



HON HENRY PUNA
PRIME MINISTER
GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS

MEDIA RELEASE

**Time to be alert, vigilant and play safe
Tuesday 11th August 2020 (CI time)**

The Prime Minister of the Cook Islands – Hon. Henry Puna – says the news out of New Zealand overnight of a family without a history of travel, testing positive for COVID-19 is a reminder of the need for all to remain vigilant.

“It is noticeable and understandable that the public has become complacent with the absence of cases in the Cook Islands, and no cases in New Zealand for 100 days.

While our borders are open to Cook Islanders and permit holders, we need to maintain our hygiene and physical distancing practices, this is critical to keeping our people safe.”

As announced by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern at an emergency press conference on Tuesday 11th August 9.15pm (NZT), New Zealand has four confirmed cases of COVID-19 in one family acquired from an as yet, unknown source.

At a Cabinet meeting earlier this afternoon the decision was made to implement the Te Marae Ora Easing Border Restrictions Matrix, a border control public health mechanism. As per this Border Control Matrix passengers arriving on this Friday’s flight will need to have undergone a New Zealand exit medical clearance screening and COVID-19 test – critical steps to ensuring we do not import the virus.

On arrival in Rarotonga passengers will need to undergo Supervised Quarantine and Medical Clearance screening and a testing regime. The Supervised Quarantine will take place in a residence of the passengers’ choice, and their local Puna will be monitoring them.

Further information, including an updated Travel Advisory will be on www.covid-19.gov.ck

The Prime Minister and Cabinet noted this measure is in place as of today, but that as this is a fluid situation, further responses will reflect developments in New Zealand as they come to hand. Cabinet will be briefed daily for the remainder of this week.

Cabinet also noted Te Marae Ora’s advice that COVID-19 testing was undertaken today on a recent returnee from New Zealand and the returnee’s close family. These tests all came back negative.

As an added layer of assurance Te Marae Ora will be interviewing and COVID-19 testing all 91 passengers who arrived in Rarotonga on Friday 31st July and Friday 7th August. These tests will be flown to New Zealand on Friday afternoon, with results expected early next week.

“You only have to look at the overseas news to see how rampant this disease is with millions of people infected around the world, and millions of deaths caused by it too.”

“While New Zealand authorities have applied stringent public health measures at the border, the disease appears to have slipped through.”

“In the words of the New Zealand Director-General of Health – Dr Ashley Bloomfield – ‘this is a very tricky virus’.”

“Up until last night we had been actively pursuing quarantine free travel through an air bridge with New Zealand; after all both countries were seemingly COVID-free, but this morning’s news shows how quickly that can change. We still want to have free travel between our country and New Zealand, but as both countries have said all along, it has to be safe for both parties. The message for us from the discovery of those virus cases in the community is that we need to be vigilant and play safe to stay safe. So we must continue to practise those precautions we’ve talked about.”

ENDS:

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