



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 20<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> September, there were 600 newly confirmed COVID-19 cases reported including 17 deaths.
- ❑ Current surveillance data is showing that vaccinated persons are at a lower risk of developing severe infections, hospitalization and deaths.
- ❑ Based on these data and considering a context of delayed and under reporting, overall low testing and limited contact tracing activities, it appears that community transmission of COVID-19 is occurring in much of PNG.
- ❑ The following provinces are considered to be in stage 3 (widespread community transmission): all four Momase region provinces, five of seven Highlands provinces (Enga, EH, WH, Hela and Southern Highlands), NCD, Central and Western provinces. In stage 2 (localised community transmission) are ENB, Jiwaka, Simbu and Manus while the remaining provinces are rated stage 1 (sporadic cases).
- ❑ As of 26<sup>th</sup> September 2021, over 130,262 people have been vaccinated at least for one dose in PNG. This includes 10,486 health workers, 41,422 people over the ages of 45 including 3,060 persons with comorbidities.
- ❑ Police Commissioner and Controller of the PNG National Pandemic Response David Manning issued 11 new measures to mitigate new COVID-19 strain, Delta Variant, and two new directives to manage high-risk domestically and high-risk countries internationally on September 24, 2021.

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

	New Cases (20-26 Sept 2021)	Deaths	Cumulative Total
AROB	0		452
Central	15		301
East New Britain	4		1228
East Sepik	1		260
Eastern Highlands	65	9	854
Enga	39	1	350
Gulf	0		133
Hela	14		210
Jiwaka	7		180
Madang	20		537
Manus	0		525
Milne Bay	1		269
Morobe	65		1414
National Capital District	112	1	5546
New Ireland	0		586
Northern (Oro)	0		197
Simbu	1		279
Southern Highlands	15		234
West New Britain	0		1041
West Sepik	42	1	627
Western	106	4	3123
Western Highlands	76	1	1177
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>19523</b>

<sup>1</sup> As of 26/09/2021, 12:00 pm, PNG time

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

	Confirmed Cases	Deaths
Global	232 636 622	4 762 089
Western Pacific	8 420 057	114 939

<sup>2</sup> WHO COVID-19 Dashboard as of 30/09/2021, 22:45 CEST

### Pillar Updates & Priorities

#### \*Surveillance:

- ❑ In the last 7 days, a total of 600 cases including 17 deaths were reported from 16 provinces.
- ❑ The cumulative number of COVID 19 cases now stands at 19,533 with 226 deaths.

- ❑ 90% of these cases been diagnosed in the last 21 days suggestive of an ongoing community transmission.
- ❑ NCD accounted for the highest number of infections and deaths (19%), followed closely by Western (18%), WHP (13%), EHP (12%), Morobe (11%), WSP and Enga both at 7% among others as shown above on Table 1.
- ❑ Deaths reported were from six provinces, EHP (9), Western (4), NCD (1), WHP (1), WSP (1) and Enga (1) with 60% reported to have had underlying comorbidities and all deaths reported are unvaccinated persons.
- ❑ There were 57 vaccine break-through infections (post vaccination) which accounted for almost 10% of all cases reported in the last seven days in which 96% had received AstraZeneca vaccine while 4% received other vaccines, Johnston & Johnston or Sinopharm. About 90% of the re-infected cases were asymptomatic.
- ❑ Current surveillance data is showing that vaccinated persons are at a lower risk of developing severe infections, hospitalization and deaths. The deaths are commonly occurring among over 50 years of age with or without comorbidity and unvaccinated.
- ❑ Note: The epidemic curve has been showing a declining trend after the first surge in March until in August, 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.

\* 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:

- ❑ Technical teams from Institute of Medical Research, CPHL and NCC Laboratory and Surveillance clusters attended two days workshop on Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS) virtually. The country teams were shown through step-by-step development of an in country WGS. A series of follow-on consultations with country teams on building sequencing capacity in country will be carried out with technical support and advice from WHO and Melbourne Doherty Institute.
- ❑ The lab team conducted safety checks on all PCR and extraction machines running COVID-19 samples from all RT PCR testing laboratory sites across the country to ensure machines are calibrated and serviced as per service due date.
- ❑ Continued technical advice and support provided to surge provinces daily on Lab procedures and algorithms.

### COVID-19 Hotline:

- ❑ As of 26<sup>th</sup> September, hotline has received a cumulative total of 286,974 calls. Of these, 6,594 (2.3%) were health-related calls. A total of 2,809 calls to date have been referred to Rapid Response Team/PHAs.
- ❑ For the reporting period of 20<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> September, the COVID-19 National Hotline received an increase of 2,240 calls. Of these, 26 (about 1.16%) were health-related calls and 17/26 were referred to the respective Rapid Response Team/PHA.
- ❑ More callers are requesting information on the different types of vaccines currently used in PNG and the risks and benefits associated with each vaccine.

### **Clinical Management (CM):**

- Clinical Management team facilitated a consultative meeting on Surge Oxygen Capacity with the newly established Oxygen Surge Committee and wider group of stake holders from development and private partners. Present during the meeting were NCC teams, Clinical Management, EMT, Logistics and NDoH, Business Partners – Exxon Mobil, BOC and DFAT.
- The committee vetted the team's projection: that 1:4 ratio was the correct estimate on oxygen stock requirement per facility.
- BOC Country Manager PNG & Solomon Islands, Mr Brad Lange assured the committee that BOC has already increased cylinder capacity by 75% above previous level. BOC has never run out of oxygen and are ready to assist in the surge.
- BOC wanted a show of good faith by the Government by making part payment paying of the outstanding 14 million kina. BOG is willing to consider cost concessions where reasonable
- NDOH logistics for oxygen will remain as per normal process.
- Critical reports from highlands region flagged critically low oxygen supplies in the region with the spike in the number of COVID cases after the recent Mt Hagen Show and Independence Celebrations.
- An emergency request was sent to the logistics team to authorize a 'weekend rescue' especially for Goroka and Mt Hagen hospitals pending proper assessment and re-stocking.
- The team are preparing for a Combined Highlands Trip with NCC Surveillance team supported through WHO.
- Work has commenced on a clinical dashboard to capture all clinical data from provinces during this surge.
- UKMED in-country requirements and preparations has been completed. They are expected to arrive in country early next month.
- Team Sana deployed to West Sepik Province have returned and are in quarantine while a second five men team are preparing for Daru next week.
- 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:**

- WHO Risk Communication team continued to support and capacity build Health Promotions Officer(s) through a two-days Training of Trainer (TOT) workshop conducted for Southern Regional this week. The training included detailed strategic planning for social mobilisation and community engagement, use of reporting and monitoring tools and WhatsApp coordination groups were been established.
- Continuation of Phase II roll out of Johnson and Johnson vaccines to the first 6 priority provinces.
- National Health Promotion Officers and WHO technical team were deployed to Madang, Manus, East Sepik, West Sepik and Western Provinces for a 10-day program of strategic planning, capacity building and demand creation activities. Positive results reported from these missions, with large numbers of community members attending vaccine information sessions.
- Local vaccine champions and testimonials from community members were reported to be effective. RCCE Cluster is developing a template for provincial teams to promote local champions.
- National mass media campaigns continued as current focus is on encouraging testing after Independence Day gatherings.

- Johnson & Johnson vaccine ‘fast facts’ materials been developed and disseminated.
- Community engagement tools close to completions. Flash cards, FAQs and community storytelling tool currently undergoing technical review and testing.
- Social listening coordination ongoing, with the first fortnightly summary sent to partners, along with suggested social media content to counteract the most common questions and misinformation identified through social listening.

**Niupela Pasin:**

- Niupela Pasin* team this week assessed 2 indoor events for less than 50 participants and 1 approval was granted for an essential training on the condition to strictly observe Niupela Pasin. On the other hand, four events were approved however the actual event wasn’t assessed.
- Private organizations and businesses shall liaise with the *Niupela Pasin* team in formulating their respective standard operating procedures.
- Team concentrated all efforts this week towards finalising of the National Containment Strategy alongside NCC Surveillance.
- Invitation letters were sent out to members of the Pandemic Group mainly PNGDF, RPNGC, NCDC, NCDPHA, Motu-Koita Assembly and Central Province PHA for joint efforts in policing the Niupela Pasin strategy in NCD and Central.

**Logistics and Supplies:**

- Mass distributions of PPEs were done this week in response to the surge around the country. Four tonnes of COVID-19 supplies of PPEs and Laboratory items was dispatched to 15 consignees: SHP, Oro, Enga, NCD, Central, Western (Kiunga & Daru), WHP and Morobe. Other facilities/organizations supplied were Gerehu General Hospital, Rita Flynn, PNGDF, Port Moresby General Hospital, Pharmaceutical Society & NCD ART Clinics.
- Partial delivery of 40 000 respirator masks from DFAT due to ongoing unavailability of space at the Murray Barracks warehouse.

**Quarantine & Point of Entry:**

- As of 26<sup>th</sup> September, there were 619 people under quarantine (PUQ) of which 56 were in home quarantine, 465 in hotels, 86 in company sites and 12 in organizational apartments.
- There were no reported COVID-19 cases of international travellers during the reporting period.

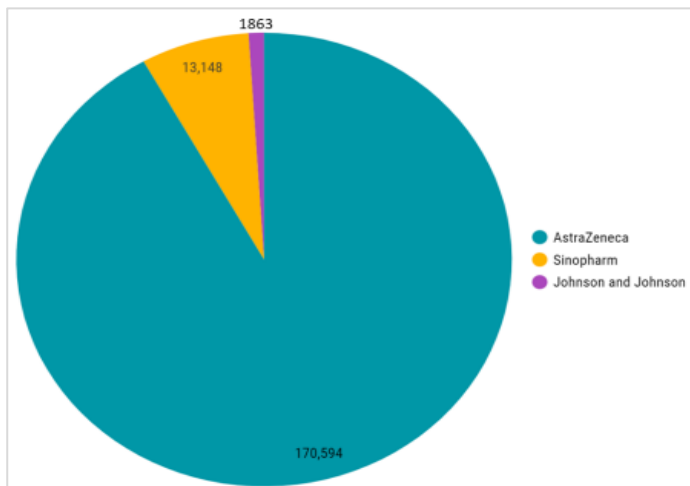
**Table 3. Persons Screened by Point of Entry**

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 – 25 September 2021)	Air	28, 224
	Sea	1,309
	Land	6

## National Vaccination Rollout

- ❑ As of 26<sup>th</sup> September 2021, over 130,262 people have been vaccinated at least for one dose in PNG. Over 57,206 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. However, continued emphasis on the importance of vaccination for all persons 45 years and older and all adults with comorbidity.
- ❑ Continued efforts made on 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 1,300 people have received the J & J vaccine.

**Figure 1. PNG COVID 19 Vaccination, total dose administered as of 26<sup>th</sup> September, 2021**



**Table 4. Cumulative number and coverage of persons vaccinated by category 26<sup>th</sup> September, 2021**

Category	At least one dose received	Fully vaccinated
Health Worker	10486	3916
45 years and above	41422	19701
Persons with comorbidity	3060	737
<b>Cumulative</b>	<b>130262</b>	<b>57206</b>

**Table 5. Cumulative number of persons vaccinated by region and province 26<sup>th</sup> 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	48007	52.0	29,154	32.0
Western	61786	15817	26.0	5,580	9.0
Morobe	189992	13896	7.0	5,428	3.0
East New Britain	77059	5542	7.0	1,399	2.0
Enga	98321	6378	6.0	1,930	2.0
Gulf	39065	2475	6.0	128	0.0
Jiwaka	70874	4322	6.0	416	1.0
Hela	62028	3296	5.0	1,502	2.0
Central	65203	3391	5.0	1,522	2.0
West Sepik	64889	2891	4.0	1,443	2.0
Manus	13650	613	4.0	125	1.0
New Ireland	43771	1978	5.0	467	1.0
Milne Bay	71136	2830	4.0	636	1.0
Northern	48628	1652	3.0	492	1.0
Eastern Highlands	146980	3977	3.0	699	0.0
Western Highlands	90838	2492	3.0	979	1.0
West New Britain	71832	1971	3.0	850	1.0
Madang	148653	3552	2.0	2,149	1.0
East Sepik	132662	2563	2.0	1,374	1.0
Chimbu	76963	877	1.0	294	0.0
ARoB	68891	693	1.0	173	0.0
Southern Highlands	133846	1049	1.0	466	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1869379</b>	<b>130262</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>57,206</b>	<b>3.1</b>

## National and Provincial Health Response

- The Pandemic Response Coordination Group and the Health Operations Team continue to meet regularly at the National Control Centre.
- Controller issues 11 new measures to mitigate new COVID-19 strain, Delta Variant, in country.
- In-addition to the new measures released on September 24, 2021, the Commissioner of Police and Controller of the PNG COVID-19 National Pandemic Response David Manning has issued two new directives to manage high risk provinces domestically and high-risk countries internationally.
- Mr. Manning has also directed that the wearing of masks is mandatory and effective immediately in public places as of September 20, 2021.
- Full details of all measures can be found at [www.covid19.info.gov.pg](http://www.covid19.info.gov.pg)

## Partners Health Response

- The next Health Cluster Meeting will be held on the 28<sup>th</sup> September. Please contact [osheaj@who.int](mailto:osheaj@who.int) if you wish to join the Health Cluster and report activities.
- Also, if PHA's wish to convene partner meetings via online teleconference (Zoom) then please don't hesitate to get in contact on the email above.

## Transmission Assessment

Currently COVID-19 cases are being reported from across PNG, with cases reported from 16 out of 22 provinces in the previous seven days. NCD accounted for the highest number of reported cases, followed by Western, Western Highlands (WHP), Eastern Highlands Province (EHP), Morobe, West Sepik (WSP) and Enga provinces among others. Autonomous Region of Bougainville (AROB), Gulf, Manus, New Ireland, Northern (Oro) and West New Britain (WNB) provinces didn't report in the last seven days. However, AROB and WNB have been reporting ILI and SARI cases in the past seven days.

Almost 90% of these cases reported were diagnosed in the last 7-14 days, suggesting active (ongoing) community transmission in provinces reporting cases. The epidemic curve shows notable surge (low peak) with increasing test positivity in the months of August and September for several provinces. There has been an almost three-fold increase in the number of COVID-19 deaths reported in the last seven days, compared to last week.

Factors considered in the transmission stage assessment include the number of newly diagnosed cases and case trend, deaths, testing rates, hospital capacity, contact tracing effectiveness and recent trends in ILI and SARI presentations.

Based on these data and considering a context of delayed and under reporting, overall low testing and limited contact tracing activities, it appears that community transmission of COVID-19 is occurring in much of PNG.

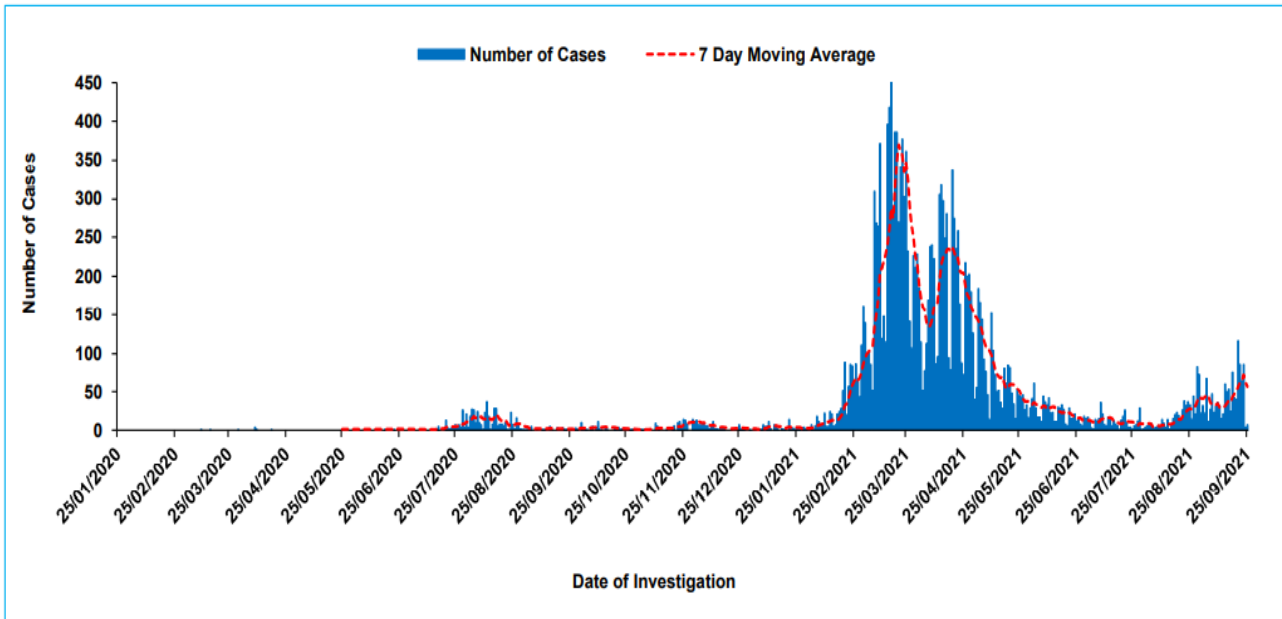
Based on the available data, the following provinces are considered to be in stage 3 (widespread community transmission): all four Momase region provinces, five of the seven Highlands provinces (Enga, EH, WHP, Hela and Southern Highlands), NCD, Central and Western provinces. In stage 2 (localised community transmission) are ENB, Jiwaka, Simbu and Manus while the remaining provinces are rated stage 1 (sporadic cases).

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](https://bit.ly/WPRODashboard)

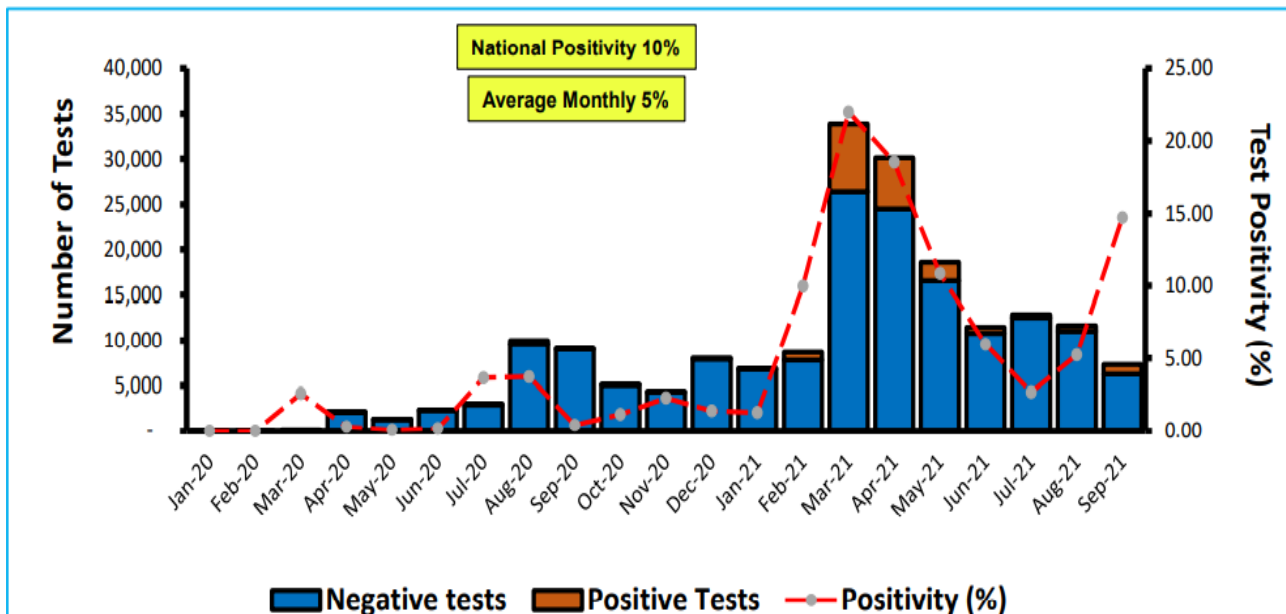
## Epidemiology

Figure 2. Epidemiological curve of total COVID-19 cases in Papua New Guinea as at 26<sup>th</sup> 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 3: Tests done in the last 7 days, 20<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> September 2021





## ANNEX – Photos

**Photo 1:** The National Department of Health, WHO and UNICEF have facilitated a Communication for COVID-19 vaccines training for Southern Region Risk Communication team at Dixies Bungalow, outside Port Moresby.



**Photo 2:** Logistics team processing of urgent lab orders during surge.



For more information about this Situation Report, please contact:

**Dr Daoni Esorom**  
Deputy Pandemic Controller  
National Department of Health  
Email: [daoniesorom@gmail.com](mailto:daoniesorom@gmail.com)  
Mobile: +675-7231 3983

**Mr Jack O'Shea**  
Deputy Incident Manager  
Health Cluster Coordinator, WHO  
Email: [osheaj@who.int](mailto:osheaj@who.int)