

Operation Namu26 launched to strengthen national dengue response

Operation Namu26 (Ops Namu26) was officially launched this morning during the Incident Management Team (IMS) meeting, attended by Members of Parliament, government agencies, Rarotonga Puna, Pa Enua representatives, the tourism industry and selected non-government organisations. The aim of Ops Namu26 is to escalate the national response to the current dengue outbreak and to mobilise a coordinated, collective national effort.

The IMS was convened on Thursday 29 January 2026 following a significant increase in dengue cases on Rarotonga at the end of December 2025 and again at the end of January 2026, as well as the detection of dengue cases on Aitutaki, Atiu, Mauke and Mangaia.

Secretary of Health, Mr Bob Williams, confirmed that on Sunday 2 February 2026, the Cook Islands recorded its first dengue-related death. The patient was a local elderly person with underlying medical conditions who presented late to hospital.

Mr Williams said this was a very unfortunate incident and Te Marae Ora extends its sincere condolences to the family. He noted that since the outbreak was declared on 22 May 2025, a total of 40 dengue patients have been admitted to hospital and, prior to this case, all had recovered.

Mr Williams encouraged everyone to seek urgent medical attention immediately if they experience flu-like symptoms, headache, joint or muscle pain, or rash, so that timely care can be provided. The health and wellbeing of our people and visitors remains a top priority for Te Marae Ora.

As of yesterday, joint communications by Cook Islands Tourism and Te Marae Ora have been strengthened as the national response moves from general dengue awareness messaging to more visible and proactive prevention activities for residents and visitors. Messaging also re-emphasises that the Cook Islands remains a safe destination for travellers.

Te Marae Ora Communications Teams will increase daily promotion of Ops Namu26 activities on Rarotonga and across the Pa Enua through multiple media platforms and radio programmes.

The tourism industry has joined the national response by supporting visitors with dengue prevention items and by taking responsibility for spraying within their own premises, under the guidance of Te Marae Ora.

The Rarotonga Puna communities have also strengthened their support for Ops Namu26. Nikao Puna has committed to weekly block spraying, which commenced yesterday, and will respond to household requests for spraying. Titikaveka Puna was sprayed this morning and,

similar to Nikao, will continue spraying for the remainder of the month. Other Puna on Rarotonga will begin their scheduled support from next week.

Aitutaki, Atiu, Mauke and Mangaia have also increased spraying and surveillance activities in partnership with their respective Island Governments and communities.

From today, the Cook Islands Red Cross will work alongside Te Marae Ora to distribute dengue prevention packs to families with positive dengue cases on both Rarotonga and the Pa Enua.

Te Marae Ora also acknowledges Air Rarotonga for its support as part of the national response to further protect the Pa Enua. Repellent spraying stations have been established at the international arrivals area and the domestic departures area, and temperature screening for international arrivals has been intensified.

The Minister of Health, Hon. Vainetutai Rose Toki Brown, acknowledged Te Marae Ora, the IMS team and the Pa Enua for demonstrating the true Cook Islands spirit of collaboration, and reaffirmed the Government's ongoing commitment to the national dengue response.

A briefing for Ops Namu26 team leaders will be held on Tuesday 10 February 2026 at the Ministry of Cultural Development (MOCD) Dome for Rarotonga participants, with a Zoom briefing for the Pa Enua. The briefing will outline roles and responsibilities for all personnel involved in the operation.

Ops Namu26 will be implemented in three phases over the next 30 days, and up to a period of two months:

Phase 1: Island-wide clean-up on Friday 13 February 2026 for Rarotonga, Aitutaki, Atiu, Mauke and Mangaia.

Phase 2: Increased and planned spraying and expanded coverage for up to two months.

Phase 3: Continued community clean-up activities and the Tutaka programme through April 2026.

Te Marae Ora will issue weekly media updates on Operation Namu26 over the initial 30-day operational period.

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