support with screening and patient pathways.
- Next week the team will provide IPC training for staff at Rita Flynn and Gerehu Hospital on 17,18 and 19 March.
- The team continues to provide CM and IPC support to Provinces predominately experiencing a surge in COVID cases and this will include establishing a national network of clinical management cluster leads.

Risk Communication & Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs):

- Last week the Risk Communication team developed communications on the announcement of the final government approval for the COVID-19 vaccines to be brought into PNG.
- The COVID-19 Champion's campaign was also launched which identifies individuals in society to raise risk perception of COVID-19 and awareness about the COVID-19 vaccines.
- An animation video on quarantine video was developed to be used on Facebook and will also be broadcast on television.
- This week the team will be finalising the COVID-19 Vaccine Communication Plan as well as social media publishing and broadcasting of the first COVID-19 champion film.
- Focus will also be on finalising distributing quarantine and Isolation infographics as well as continuing to support awareness and risk communication on safe mourning practices and supporting the vaccine deployment team.

- The team will hold a meeting this week with NCD PHA and city authorities including the Police and other enforcing authorities to develop solutions to support citywide implementation and enforcement of Niupela Pasin measures. Collaboration will also continue with East Sepik PHA to ensure Covid 19 protocols are maintained and implemented during Grand Chief funeral and burial services.
- A meeting is also being planned with the Electoral Commission to ensure upcoming Moresby North West by elections are Covid 19 Compliant.

COVAX/Vaccine Planning & Introduction:

- PNG regulatory approval and import clearance for the AstraZeneca vaccine has been granted by the government. This clears the way for the AstraZeneca vaccine to be received in PNG.
- The Secretary of Health released a circular announcing the COVID-19 vaccine, AstraZeneca would be deployed in PNG. The Secretary has requested PHAs to start preparations for vaccine deployment
- Subcommittees on Resource/Funding's and on Operational planning and coordination were convened during the week to continue their work on preparations for vaccine deployment.
- This week the NDoH will compile data on target populations in each province and provinces to begin microplanning for the allocation of vaccine.

Logistics and Supplies:

- 90% of the supply of WHO biomedical bundles have now been received by PHAs with only 2 of 22 PHA yet to confirm receipt of equipment.
- A stock count has been completed on critical national stock level of GeneXpert testing cartridges and other stock. This assessment and distribution reports have been shared with Surveillance Laboratory teams to support strategic planning on the management of available national stock.
- Dispatches of GeneXpert testing cartridges, UTMs and person protective equipment (PPE) was dispatched to East Sepik, Hela, Jiwaka, Port Moresby General Hospital, Rita Flynn, St Johns, and Sky Medical Clinic.
- An urgent supply of 117 cartons of PPE was also received from WHO regional office which included gowns, shoe covers and surgical caps.
- A data collection template was also sent to partners for the PNG COVID 19 pipeline dashboard. It is expected that partners will provide their respective pipelines to be reflected on the dashboard.
- Next week the team will focus on preparing and executing a new PPE distribution plan and will closely monitor supply levels at Port Moresby General Hospital and Rita Flynn by providing onsite supply management technical support.

Transmission Assessment

There are currently surges occurring in several provinces across PNG, with outbreaks in the National Capital District (NCD), West Sepik, Morobe, Eastern Highlands, Western Highlands, Jiwaka, Enga, and Autonomous Region of Bougainville. These outbreaks include a large number of healthcare workers, as well as other key populations of concern, such as incarcerated people and people working in closed settings including mine sites. Large-scale population-level testing remains low across most of PNG, with few health facilities conducting routine screening, swabbing symptomatic patients, and reporting test results on a regular basis. Despite this, test positivity is high, with some facilities recording over 30% of tests returning positive results.

Currently NCD and West Sepik, are in Stage 3, large-scale community transmission, with almost all infections locally acquired and not linked to specific groups or locations. In addition, Western Province, Jiwaka, East New Britain, Morobe, Eastern 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, Enga and Western Highlands are in Stage 1, imported cases, with recent transmission imported from another province or area, or linked to imported cases. These localised outbreaks will be closely followed to watch for signs of increasing community transmission over coming weeks.

Nineteen 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

Epi Update COVID-19

Tests	Cases	Deaths
969**	606	5
NAT Tests past 7 days	New cases past 7 days	Deaths past 7 days
55411	2269	21
Cumulative NAT Tests	Cumulative Cases	Cumulative Deaths
0	343	31*
Imported Cases in past 28 days	Cases in past 7 days with no link	Active Clusters in the past 7 days

*Case investigation ongoing

*Please note, provinces using GeneXpert testing are commonly only reporting positive test results to the NCC. There is a delay in receiving negative test numbers from provinces therefore the figure for number of tests in the past 7 days may not accurately reflect the actual number of total tests being conducted. this information is based on the test results received at the time of reporting.

See table 3 for positivity rates per province.

Table 3. Test positivity* among provinces reporting one or more COVID-19 cases,

Province	Cumulative Cases	Cumulative PCR Tests	Positivity
AROB	48	719	7%
Central	26	336	8%
East New Britain	52	2459	2%
East Sepik	16	915	2%
Eastern Highlands	77	1814	4%
Enga	29	628	5%
Hela	8	1286	1%
Jiwaka	16	220	7%
Madang	44	663	7%
Milne Bay	10	523	2%
Morobe	94	3946	2%
National Capital District	1055	12845	8%
New Ireland	23	2010	1%
Simbu	4	277	1%
Southern Highlands	3	272	1%
West New Britain	197	8596	2%
West Sepik	206	1229	17%
Western	324	11833	3%
Western Highlands	37	2540	1%
TOTAL	2269	55411	4%

*Please note, this information is based on the test results received at the time of reporting. Some provinces may have conducted additional testing but have not shared their results with the National Control Centre.

Epidemiology

Figure 1. Epidemiological curve of COVID-19 cases in Papua New Guinea, 15 March 2020 to 14 March 2021

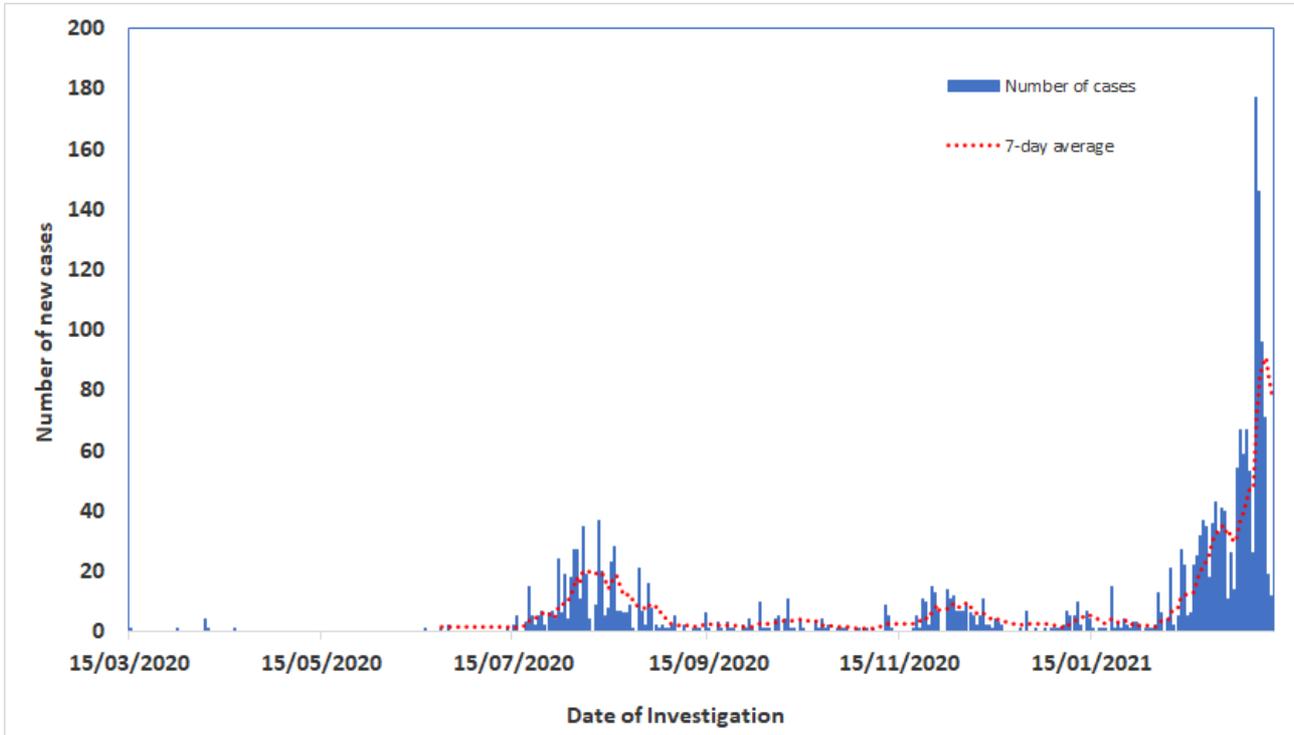


Figure 2. Number of new weekly and cumulative COVID-19 cases, 1 Feb to 14 March 2021

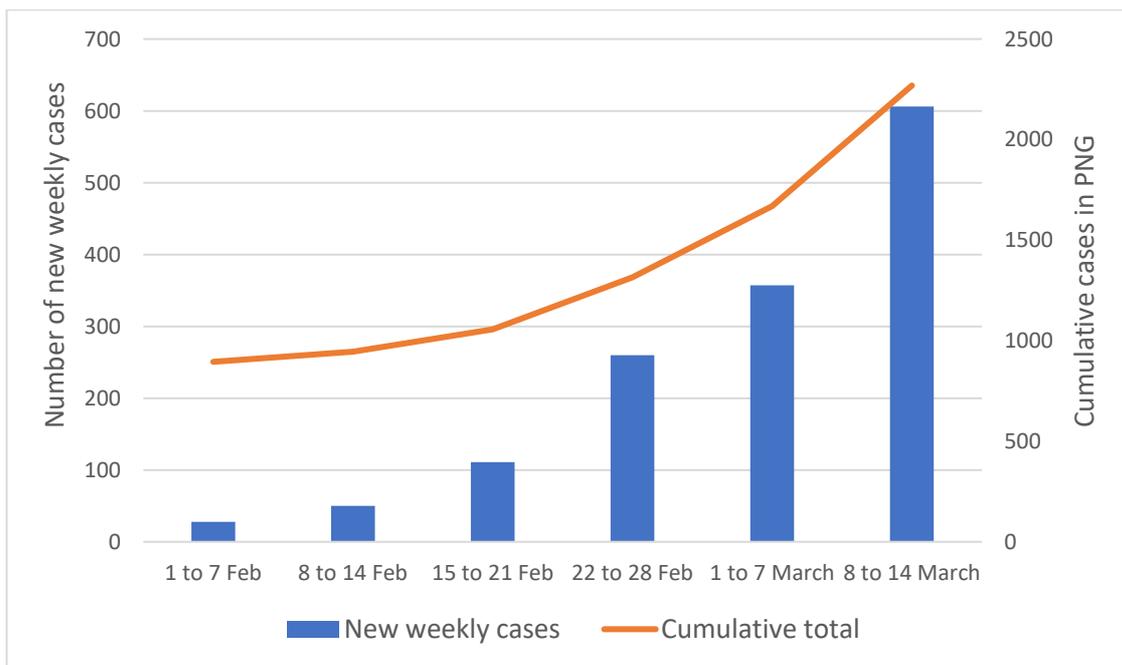
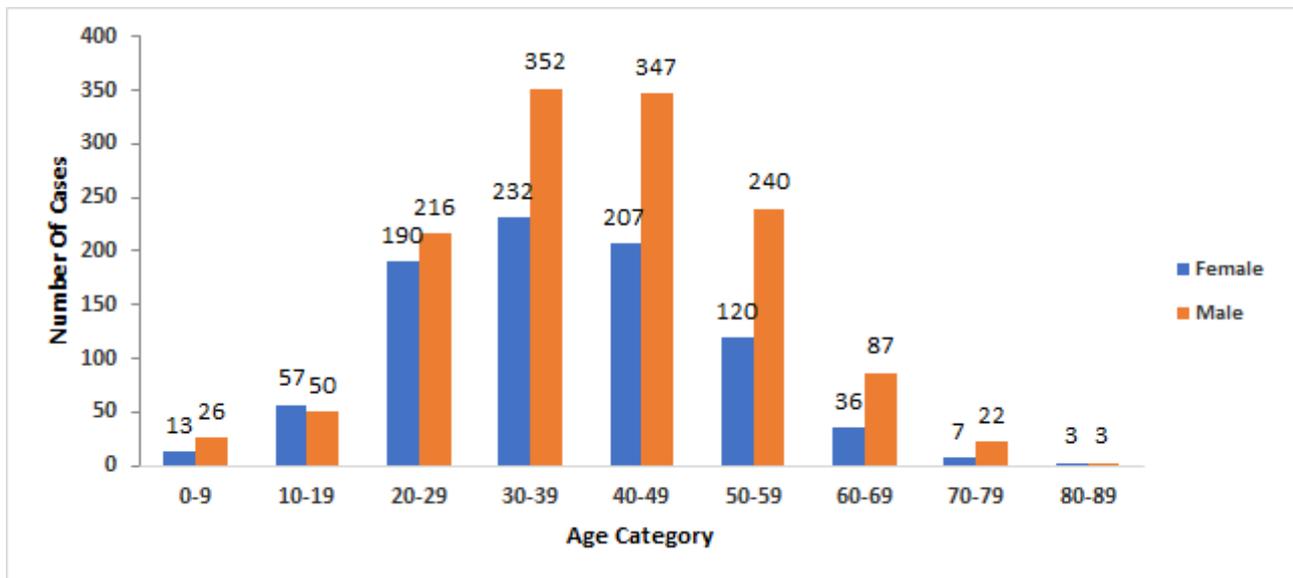


Figure 3. COVID-19 cases by age-group and sex in Papua New Guinea, 15 March 2020 to 14 March 2021



- The number of symptomatic cases has increased over recent weeks, with 70% of cases between 8 and 14 March reporting symptoms at the time of testing. The most commonly reported symptoms are cough, fever, and headache.

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 – 13 March 2021)	Air	16,105
	Sea	671
	Land	6
	Total	16,762

COVID-19 Hotline

- For the period of 08 March to 14 February, the COVID-19 National Hotline received 4,651 calls. **This is a 55.89% increase in calls from over the last fortnight.** Of these, 92 (about 2%) were health-related calls. 67 of these were referred to the Rapid Response Team/PHA.
- The rate of health-related calls being referred to the Rapid Response Teams and PHAs has increased by 97% from the prior week.
- As of 14 March, the hotline had received a total of 181,055 calls. Of these, 5,320 (3%) were health-related calls. A total of 1,944 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.

Operational COVID-19 Surge Plan

- The NCC has developed an Operational COVID-19 Surge Plan template has been developed to provide guidance on a range of strategic response activities for provinces to effectively prepare and respond to surges in the health system caused by a COVID-19 outbreak in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Plan is intended to provide guidance on the response to an outbreak in a Province in order to reduce the adverse health impacts on the population and reduce the burden and disruption to health-related services.
- Surge Plan template and Surge Capacity Assessment documents have been shared with all provinces.
- The Secretary of Health has issued an instruction for all PHAs to urgently complete their surge plans by Wednesday 17th March.

ARoB

- The Suhin quarantine facility is being prepared to accommodate mild to moderate positive patients while severe and critical cases will be accommodated at Buka isolation ward.
- Screening and cough triaging is actively ongoing at Buka, Arawa and Buin Hospitals where samples are collected for testing. There are 2 contact tracing teams currently operating in Buka where most of the positive cases are coming from. The contact tracing team in Arawa will be strengthened to also support contact tracing in Buin.

Morobe

- Due to widespread community transmission, Morobe PHA is re-strategizing to focus on community level surveillance and specimen collection utilizing health care workers at the Aid Post level. The aim is to provide staff training and upskilling early so community transmission can be detected.
- Enhanced IPC measures at all health facilities is being maintained, with a weekly COVID-19 risk control and compliance assessment being conducted by respective supervisors to ensure that COVID-19 transmission does not occur at health facilities.

Madang

- The province has spent the week (22nd-26th Feb) conducting awareness on strict adherence to the new normal, especially focusing on wearing of masks, physical distancing, and hand hygiene. The provincial health team also conducted a 3-day refresher training for Clinical & Surveillance from 23rd to 25th February highlighting SOPs in place for clinical pathways, contact tracing, cough triaging and specimen collections. This training was supported through World Vision and UNICEF.
- The triage set-up at the Madang Hospital was ready for use by 25th February.
- Measures for the province will be released by the end of this week.

West Sepik & East Sepik Provinces

- There are concerns around the influx and movement of people in these 2 provinces during the mourning and funeral arrangements for the late Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare. PHAs of both provinces have requested assistance with PPE, UTMs and geneXpert cartridges in preparation of a highly likely increased surge after this event.

New Ireland Province

- The Kavieng hospital is strongly enforcing entry by mask and hand sanitization. All patients are also being screened for flu-like symptoms. Specimen collection for suspected COVID-19 is done at the pre-triage and tests are done using RDT or GeneXpert testing.
- The hospital is also operating on reduced staffing levels due to an increasing number of flu-like illness among hospital staff. Consequently, IPC measures in the hospital have been enhanced and staff are encouraged to observe IPC measures at all times.
- JICA recently donated several items of hospital equipment however the hospital is still in need of ventilator and an incinerator.

Eastern Highlands Province

- EHP PCC had its first PCC meeting for 2021 on the 11th March, chaired by the Provincial Administrator. The PCC will be meeting once every two weeks to monitor COVID-19 mitigation activities in the province.
- On the 11th March, the PCC released measures covering the Niupla Pasin. The measures include all business houses to enforce “no mask, no service”. The Goroka Urban Local Level Government will enforce that Goroka town is kept clean, no cooked food sales in public, ban on dart game in public and ban sales of betelnut in towns, schools and institutions.
- The health team are maintaining their awareness and advocacy activities, including updates through radio Eastern Highlands, urging the public to observe the simple measures of hand cleanliness, physical distancing, avoiding crowd gatherings and mask wearing.
- All positive cases in EHP are isolated at this stage and contact tracing activities are continuing for these positive cases.

Jiwaka

- A total of 81 GeneX tests have been completed since 12th March and 15 of these confirmed positive.
- The Kujjip Hospital was shut for one day to allow decontamination of the facility and a scale down of services ensued to allow staff to be properly isolated.
- PEOC meetings for Jiwaka are twice weekly, on Mondays and Fridays and the PCC meetings will commence shortly.
- The PHA has led by example with very strict no mask, no entry at the office.
- Currently the PEOC has arrangements in place for PPE distribution and IPC messaging to all its health facilities as well as on-going awareness in the province resulting in positive response from public markets and shops.
- Close contacts of positive cases have been told to home-quarantine and will be monitored by the surveillance team for symptoms.

ANNEX A – Photos



Photos 1-2 Swabbing training - NCD

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