

Media Brief

TO Media outlets

FROM Dr Josephine Herman, Secretary

DATE 09 March 2020

SUBJECT The Cook Islands Emergency Response Plan to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) approved

Today Cabinet approved the Cook Islands Emergency Response Plan to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). The Hon. Prime Minister Henry Puna will lead the national effort in consultation with the Minister of Health and Cabinet.

While there are no cases of COVID-19 in the Cook Islands, the government is taking a proactive approach to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the health, social and economic status of the Cook Islands population.

The approval of this Plan is an important step in strengthening our preparedness and readiness.

The Plan ensures a nationwide response to COVID-19.

It seeks to flatten the epidemic curve and slow the spread of infection. This will help alleviate the burden on the nation's health system, economy and society. To do this, targeted interventions are required, such as good hand hygiene and social distancing practices.

Under the Plan there are four response codes:

1. Code Blue – preparedness and readiness to delay entry of the disease
2. Code Yellow – alert to delay widespread transmission of the disease
3. Code Red – activation to mitigate the impact of the disease
4. Code Green – post event recovery.

The Secretary for Te Marae Ora Cook Islands Ministry of Health (TMO) Dr Josephine Herman says that the country is currently in Code Blue and intense preparations are underway to delay entry of the disease as well as widespread transmission.

TMO has activated its Health Emergency Operations Centre (HEOC) with executive oversight by the Secretary of Health, and assisted by Police Commissioner Maara Tetava and Office of the Prime Minister Chief of Staff Ben Ponia.

The HEOC is staffed by people from multiple agencies to help ensure a coordinated response to COVID-19.

Stakeholders including traditional leaders, Religious Advisory Council, government agencies, non-government organisations, Disaster Risk Management Committees in the Rarotonga Puna and Pa Enuā, international partners, and the private sector will all have a role to play in the response.

The Prime Minister is pleased to see the finalised Plan.

“The success of the Cook Islands national response relies on everyone working together to protect population health and minimise disruption to essential services,” says Puna.

The Plan will come into effect immediately and will be available to the public tomorrow on health.gov.ck.

For further information about COVID-19, please visit health.gov.ck or call our 24-hour Healthline on 29667.

END

Word count: 381