



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

Situation Summary and Highlights

- ❑ From the period of 13th – 19th September, there were 521 newly confirmed COVID-19 cases reported including 7 deaths.
- ❑ Based on the available data, it is believed that community transmission of COVID-19 is occurring in much of PNG. NCD, Western, East New Britain, West New Britain, West Sepik, Western Highlands, Enga, Eastern Highlands, Morobe and Jiwaka provinces, would appear to be in stage 3 widespread community transmission while other provinces in PNG would appear to have localised community transmission (stage 2).
- ❑ PNG EMT “Team SANA” Supports West Sepik COVID-19 surge this week.
- ❑ As of 19th September 2021, over 124,550 people have been vaccinated at least for one dose in PNG. This includes 10,119 health workers, 39,654 people over the ages of 45 including 2,884 persons with comorbidities.
- ❑ 11 new COVID-19 control measures came into effect on 15 September 2021 issued by the Police Commissioner and Controller of the PNG National Pandemic Response David Manning.

Table 1. Newly reported COVID-19 cases in PNG¹

	New Cases (13-19 Sept 2021)	Deaths	Cumulative Total
AROB	0		452
Central	2		286
East New Britain	2		1224
East Sepik	0		259
Eastern Highlands	27		788
Enga	10		310
Gulf	0		133
Hela	7		196
Jiwaka	6	2	173
Madang	4		517
Manus	1		525
Milne Bay	0		268
Morobe	51		1348
National Capital District	52		5433
New Ireland	1		586
Northern (Oro)	0		197
Simbu	1		278
Southern Highlands	0		219
West New Britain	0		1041
West Sepik	2	2	584
Western	341	3	3015
Western Highlands	14		1101
TOTAL	521	7	18933

¹ As of 19/09/2021, 12:00 pm, PNG time

Pillar Updates & Priorities

*Surveillance:

- ❑ In the last 7 days, a total of 521 cases including 7 deaths were reported from 15 provinces indicating a widespread community transmission. Western province accounted for the highest number of cases (65%), followed by NCD (10%), Morobe (10%), EHP (5%) and others as shown above on the Table 1.
- ❑ Over 90% of these reported cases remain active cases (diagnosed in the last 21 days), 88% have reported being symptomatic, 2% has had history of previous infection while 1% have died. Deaths reported were from three (3) provinces, Western (43%), Jiwaka (3.5%) and West Sepik (3.5%) with 86% reported to have had underlying comorbidities.
- ❑ Occurrence of breakthrough infections among vaccinated persons were observed among 2% of the cases reported in the last 7 days.
- ❑ Despite the epidemic curve showing a declining trend after the first surge from March 2021 to August, a (low peak) surge is notable with increased test positivity. In the context of

Table 2. COVID-19 GLOBAL AND REGIONAL UPDATE²

	Confirmed Cases	Deaths
Global	228 909 238	4 699 219
Western Pacific	7 875 770	107 729

² WHO COVID-19 Dashboard as of 19/09/2021, 22:45 CEST

delayed or under reporting on overall low testing numbers and limited contact tracing activities, the declining trend and positivity must be interpreted with caution.

- Based on the available data, it is believed that community transmission of COVID-19 is occurring in much of PNG. NCD, Western, East New Britain, West New Britain, West Sepik, Western Highlands, Enga, Eastern Highlands, Morobe and Jiwaka provinces, would appear to be in stage 3 widespread community transmission while other provinces in PNG would appear to have localised community transmission (stage 2).
- 32 contacts of 31 index cases in NCD have been traced for swabbing and testing this week.

* Cases are only reported upon receipt of CIFs and death certificates hence the figures reported may not be reflective on the current situation in the provinces.

Laboratory:

- Continued samples tracking on 115 samples shipped to Melbourne Doherty University for genome sequencing in past three weeks with results pending.
- A virtual Genome Sequencing workshop has been scheduled for 21st – 22nd September with the objective is to discuss the possibility and need for WHO support for an in-country capacity in sequencing and detecting mutated variants.
- There is adequate stock of testing commodities in the country. Ongoing work with the logistics team to identify expiring dates to track and monitor at national and sub national levels.
- Due to the low testing coverage, there is a need to strategize with the aim to increase coverage. Some intervention includes, relooking at the testing strategy, sending out the latest swabbing clinics and services and importantly the number of deaths associated with COVID 19.

COVID-19 Hotline:

- As of 19th September, hotline has received a cumulative total of 284,708 calls. Of these, 6,568 (2.3%) were health-related calls. A total of 2,792 calls to date have been referred to Rapid Response Team/PHAs.
- For the reporting period of 13th – 19th September, the COVID-19 National Hotline received 1,891 calls. Of these, 13 (about 0.99%) were health-related calls and 9/13 were referred to the respective Rapid Response Team/PHA.
- Call Centre was affected by the prolong power outage on the 16 September thus cancelled all night's call operation.
- More callers are requesting information on the different types of vaccines currently used in PNG and the risks and benefits associated with each vaccine.
- Callers asking for specific locations in country Johnson & Johnson vaccines are been administered.
- A number of calls received during night shift wanting to know about the basic signs and symptoms of COVID-19.

Clinical Management (CM):

- Development of plans around prepositioning of oxygen cylinders in selected locations in Western Province for the surge. A meeting was held in NCC to develop a concept note. It was proposed in lieu to the outstanding BOC debt, a way forward to make COVID – Oxygen

available through a different vetted mechanism must be put in place through negotiation with relevant stake holders.

- Oxygen Surge committee was formed immediately with representation from NDoH, NCC and WHO with aim of developing a National Oxygen Policy to guide production, supply and usage in country.
- The clinical team has been working closely with Western Province PHA in collating information to use to be adequately and efficiently prepare their team in response to the current surge.
- A seven-member team of PNG's National Emergency Medical Team (EMT) "Team SANA" has deployed to Vanimo, on a 14-day mission to support West Sepik's COVID-19 response.
- 7-member team consisting of a Team leader, Doctor and 5 nurses were all vaccinated and had experienced with COVID care will be supporting clinical care and provide some training in Vanimo.
- Another team of two specialist and a senior nurse will be deployed to Daru next week to support clinical function and run refresher course on clinical care.
- After coordinating international EMT deployments in PNG - the government is now deploying national clinical teams under Team SANA, with support from WHO Papua New Guinea , National Capital District Provincial Health Authority , Port Moresby General Hospital and St John Ambulance Papua New Guinea and the PHAs.
- Team Sana needs more volunteers to support COVID care in surge provinces. Team Sana members will need to be fully vaccinated to travel and work in the surge provinces. If you are interested, please send in Expression of Interests using the link here; <https://forms.gle/A5uyLGo5oQnbx3Lg6>.

Risk Communication & Community Engagement:

- Continued to provide community advocacy and awareness on COVID-19 vaccines at National and Provincial levels.
- NCD PHA RCCE Team mobilisers, aligned to the Phase II vaccine rollout, are integrating demand creation with immediate vaccine uptake. A session conducted at Crown Plaza saw 9 from the 13 in attendance got vaccinated at Lawes Road Clinic.
- Mass media and SMS blasts focused on Niupela Pasin to support Independence Day and public gathering celebrations including a series of social media tiles that were published and shared widely.
- RCCE Team has been working with Partner Coordination and Health Cluster, participated in a second key consultation with USAID funded FHI360, NDoH, PATH and DFAT aimed to ensure partner's RCCE efforts are coordinated and targeted.
- The mobile clinic at Vision City was closed for Independence Week but will resume operations on extended days Monday-Friday 9am-3pm and Saturday 9am-12pm commencing Monday 20 September and will now be providing the Johnson & Johnson vaccine alongside AstraZeneca.
- Targeted partner meetings were held to identify existing opportunities for NCC, NDoH to amplify demand creation efforts that reach into communities.

Niupela Pasin (NP):

- Niupela Pasin team this week assessed 7 indoor events and 1 outdoor event. 12 approvals were granted for various events including meetings around the country on commitment to strictly observe Niupela Pasin (NP).

- Events ranged from PNG's independence celebrations, meetings, workshops and private functions from across the country with mandatory mask wearing, temperature checks, hand sanitizing and observing social distancing.
- Mass gatherings such as cultural/provincial shows were discouraged at this time in light of delta variant. People are strongly encouraged to adhere to Niupla Pasin measures as vaccination targets are incredibly low.
- NCDC Health provided 10 packets of masks and 12 bottles of hand sanitizers for Independence Day celebrations at Ela Beach.

Logistics and Supplies:

- Supplied 0.5 tonnes of COVID-19 supplies of PPEs and Laboratory items dispatched to 4 consignees: Hela, Badili AMS, Sky Medical Services & NCC.
- Continued support by UNOPS on the distribution of N95 Masks and gowns (procured by UNOPS on behalf of GoPNG) throughout the country.
- Continue mass distribution of PPEs to provinces.
- Continued casual support by WHO to assist with warehousing tasks, two (2) weeks remaining.
- Partial delivery of Global Fund (World Vision) donation paused due to ongoing unavailability of space at the Murray Barracks warehouse.
- Continued dissemination of PPE and Lab requisition forms and improving communication with the provinces.
- mSupply integration: The Logistic team has completed integration of WNB, Morobe and ENB providing COVID-19 PPE details into the Provincial Medical Store (PMS).
- ENB COVID-19 mSupply Integration- PPE stock integration into mSupply at the Provincial Medical Store. ENB to manage and order PPEs via mSupply at the ENB Provincial Medical Store. Lab items continue to be managed using stock cards and placing orders using Lab requisition form.
- For Health and logistics, continued preparation for PMGH Oxygen Plant Contractor (AES) completed slab and pre-assembling. Oxygen plant has been delivered to PMGH.
- Continued preparation for Waste Area and Management Project (WAMP)
- Continue processing and dispatching of PPEs and Lab items to provinces/facilities- Priority on Western Province.

Quarantine & Point of Entry:

- As of 19th September, there were 651 people under quarantine (PUQ) of which 86 were in home quarantine, 450 in hotels, 86 in company sites and 29 in organizational apartments.
- There were no reported COVID-19 cases of international travellers during the reporting period. Investigation and contact tracing are being carried out on these passengers and moved into isolation.

Table 3. 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 2020 – 16 June 2020)	3,788	
Total Number of Travelers Screened after SOE (17 June 2020 – 11 September 2021)	Air	27,718
	Sea	1,309
	Land	6

National Vaccination Rollout

- As of 19th September 2021, over 124,550 people have been vaccinated at least for one dose in PNG.
- Over 50,917 people are fully vaccinated having received their 2nd dose of COVID-19 vaccine.
- Eligibility for vaccination is now open to all adults of 18 years of age and older.
- Continued to emphasize the importance of vaccination for all persons 45 years and older and all adults having comorbidity.
- Efforts continue for the vaccination of healthcare workers and other essential workers.
- Johnson and Johnson vaccine roll out have begun in Port Moresby, Western Province, East Sepik, Manus and West Sepik. Over 500 people have received the J & J vaccine.

Figure 1. Cumulative number and coverage of persons vaccinated by category and region and province 20th September, 2021

Category	At least one dose received	Fully vaccinated
Health Worker	10119	3229
45 years and above	39654	19884
Persons with comorbidity	2884	709
Cumulative	124550	50917

Figure 2. Cumulative number of persons vaccinated by region and province 20th September, 2021

Province	Target for 2021	Cumulative-at least one dose received (#)	At least one dose received coverage (%)	Fully vaccinated(#)	Fully vaccinated coverage (%)
NCD	92312	46334	50.0	26,983	29.0
Western	61786	15232	25.0	4,481	7.0
East New Britain	77059	5542	7.0	1,399	2.0
Morobe	189992	13237	7.0	4,823	3.0
Gulf	39065	2475	6.0	128	0.0
Jiwaka	70874	4322	6.0	416	1.0
Enga	98321	5521	6.0	1,815	2.0
Hela	62028	3195	5.0	1,324	2.0
Central	65203	3391	5.0	1,522	2.0
Manus	13650	613	4.0	125	1.0
New Ireland	43771	1978	5.0	467	1.0
West Sepik	64889	2689	4.0	1,198	2.0
Milne Bay	71136	2342	3.0	364	1.0
Northern	48628	1542	3.0	422	1.0
Eastern Highlands	146980	3977	3.0	699	0.0
West New Britain	71832	1971	3.0	850	1.0
Western Highlands	90838	2310	3.0	872	1.0
Madang	148653	3235	2.0	1,562	1.0
East Sepik	132662	2057	2.0	616	0.0
Chimbu	76963	877	1.0	289	0.0
ARoB	68891	693	1.0	173	0.0
Southern Highlands	133846	1017	1.0	439	0.0
Total	1869379	124550	6.7	50,917	2.7

National and Provincial Health Response

- The Pandemic Response Coordination Group and the Health Operations Team continue to meet regularly at the National Control Centre.
- 11 new COVID-19 control measures came into effect on 15 September 2021 issued by the Police Commissioner and Controller of the PNG National Pandemic Response David Manning.
- However, a seven-day grace period will apply for all passengers. To clarify, passengers boarding an aircraft on and after Wednesday 22 September, 2021, will be required to have been tested for COVID-19 within a 72-hour period prior to boarding their first port of departure.
- The main changes to the measure are to international and domestic travel as well as social and business. Domestic travel, social and business have been placed into Measure No. 3. Domestic Measures.
- Full details of all measures can be found at www.covid19.info.gov.pg

Partners Health Response

- The Health Cluster Partners meeting was held on Tuesday 14th of September with over 30 Health and Non-Health partners in attendance. Acknowledgment to ADI and YWAM for providing updates on their work in Western Province and New Ireland.

- ❑ Members were briefed on the most current surveillance and vaccine rollout reports. The lack of testing and reporting from provinces limits the national team's ability to plan and make evidence-based decisions. Vaccine uptake continues to remain low across the country; this includes health care workers.
- ❑ Independence Day celebrations on the 16th of September saw mass gatherings throughout the country. This is concerning and a possible spreading event with regards to the Delta Variant being present in provinces.
- ❑ The next Health Cluster Meeting will be held on the 28th September. Please contact osheaj@who.int if you wish to join the Health Cluster and report activities.
- ❑ If Provincial Health Authorities wish to conduct integrated partner meetings in order to coordinate COVID-19 response, via zoom with assistance from WHO and NCC, please contact the email above.

Transmission Assessment

Currently COVID-19 cases are being reported from across PNG, with cases reported from 15 out of 22 provinces in the previous seven days. AROB, ESP, Gulf, Milne Bay, Oro, SHP and WNB provinces didn't report in the last 7 days.

There has been an almost four-fold increase in the number of cases being reported in the last seven 7 days, compared to last week. Western Province accounted for the highest number of reported cases followed by NCD, Morobe and the EHP.

The current weekly test positivity has increased from 6% to 13%, suggesting increasing community transmission in the reporting provinces and the need for more testing. There are likely more people with coronavirus in the community who haven't been tested yet in those provinces.

The epidemic curve has been showing a declining trend after the first surge in March until the start of August when a (low peak) surge is notable with increasing test positivity. In the context of delayed or under reporting, overall low testing and limited contact tracing activities, the declining trend and positivity should be interpreted with caution.

With some level of confidence, based on the available data, it is believed that community transmission of COVID-19 is occurring in much of PNG. Western Province, NCD, WSP, ENBP, WNBP, WSP, WHP, Enga, EHP, Morobe and Jiwaka provinces, would appear to be in stage 3 widespread community transmission while other provinces in PNG would appear to have localised community transmission (stage 2).

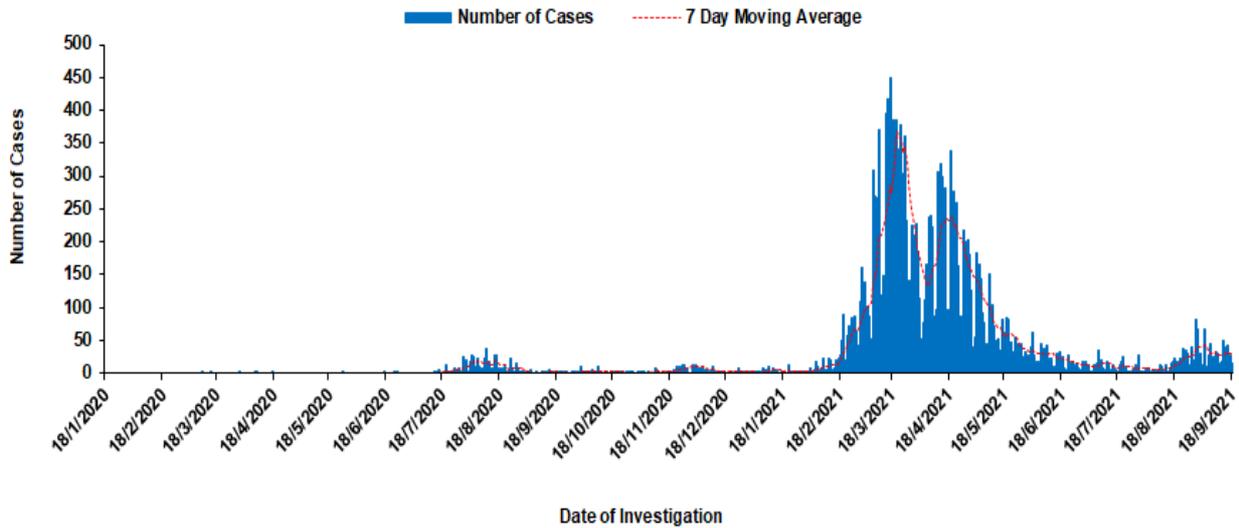
Occurrence of breakthrough infections and reinfections among persons with past history of COVID-19 infection within a median of two months post vaccination and seven months post COVID-19 infection has been noted. While the cases may have been few to draw valid conclusions, they provide some guide on the duration of immunity and when persons with prior COVID-19 infection can be vaccinated.

Challenges around obtaining swabbing, testing, reporting data and contact tracing are still observed. Strategies are currently being explored to improve and strengthen current responses including ramping up active surveillance and enhancing testing in order to establish the extent of Delta transmission in the country. Increasing vaccination coverage to high risk/ vulnerable population with priorities on frontline health workers, persons over the ages of 45yrs and persons with underlying medical conditions, including, re-enforcing maintenance of the new normal practices even after vaccination, are also part of the national strategies to the current responses.

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

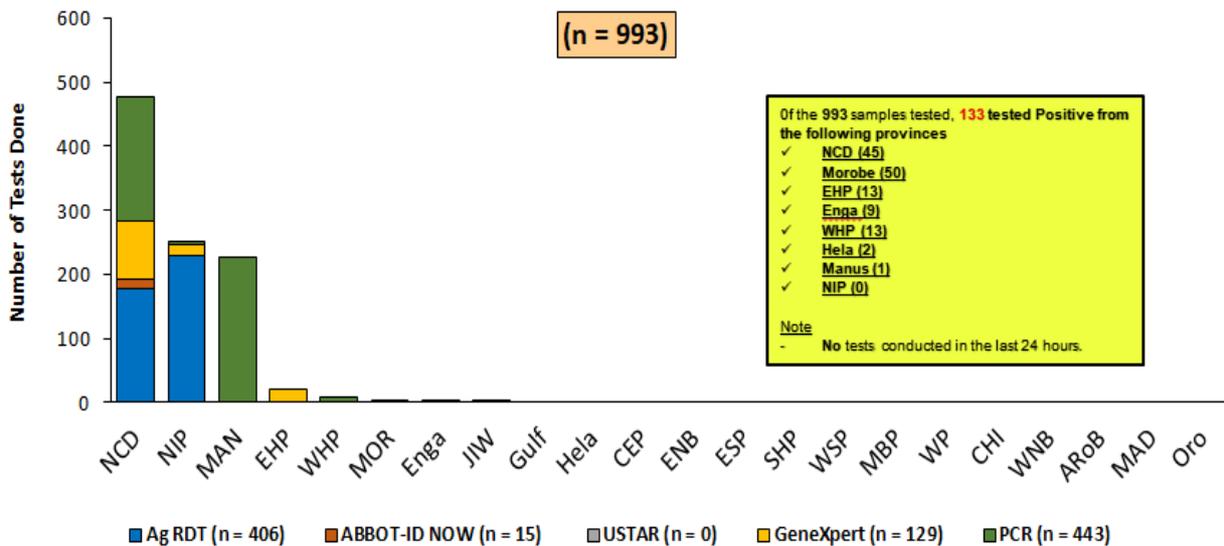
Epidemiology

Figure 3. Epidemiological curve of total COVID-19 cases in Papua New Guinea as at 19th September, 2021



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

Figure 4: Tests done in the last 7 days, 13th to 19th September 2021



ANNEX A – Photos

Photo 1: Departing National EMT team in Port Moresby.



Photo 2: NCC/WHO Lab Surveillance Technical Officer Ms Leonie Ruape demonstrating to Lab Manager in Kiunga District Hospital on how to retrieve CT values from a GeneXpert machine.



Photo 3: RCCE team conducting awareness on COVID-19 and Vaccines in Crown Plaza, Port Moresby.



For more information about this Situation Report, please contact:

Dr Daoni Esorom
Deputy Pandemic Controller
National Department of Health
Email: daoniesorom@gmail.com
Mobile: +675-7231 3983

Mr Jack O'Shea
a/Incident Manager (IM)
Health Cluster Coordinator, WHO
Email: osheaj@who.int