

Kindness and Compassion

10 September 2020

“Since beginning quarantine-free travel to the Cook Islands in June this year, over 600 Cook Islanders have returned to re-join their families. We completed this by applying robust public health measures at the border, and assessing the public health risk to the Cook Islands population. This process is ongoing and includes daily situation reports the latest published today is #226. Current efforts are focussed on Auckland in particularly with the large Auckland COVID-19 cluster” said Secretary of Health Dr Aumea Herman today.

“We are pleased to have found a way to safely return our people home. They are fellow Cook Islanders, our relatives, their spouses and children, people who were referred to New Zealand for medical treatment, and workers or others who usually live here.”

“Some have been away from their loved ones for months, and just want to come home.

“Unlike many of us, most of them have been in real ‘lockdowns’ or ‘quarantine’ in their effort to get home; and all have been tested for COVID-19, sometimes more than twice and tested negative.”

“Our country is one of the very few in the world which remains COVID-19-free, and our isolation has played a part in that along with our precautionary public health approach and our careful assessment of virus transmission patterns in other populations. Every day we review the global and regional situation and assess how this might affect us. Before we make recommendations or decisions, we work through the ‘pros and cons’ to ensure this is well informed by the evidence.”

“Some of the people who returned last week have been trying to get home for months. For one elderly couple (medical referral) it was their fifth attempt to catch a flight. They’d been booked on four previous flights all of which for some reason or other were cancelled. Most if not all of the returnees are just relieved and glad to be home. They’re not quarantine breakers.”

“Some communities have asked for more signage and more communication about where people are quarantined in their neighbourhood, and for 24/7 surveillance, and this has been established. Some Punas have requested for the lists of names of recent arrivals however, on Crown Law advice this has been limited to Immigration, Police and Te Marae Ora. The head of each Community Health Clinic or Puna only receives the names of those residing in their area. Te Marae Ora will continue to improve our processes.”

Te Marae Ora as the lead agency is conducting daily health checks, and ensuring all arrivals have adequate supplies of medicines, blood tests, and health services when required. Today

all those in supervised quarantine have had swabs done which will be sent to New Zealand on tomorrow's flight for COVID testing. So far, all are in good health.

“Several government agencies like Police are working closely with us. We have already asked them to investigate rumoured breaches on our behalf and they have done so swiftly; but so far that's all they've been, rumours. Scurrilous comments and rumours on social media are unhelpful and create unnecessary concern and in at least one case has been acted on by Police.”

“That notwithstanding, we still ‘all’ have to be vigilant. We need to maintain our hand, face and cough/sneeze hygiene along with physical distancing. It may seem trite, but ‘we are all in this together’. The returnees have a part to play and so do we. Cook Islanders are well known for being kind and generous hosts. The people who arrived nearly a week ago are our own anau. Lets be kind and generous to them too, and to those arriving tomorrow.”

Dr Herman is currently in Auckland undertaking medical tests that are not available here in the Cook Islands. She continues to meet via zoom with staff daily to ensure our health response remains effective and she is in regular contact with senior officials and Cabinet Ministers involved in the national response.

Dr Uka is Acting Secretary of Health and Dr Ted Hughes who returned to Rarotonga last week is undergoing supervised quarantine at Rarotonga Hospital and will provide cover for any medical emergencies if required. Dr Hughes was seconded to Te Marae Ora through a special request to Waitemata DHB and Auckland DHB to provide clinical oversight and intensive care unit assistance, while Dr Herman is overseas.

We are ensuring the health system can respond rapidly should we receive a severe trauma case especially involving a head injury or other medical emergency. Should Dr Hughes' clinical services be required by Te Marae Ora in the week ahead, he will be wearing full PPE.

Te Marae Ora organised an emergency medivac to Auckland Hospital last month. The patient has recovered and is much improved.

At this stage 28 passengers are expected to arrive on tomorrow's flight. They will be undertaking their 2 weeks supervised quarantine across 21 properties.

For up to date information visit www.covid19.gov.ck

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