

Media Brief

TO Media outlets

FROM Dr Josephine Herman, Secretary

DATE 08 March 2020

SUBJECT Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) - sharing accurate information.

Secretary of Health, Dr Josephine Herman encourages people to share accurate information about COVID-19.

“We know that there has been some misinformation on Facebook but it’s really important that we stick to the facts about COVID-19,” she said.

The best source of information is the Te Marae Ora Cook Islands Ministry of Health website (health.gov.ck) or Te Marae Ora Facebook page or Twitter. Other reliable sources of information include the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the NZ Ministry of Health.

There is currently no case of COVID-19 in the Cook Islands. However, the Cook Islands Government recognises that it is highly likely that it will come to the Cook Islands. There are three people currently in quarantine. All have no symptoms of COVID-19.

“It’s really important that we show respect to those people who are in quarantine. Tomorrow, it could be me or it could be you who needs to go into quarantine. We want people to feel supported and also to know that it’s okay to put up your hand if you do have symptoms. This is important because if there is a case, our health workers can provide the appropriate care and undertake contact tracing.”

“We are hearing concerns in our community about the disease. That’s natural. It’s normal to feel worried. We are working with different community groups to get information out to all of our communities in Rarotonga and the Pa Enuā. But we need everyone’s help to share accurate information.”

How infectious is COVID-19?

“For some perspective, it helps to compare COVID-19 to measles, which is one of the most infectious diseases we know. If one person has measles, they can spread it to approximately 12 to 18 people. The reason we are able to prevent measles is because we have a very high rate of vaccination in the Cook Islands.”

“COVID-19 is a new disease so we are still figuring out exactly how infectious it is. Scientists studying the disease think that one person with COVID-19 is likely to infect two

to five other people. By comparison one person with influenza is likely to infect between one to two people.”

While there is no vaccine for COVID-19, there are simple but effective measures people can take to help break the cycle of transmission. This includes regularly washing your hands with soap and water or hand sanitiser, and avoid touching your face.

“We’re encouraging people to smile instead of kissing when greeting people. We know it’s a big shift for our Cook Islands culture, but it’s small steps like this that will help our community keep safe.”

Advice from Te Marae Ora Mental Health Team

It’s normal to worry. Sometimes our worries can run away with us. However, just like a cyclone, with the right knowledge and a little planning, you can prepare yourself and your family.

Some simple tips to help:

- Get the facts — not the rumours. Check out health.gov.ck
- Take control—follow advice given by Te Marae Ora
- Be flexible— you may have to change some plans
- Be prepared—have a plan for your family
- Look out for each other — be kind and take care of each other

What is the difference between quarantine and isolation?

Quarantine is for people who are not showing any symptoms but require separation from others in case they may have the virus.

Isolation is for people who are showing symptoms and require separation from others to limit the spread of the virus. This can be in a hospital setting or in their home or community facility.