

This Situation Report is jointly issued by PNG National Department of Health and World Health Organization once weekly. This Report is not comprehensive and covers information received as of reporting date.

### Situation Summary and Highlights

- As of 04 April 2021 (12:00 pm), there have been 7038 COVID-19 cases and 61 COVID-19 deaths reported in Papua New Guinea. From the period of 29 March to 04 April, there were 1730 new cases and 12 new deaths reported.
- Due to logistical difficulties, lengthy test turnaround time, public holidays, clinic shutdowns, and low testing capacity in PNG, there have been delays in swabbing, testing, and reporting of results, thus the number of cases reported in the last week is likely to be under-representation of the situation that is occurring.
- The total number of provinces that have reported COVID-19 cases to date is twenty. Only Manus and Oro (Northern) Provinces have not reported cases to date.
- Calls to COVID-19 Hotline have increased by 202% within the month of March with call numbers increasing approximately 30% each week.
- On 30 March, PNG launched the roll out of the first batch of vaccines in NCD with the Prime Minister being the first to be vaccinated along with the Minister for Health and the National Pandemic Controller.
- A meeting of Heads of Missions, UN agencies and Humanitarian Cluster lead agencies was held on Thursday 1 April and was co-hosted by the National Controller and the United Nations Resident Coordinator. The purpose of the meeting was to provide Heads of Diplomatic Missions with an overall situational update on COVID-19, including priorities of the National Control Centre, and discuss possible areas of continued and coordinated support by international partners.
- The COVAX Facility has notified participating economies that deliveries of doses from the Serum Institute of India (SII) will be delayed in March and April. Delays in securing supplies of SII-produced COVID-19 vaccine doses are due to the increased demand for COVID-19 vaccines in India.

**Table 1. Newly reported COVID-19 cases in PNG<sup>1</sup>**

	New Cases (29 March – 04 April 2021)	Cumulative Total
National Capital District	487	2998
Western <sup>2</sup>	855	1854
West Sepik	0	325
Eastern Highlands	47	297
Morobe	74	280
West New Britain	14	214
East New Britain	58	224
Western Highlands	35	152
AROB	7	105
New Ireland	12	89
Madang	1	71
East Sepik	21	72
Enga	4	53
Central	50	91
Simbu	24	65
Southern Highlands	29	66
Jiwaka	7	33
Hela	3	23
Gulf	0	13
Milne Bay	2	13
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1730</b>	<b>7038</b>

<sup>1</sup> As of 04/04/2021, 12:00 pm, PNG time  
<sup>2</sup> 1578 cases (85%) from North Fly; 27 cases Middle/South Fly; 249 have no district stated

**Note:** Due to additional data cleaning, provincial case numbers may not add up from last week.

**Table 2. COVID-19 GLOBAL AND REGIONAL UPDATE<sup>2</sup>**

	Confirmed Cases	Deaths
Global	130 422 190	2 842 135
Western Pacific	1 963 001	31 896

<sup>2</sup> WHO COVID-19 Dashboard as of 04/04/2021, 14:34 CEST

## Summary of Activities and Upcoming Priorities

### Surveillance:

- Last Antigen rapid diagnostic test (AgRDT) training for Highlands and Momsae regions was conducted by NCC staff in conjunction with CPHL.
- Whole genome sequencing of 457 samples has now been completed by the MDU laboratory in Australia. No variants of concern have been identified to date.  
The team undertook new analyses and reporting to prepare for inter-governmental meeting and worked with NCD PHA to develop clearer pathways for swabbing, testing, and reporting of results.
- This week the team are preparing for re-launch of GoData surveillance system for collecting and reporting positive cases, test results, and contact tracing.
- Work will continue with an ongoing audit of all confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths per province to date to cross-check against the totals being reported by NCC.
- The team will continue to support the provinces in undertaking swabbing, contact tracing, surveillance activities, and analysis of data as well as continue with weekly preparation of testing, epidemiologic, and surveillance data to support the work of the modelling and genome sequencing teams internationally.

### Quarantine & Port of Entry:

- 300 passengers were screened at POE over the last 7 days.
- As of 2 April, there were 722 people in quarantine of which 78 were in home quarantine, 592 in hotels, 32 in company sites and 20 in managed apartments.
- Staff responsible for monitoring incoming travellers are no longer reporting to work due to non-payment of salaries for 5 months. Quarantine monitoring is therefore not being undertaken to the required standards and expectations.

### Laboratory:

- 3,737 samples were received by CPHL from the provinces in the reporting period of this sitrep.
- 1200 samples were sent to FSS Laboratory in Brisbane and 1489 samples sent to NPHL Laboratory in Singapore. Results have been received from both locations.
- Turn-around time for results from overseas labs has been approximately 24 hours.
- The delay in results for PCR from the provinces is due to delays within the system in the provinces such as transport, delayed flights, and airlines occasionally not accepting packages.

### Clinical Management and Infection Prevention and Control:

- Last week the team focused on establishing a clinical management network. Clinical cluster leads across the country have been added to the network which will host a regular zoom meeting to address clinical management issues related to COVID-19. Minimal communication back from the Provinces has made it difficult to provide clinical management support to provinces.
- The TAC opened this week with an initial bed capacity of 10 up to 50. The team supported TAC with IPC and CM training including scenario training for nurses.
- The isolation SOP for Health Care settings as well as home isolation guidance has been completed and will be disseminated to Provinces this week.
- The team continues to capture COVID19 bed occupancy rates across NCD presented through a daily dashboard.

- As it is month end the data collected so far was evaluated and it was determined in NCD mild and moderate cases account for most hospitalised patients.
- Since the 12 March bed occupancy has stayed reasonably static between 60-70 cases with an overall current capacity of 147.
- There is no significant increase or decrease in hospitalised cases across any of the symptom severity.
- A two-day IPC training course was run for outpatient services staff in Madang last week. The training was also provided to the tuberculosis clinic, Blood Bank and Family Support Centre.

#### **Risk Communication & Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs):**

- The National Health Department Vaccine Communication Strategy was approved on the 1 April 2021. This will now help to start early vaccine communication with the PHAs.
- The team supported the launch of the first batch of COVID-19 Vaccines for frontline Health workers in NCD on 30 March.
- Team developed quote cards on vaccines as well as a half page advert & editorial on the Post Courier to published on Tuesday 6 April.
- Interviews continued for the COVID-19 Champion initiative which will feature on EMTV and TV1.
- Placements were also organised with mass media for community service announcements and adverts.
- This week the team will continue to focus on vaccine communication for NCD and developing a Media Campaign on vaccine safety.
- A sensitization workshop for 600 health workers in NCD was held on 31 March to 5 April. The workshop was open to all clinics and community health advocates.
- 10,000 information brochures on the COVID-19 Vaccine were provided to health institutions and stakeholders in NCD and the team also completed the latest animated film on quarantine and testing as well as accompanying Infographics.
- This week the team will continue to plan for the rollout of the provincial and Regional vaccine sensitization and advocacy workshops. This will also include targeting Nurses Union, PHA management and other Health professionals.

#### **Niuplea Pasin**

- The Niuplea Pasin team continue to collaborate with Police and Private Security firms on enforcing of Niuplea Pasin Measures.
- Enforcement has been focused on Business houses and other Public Settings such as Bus stops (PMVs), and Market Places.
- Communication and reporting from Provinces on Implementation and enforcement of Niuplea Pasin Measures slow but ongoing.
- A coordination meeting held with the Correctional Services Commission on adapting Niuplea Pasin Measures in Prison facilities throughout the country in collaboration with the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) and the World Health Organisation.
- Draft Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on Elections has been completed in collaboration with the Electoral Commission for the upcoming Moresby North West By Election to be compliant with COVID-19 protocol.

- This week the team will finalise Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for the Moresby North West by election as well as ongoing monitoring of Niupela Pasin enforcement by law enforcement authorities.

#### **COVAX/Vaccine Planning & Introduction:**

- On 30 March, PNG launched the roll out of the first batch of vaccines in NCD with the Prime Minister being the first to be vaccinated along with the Minister for Health and the National Pandemic Controller. This approach was aimed at instilling confidence in the community around the safety of taking the vaccine.
- Public and private health workers and essential front-line workers in NCD are now the priority to be vaccinated from the initial batch, with worker from Port Moresby General Hospital beginning to receive their doses last week.
- Work continues on the planning and preparations for the roll out of the AstraZeneca vaccination activity targeting the 3% of total population of PNG.
- The NTWG was held, and the subcommittees presented progress in their respective areas of responsibility.
- This week team will continue to support provinces revise their micro-plans for the vaccine deployment.
- The COVAX Facility has notified participating countries that deliveries of doses from the Serum Institute of India (SII) will be delayed in March and April. Delays in securing supplies of SII-produced COVID-19 vaccine doses are due to the increased demand for COVID-19 vaccines in India.

#### **Logistics and Supplies:**

- On 30 March, the French Armed Forces delivered 60 tents from the French Republic's pre-positioned stock in Noumea, New Caledonia, as part of the FRANZ agreement to countries in the region affected by the crisis. Another shipment of COVID-19 kits is expected to arrive at a later date.
- Five 40ft containers of gowns, goggles and gloves were also received from DFAT.
- Last week PPE supplies were consigned to Air Niugini for dispatch to ENB, WNB, NIP, Madang, Milne Bay, Simbu, WHP, SHP, EHP and Manus.
- 1 page Oxygen plant concept developed and shared with donor to get sponsorship for provinces.
- This week the team will focus on a PPE distribution for Oro, Central and Gulf provinces.
- Bismarck Shipping will also assist with had sanitiser distributions to 19 provinces free of charge.

## Transmission Assessment

There are currently surges occurring in several provinces across PNG, with outbreaks in the National Capital District (NCD), Western, Eastern Highlands, Western Highlands, East New Britain, Morobe, and Simbu. There have been extended delays in swabbing, sending samples for testing, and receipt of results from laboratories, which means that even people meeting the case definition for COVID-19 testing are not always able to be swabbed and receive their test results in a timely manner. In addition, large-scale population-level testing remains low across most of PNG. As such, test positivity is high, with some laboratories reporting over of 30% of tests return positive results.

Twenty out of 22 provinces, including Autonomous Region of Bougainville (AROB) have reported at least one COVID-19 case since March 2020. However, due to testing limitations and inadequate staffing to conduct thorough contact tracing for all cases, the ability to conduct provincial transmission assessments is somewhat limited. Community transmission is occurring throughout much of PNG, including the (AROB), Eastern Highlands, East New Britain, East Sepik, Jiwaka, National Capital District (NCD), New Ireland, Morobe, Simbu, Southern Highlands, Western, and Western Highlands.

More information on the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office COVID-19 transmission stages can be found here: [bit.ly/WPRODashboard](https://bit.ly/WPRODashboard)

### Epi Update COVID-19

	Tests	Cases	Deaths
<b>2519</b> <sup>NAT Tests past 7 days</sup>	<b>1730</b> New cases past 7 days	<b>12</b> Deaths past 7 days	
<b>70260</b> <sup>^</sup> Cumulative NAT Tests	<b>7038</b> Cumulative Cases	<b>61</b> Cumulative Deaths	
<b>0</b> Imported Cases in past 28 days	<b>1323</b> <sup>*</sup> Cases in past 7 days with no link	<b>38</b> <sup>*</sup> Active Clusters in the past 7 days	

\*Case investigation ongoing

^ Some provinces and private facilities have not reported their negative test results to the National Control Centre prior to publication of this Situation Report, so the actual number of tests conducted in the previous 7 days is expected to be higher.

**Table 3. Number of GeneXpert and RT-PCR tests\* conducted from in March 2021, compared to RT-PCR monthly testing target, by province**

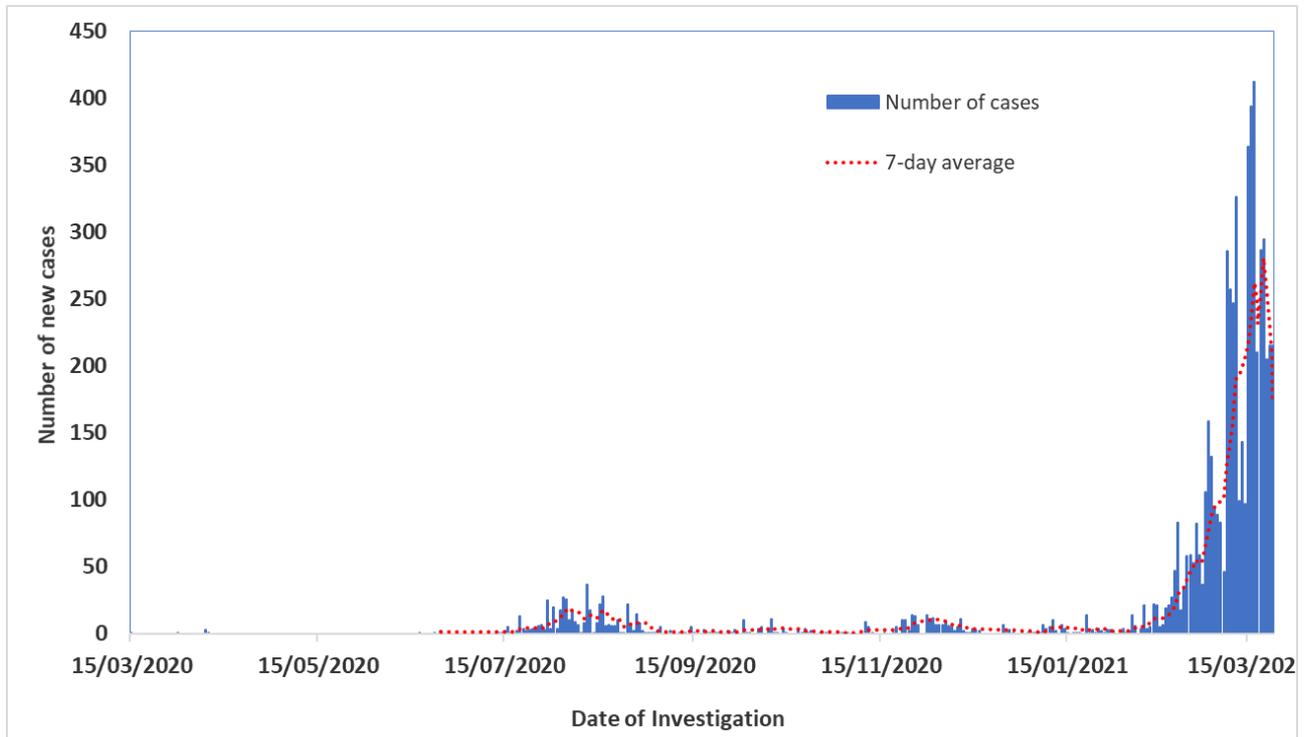
Province	GeneXpert Tests March 2021	RT-PCR Tests March 2021	RT-PCR Monthly Target <sup>^</sup>
AROB	597	342	441
Central	0	114	420
East New Britain	485	910	496
East Sepik	0	297	849
Eastern Highlands	282	1259	948
Enga	344	219	634
Gulf	67	22	251
Hela	88	121	398
Jiwaka	110	38	440
Madang	286	0	950
Manus	0	192	88
Milne Bay	167	97	459
Morobe	286	937	1223
NCD	1002	2701	593
New Ireland	0	25	281
Northern	0	46	312
Simbu	148	19	499
Southern Highlands	0	183	859
West New Britain	20	1	460
West Sepik	212	663	418
Western	79	285	395
Western Highlands	443	840	584

\*Please note, this information is based on the test results received by Monday 05 April 2021. Some provinces and private facilities may have conducted additional testing but have not reported their results to the National Control Centre.

<sup>^</sup> Monthly testing targets are based on RT-PCR capacity in-country and support offered from international laboratories, scaled to population estimates for each province.

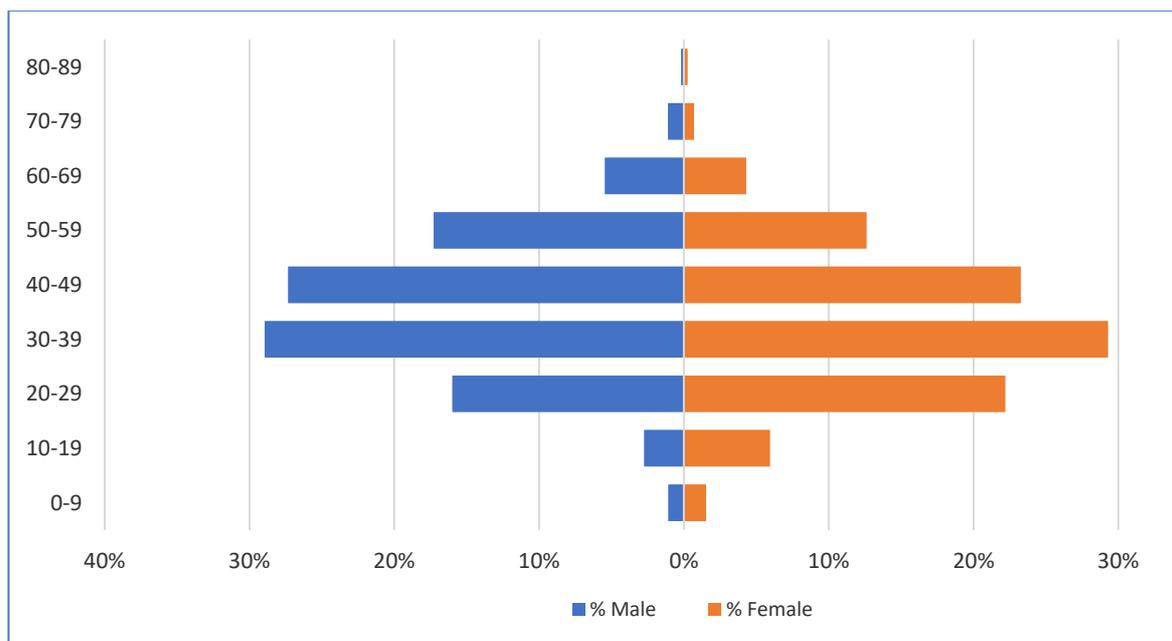
## Epidemiology

**Figure 1. Epidemiological curve of COVID-19 cases in Papua New Guinea, 15 March 2020 to 04 April 2021**



Please note: The decreasing trend must be interpreted with caution as there are delays in receiving and reporting results from provinces.

**Figure 2. Percentage age distribution of COVID-19 cases (65% male, n=4437), 15 March 2020 to 04 April 2021**



**Table 4. Persons Screened by Point of Entry**

Total Number of Travelers Screened before SOE (until 22 March 2020)	29,387	
Total Number of Travelers Screened during SOE (23 March – 16 June 2020)	3,788	
Total Number of Travelers Screened after SOE (17 June 2020 – 3 April 2021)	Air	17,353
	Sea	671
	Land	6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>18,010</b>

#### COVID-19 Hotline

- Calls to COVID-19 Hotline have increased on average by 202% over the month of March with call numbers increasing approximately 30% each week.
- For the period of 29 March to 4 April, the COVID-19 National Hotline received 6552 calls. Of these, 82 (about 1.25%) were health-related calls. 61 of these were referred to the Rapid Response Team/PHA.
- As of 4 April, the hotline had received a total of 202,454 calls. Of these, 5,685 (3%) were health-related calls. A total of 2197 calls to date have been referred to Rapid Response Team/PHAs.

## Strategic Approach

### National and Provincial Public Health Response

- The Pandemic Response Coordination Group and the Health Operations Team continue to meet regularly at the National Control Centre.
- Focus continues to be on supporting PHAs with Surveillance, Clinical Management and Testing.
- The Prime Minister hosted a meeting of all Provincial Governors on Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> March where a situational overview was provided by the National Controller which outlined the current national situation as well as highlighting the support that has been provided to provinces over the last year.
- The Prime Minister also hosted a meeting of all Provincial Health Authority CEOs on Thursday 1 April to identify gaps and issues they are experiencing in managing the pandemic at the provincial level.
- A meeting of Heads of Missions, UN agencies and Humanitarian Cluster lead agencies was held on Thursday 1 April and was co-hosted by the National Controller and the United Nations Resident Coordinator. The purpose of the meeting was to provide Heads of Diplomatic Missions with an overall situational update on COVID-19, including priorities of the National Control Centre, and discuss possible areas of continued and coordinated support by international partners.

### Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs)

- 5 international EMTs have confirmed their availability to support local health facilities in PNG, with Team Rubicon arriving from the United States on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> April. Australia's AUSMAT already have 3 people in country and could potentially send a full team in the coming weeks. Additional teams including Australia's AUSMAT, St Johns Ambulance, Johanniter International and MSF have also indicated availability to support.

## ANNEX A – Photos



Photo 1: IPC training in Madang



Photo 2-3: Supplies donated from the French Republic.



Photos 4-5: Prime Minister and Health Minister receiving first dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine.

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