



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 21 March 2021 (12:00 pm), there have been 3574 COVID-19 cases and 36 COVID-19 deaths reported in Papua New Guinea. From the period of 15 to 21 March, there were 1305 newly reported cases including 15 new deaths. **This is the seventh consecutive week of increasing cases**, and more than double the previous highest number of cases reported in a single week in PNG.
- 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.
- Public Health Unit at Doherty Institute in Australia has conducted whole genome sequencing on positive test samples sent from PNG and no variants of concern have been identified in sequencing conducted to date.
- The COVID-19 Hotline has experienced a 33.83% 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.
- This week the Australian government will deploy an Australian Medical Assistance Team (AUSMAT) to undertake assessments and critical planning for a potential full deployment of a clinical care team to support the health system in PNG.

### Summary of Activities and Upcoming Priorities

#### Surveillance:

- Last week the Surveillance team undertook planning activities to support the rollout of the antigen rapid diagnostic tests (AgRDT) to all provinces, working alongside the Central Public Health Laboratory (CPHL) and the Institute for Medical Research (IMR) Goroka
- Discussions were held with the Public Health Unit at Doherty Institute in Australia around whole genome sequencing. No variants of concern have been identified in sequencing conducted to date.

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

	New Cases (15 to 21 March 2021)	Cumulative Total
National Capital District	595	1650
Western	171	495
West Sepik	139	345
West New Britain	0	196
Eastern Highlands	85	162
Morobe	46	140
East New Britain	51	103
Western Highlands	63	100
AROB	11	59
Madang	15	59
Enga	20	49
New Ireland	22	45
Central	11	37
East Sepik	19	35
Simbu	27	31
Jiwaka	4	20
Hela	11	19
Southern Highlands	14	17
Milne Bay	1	11
Gulf	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1305</b>	<b>3574</b>

<sup>1</sup> As of 21/03/2021, 12:00 pm, PNG time

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	122 524 424	2 703 620
Western Pacific	1 775 575	30 843

<sup>2</sup> WHO COVID-19 Dashboard as of 21/03/2021, 2:27 pm CET

- 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 conducted of all confirmed COVID-19 cases per province by date to cross-check against the totals being reported by NCC.
- Further training will be provided for provinces on the use of AgRDT, along with CPHL and IMR Goroka
- Additional data entry clerks will be recruited to assist with the surge in cases and to ensure reporting can be completed in a timely manner.
- The team will also continue to prepare data to support the work of the modelling and genome sequencing teams internationally.

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

- 313 passengers were screened at POE over the last 7 days.
- Quarantine monitoring has been impacted as responsible staff have not been reporting to work due to non-payment of salaries for 4 months.

#### **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 of provincial laboratories and provide support for the demand for cartridges due to the surge in COVID-19 cases.

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

- The Clinical management team has been supporting NCD PHA with the clinical management (CM) of the current surge in positive COVID-19 cases.
- The team continues to provide CM and IPC support to provinces predominately experiencing a surge in COVID cases.
- The majority of last week focused on gathering information on the true status of isolation bed capacity and critical care capacity across the country and developing a clinical dashboard.
- This week the team will focus on providing IPC training for staff at Rita Flynn, Gerehu and PIH Hospitals as well as establishing a network of clinical cluster leads across the country.
- The team will also continue to provide CM and IPC support to Provinces experiencing a surge in cases.

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

- The first COVID19 Champions Campaign film featuring Professor Mola was released last week and planning continued to line-up of more champions in NCD as well as other parts of the country.
- A Joint Media Conference was held by Secretary of Health, WHO, UNICEF and leaders in Science and Medical community in PNG, representatives from professional societies and provincial health authorities to show solidarity in the COVID-19 Vaccines.
- The team started developing a vaccine Communication FAQs and the Vaccine Communication Strategy was finalised and submitted for approval and endorsement.

- New IEC materials and Information is now out for public consumption and includes infographics on Isolation and Quarantine, and infographics on COVID-19 deceased management.
- Guidance on managing COVID-19 deceased remains were also circulated as part of IPC measures.
- Weekly SMS blast on COVID-19 measures and Niupela Pasin have begun and will continue 3 times weekly for 1 month.
- This week the team will focus on developing a vaccine communication training module as well as printing all IEC materials for distribution to the provinces.

#### **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.
- Provinces are submitting data on target populations but there is still not a complete data set.
- The Secretary of Health and leaders of the medical community held a press conference Thursday afternoon announcing the donation of 8000 doses of AstraZeneca vaccine from the Government of Australia to fast-track vaccination of health care workers in NCD.

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

- Last week PNG received PPE donation from New Zealand as well as 320 Oxygen concentrators from UNOPS which were dispatched to the Rita Flynn facility and Port Moresby General Hospital.
- A priority this week will be preparing to consign PPE to AROB, Enga, Jiwaka and others provinces as well as receive donations from DFAT including PPE and Mobile Storage Unit and Tents.
- An assessment will be undertaken of equipment needs with the clinical management team and Facility Branch.

## 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. 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, New Ireland, Jiwaka, East New Britain, Morobe, Eastern 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 will be closely followed to watch for signs of increasing community transmission over coming weeks.

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
<b>5269</b> NAT Tests past 7 days	<b>1305</b> New cases past 7 days	<b>15</b> Deaths past 7 days
<b>60680</b> Cumulative NAT Tests	<b>3574</b> Cumulative Cases	<b>36</b> Cumulative Deaths
<b>0</b> Imported Cases in past 28 days	<b>866</b> Cases in past 7 days with no link	<b>28*</b> Active Clusters in the past 7 days

\*Case investigation ongoing. Data as reported at the time of sample collection.

## Testing Update

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.

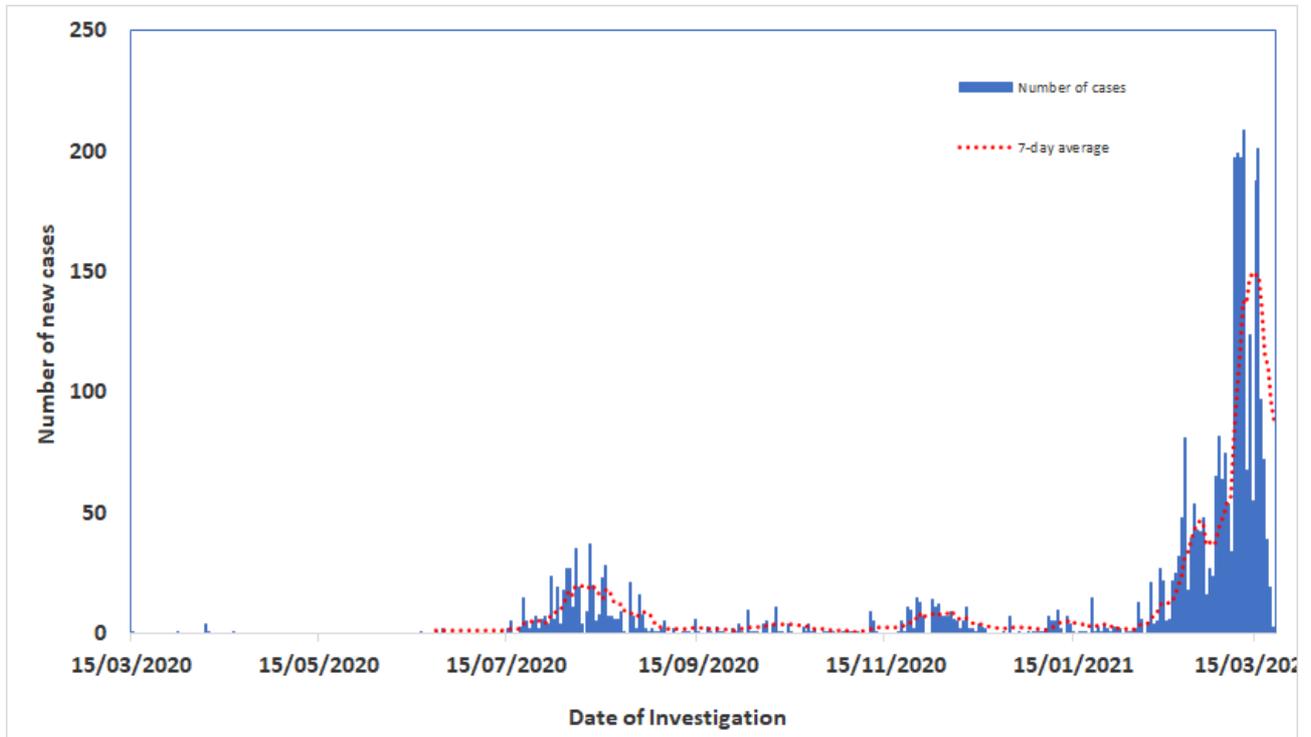
**Table 3. Number of GeneXpert and RT-PCR tests\* conducted from 1 February – 21 March 2021, by province**

Province	GeneXpert Tests	RT-PCR Tests	Tests per 100,000 population
AROB	681	162	252
Central	0	87	27
East New Britain	57	158	57
East Sepik	0	388	60
Eastern Highlands	127	922	146
Enga	390	205	124
Gulf	15	13	15
Hela	77	139	72
Jiwaka	49	0	15
Madang	470	0	65
Manus	0	242	362
Milne Bay	111	91	58
Morobe	224	771	107
NCD	369	1822	487
New Ireland	0	0	0
Northern	0	0	0
Simbu	31	0	8
Southern Highlands	0	23	4
West New Britain	36	1207	357
West Sepik	465	531	315
Western	35	176	70
Western Highlands	308	593	204
<b>Total</b>	<b>3445</b>	<b>7530</b>	<b>121</b>

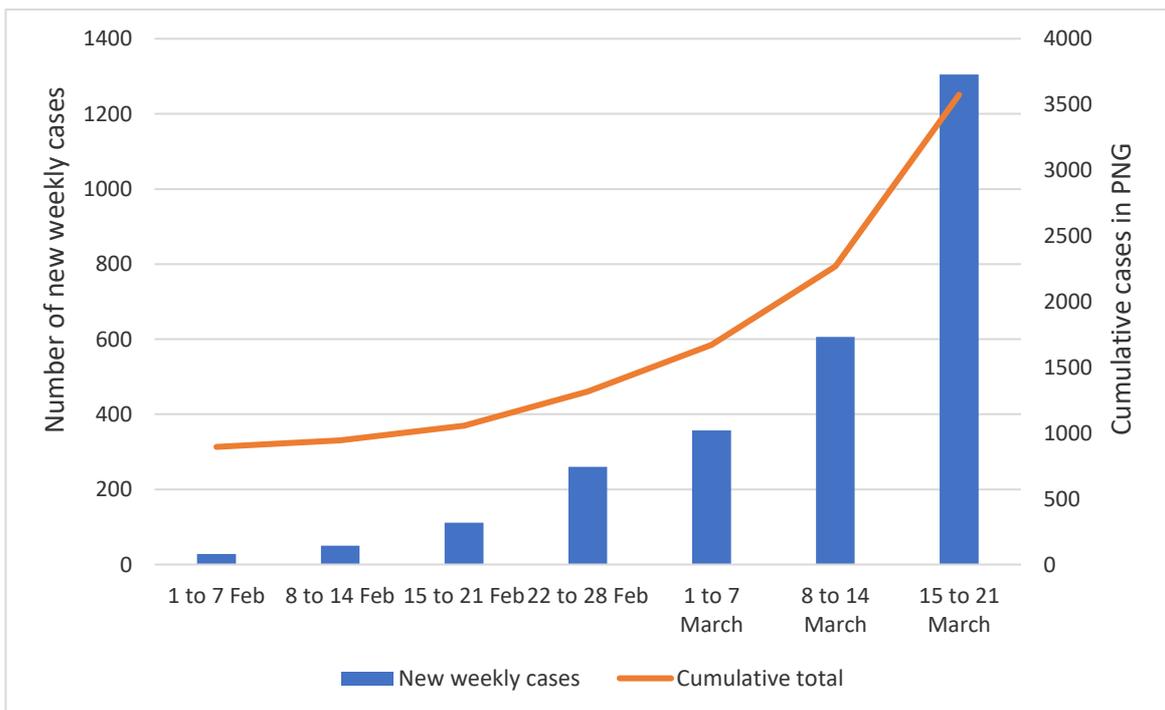
\*Please note, this information is based on the test results received at the time of reporting. Some provinces may have conducted additional testing but have not shared their results with the National Control Centre.

## Epidemiology

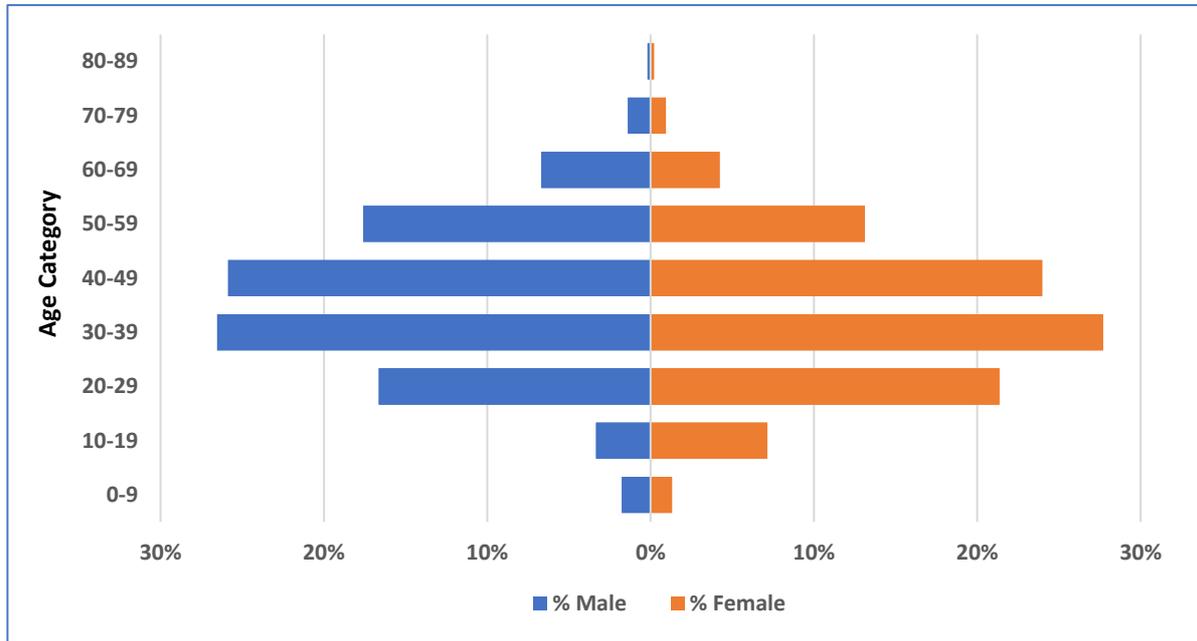
**Figure 1. Epidemiological curve of COVID-19 cases in Papua New Guinea, 15 March 2020 to 21 March 2021**



**Figure 2. Number of new weekly and cumulative COVID-19 cases, 1 Feb to 21 March 2021**



**Figure 3. Percentage age distribution of COVID-19 cases (60% male, n=2092), 15 March 2020 to 21 March 2021**



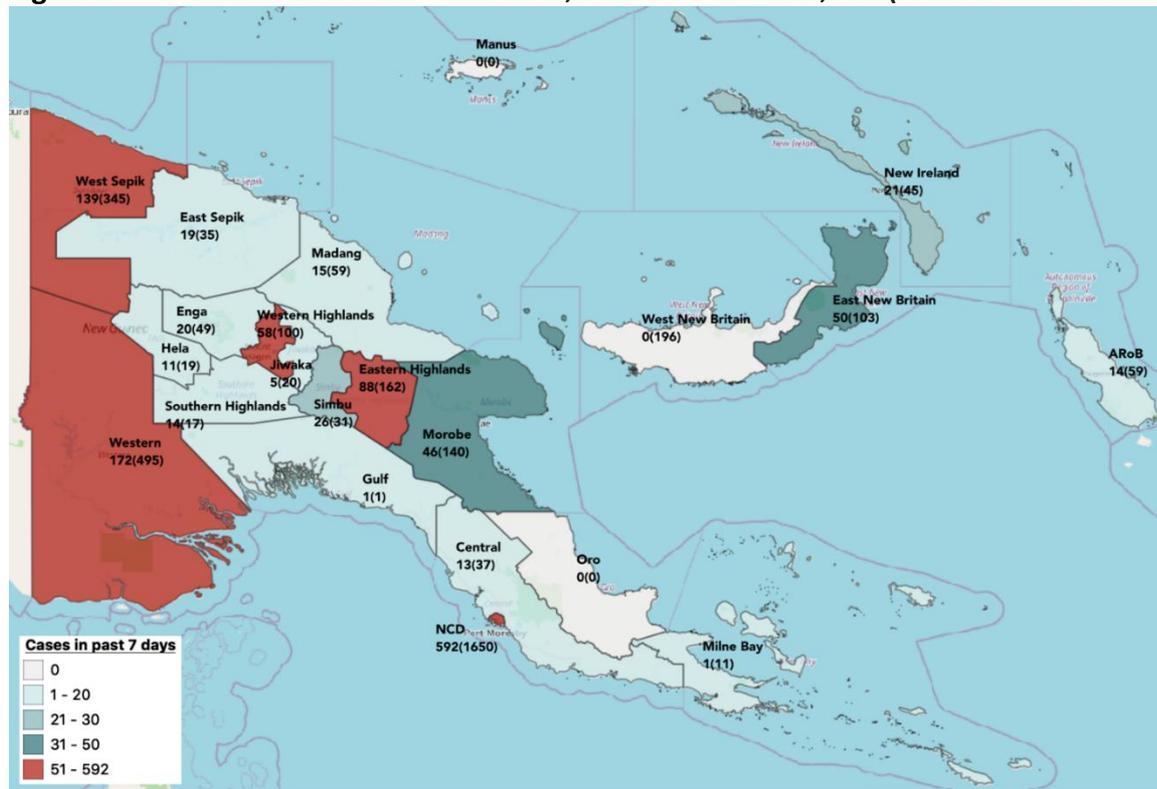
**Table 4. Persons Screened by Point of Entry**

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 – 20 March 2021)	Air	16,418
	Sea	671
	Land	6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>17,075</b>

**COVID-19 Hotline**

- For the period of 15 March to 21 February, the COVID-19 National Hotline received 7028 calls. **This is a 33.82% increase in calls in the last 7 days.** Of these, 156 (about 2%) were health-related calls. 100 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 33% from the prior week.
- As of 21 March, the hotline had received a total of 188.101 calls. Of these, 5,476 (3%) were health-related calls. A total of 2049 calls to date have been referred to Rapid Response Team/PHAs.

**Figure 4. Provincial distribution of new cases, 15 – 21 March 2021, and (total since the start of outbreak)**



## 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.
- This week the Australian government will deploy an Australian Medical Assistance Team (AUSMAT) to undertake assessments and critical planning for a potential full deployment of a clinical care team to support the health system in PNG
- The Australian government has committed to send 8,000 doses of its COVID-19 vaccine supply to PNG next week and is asking AstraZeneca and European authorities to divert another 1 million doses to PNG. This is in addition to the 288,000 doses already on order for PNG through the COVAX facility.
- The existing regulatory approval and import clearance for the AstraZeneca which was issued by the PNG Government last week was specifically for those which are manufactured by the Serum Institute of India. As Australia's stock of the AstraZeneca vaccine was manufactured in the UK, it will therefore require separate regulatory approval and import clearance to be issued by the PNG Government prior to being sent from Australia.

- ❑ Talks are also ongoing between the PNG Government and the Government of India to provide an urgent supply of their stocks of the AstraZeneca vaccine which was manufactured by the Serum Institute of India and therefore is already approved in PNG.

#### **Operational COVID-19 Surge Plan**

- ❑ Most provinces have submitted their surge capacity assessments and surge plans, except Oro, New Ireland, Manus and AROB.
- ❑ The Secretary of Health had issued an instruction for all PHAs to urgently complete their surge plans by Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> March.

## **Provincial Updates**

### **National Capital District**

- ❑ Work is underway to open a COVID-19 care centre at Taurama Aquatic Centre. This will initially have a capacity of up to 120 patients for managing low acuity mild patients that need monitoring and nursing care. The facility has a theoretical maximum of 300 beds, but additional emergency medical assistance will be required to open the facility to this 300-bed capacity and/or provide care to higher acuity patients. The estimated opening date for up to 20 patients is around 25 March or earlier.

### **New Ireland Province**

- ❑ The St Barbra mine on the island of Simberi has reported several COVID-19 cases in the last couple of days, all positive COVID-19 cases in isolation on company premises and contact tracing carried out.

### **East New Brittan Province**

- ❑ ENB is one of the dedicated reporting provinces in the country, providing daily sitreps to NCC. ENB is also one of provinces that isolates all its positive COVID-19 cases in a designated venue and releases them after their 14 days of isolation.
- ❑ The province is continuing to use Ag-RDT as part of the validation process and has identified several COVID-19 cases using this testing strategy.
- ❑ With the increasing number of positives, the contact tracing in the province is a challenge and several cases are pending contact tracing.
- ❑ The province continues to screen with enhanced surveillance for ILI/SARI at 7 health facilities; St Mary Hospital, Butuwin urban clinic, Warangoi, Rabaul Urban clinic, Kerevat, Palmalmal and Nonga Hospital.

### **Madang Province**

- ❑ Madang Province have had a well-coordinated approach since the start of the Pandemic in early 2020 and have several good lessons to learn from during their earlier response.
- ❑ The province is applying a holistic approach with inter government agencies, business houses and the PHA providing a united front to prevent COVID-19 from entering the province.
- ❑ The province attribute this to availability of funds and are now focusing on sustainable health services and infrastructure that will see COVID-19 addressed but also address other ongoing diseases and their challenges.

### **Enga Province**

- The province reported 63 confirmed COVID-19 cases in recent weeks with Wapenamanda recording the highest number of cases (43).
- Other districts including Wabag, Kompiam Ambum and Kandep also have positive cases, suggesting possible community transmission taking place.
- All Niupla Pasin measures including compulsory masks wearing, hand hygiene, restrictions on mass gatherings such as brideprice, haus krais, village court hearings as well as the closure of the main markets of Pawas and Kumbaskam.
- Business operating hours will be from 8am-3pm.

#### **Western Highlands Province**

- WHP PHA is one of the Highlands provinces which continues to provide daily reports to the NCC.
- The province has screened a total of 96,374 people since the beginning of the Pandemic and collected a total of 3158 samples from individuals (PUI), of which 114 (cumulative) returned positive for COVID-19.
- The province continues to screen and set up cough triage in 6 health facilities, including the Mt Hagen Hospital collecting samples from ILI/SARI cases, except on weekends.

## **Logistics and Supplies**

### **In kind Donations**

- More on Saturday 20th March 2021 the New Zealand Defence Force donated 4,393kg of assorted PPEs for PNG Defence Force Posts around the country. These donations are to be distributed to all PNGDF Port Moresby based Units and outer Units including Highlands Provinces where PNGDF has footprints of PNGDF troops.
- Provisions will also be provided to PNGDF on the western border at Kiunga, Daru and Vanimo.
- FHI360 through USAID will have donated 25,000 UTM's and 20 clinical monitors valued at US \$74,204 for NCDPHA. Formalities for an official hand over is in progress.
- UNICEF aiding with casual manpower and a 2-tonne truck to assist with packing and dispatch of C-19 supplies to priority provinces for the next 2 weeks.

### **Distribution**

- NCC Health Logistics continues to supply Sky Medical & Pacific International Hospital who have been tasked to conduct testing for Government office staff.
- More than 5000 UTM's dispatched to date across PHAs as well as 100,000 surgical masks to East Sepik Province.

<b>Distribution of O2 Concentrators</b>		
<b>Province</b>	<b>Qty</b>	<b>Delivery Status</b>
Kimbe Hospital, West New Britain	5	PHA collected

East New Britain	5	PHA collected
Manus	4	PHA collected
Morobe	5	PHA collected
Central	4	Delivered
NCD		Delivered
Western- Kiunga	5	PHA collected
Western- Daru	5	PHA collected
Eastern Highlands- Goroka PHA	5	PHA collected
Simbu	4	PHA collected
Jiwaka	4	PHA collected
WHP	5	PHA collected
Enga	5	PHA collected
Hela	5	PHA collected
Ventilator Distribution		
Hospital	Qty	Shipping Status
Port Moresby General Hospital, NCD.	2	10 Delivered
Nonga provincial hospital, Rabaul, ENB		1 Sched for se freight 9th - 12th March 2021
Wewak provincial hospital, East Sepik	1	TBC
Angaou Hospital, Lae, Morobe	2	3 Sched for se freight 9th - 12th March 2021
Goroka Hospital, Goroka, EHP	1	1 TBC
Mt Hagen Provincial Hospital, WHP	1	2 TBC
Tari Provincial hospital, Tari, Hela		1 TBC
Kavieng Provincial Hospital, New Ireland	1	TBC
Alotau Hospital, Milne Bay		1 TBC
Kimbe Hospital, West New Britain	1	1 Sched for se freight 9th - 12th March 2021
Simbu Hospital, Kundiawa, Simbu	1	TBC
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>

## ANNEX A – Photos



Photos 1-3 arrival of donated PPE from the New Zealand Government

---

For more information about this Situation Report, contact:

**Dr Daoni Esorom**  
Incident Manager – COVID-19  
National Department of Health  
Email: daoniesorom@gmail.com; Mobile: +675-72313983

**Greg Cameron**  
Information & Planning Pillar Lead  
National Control Centre / UN RCO  
Email: greg.cameron@undp.org