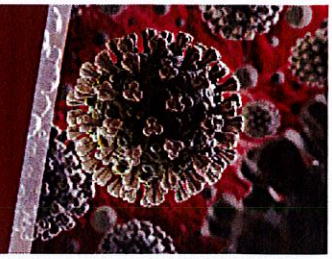
Ministry of Health
Vanuatu Government

COVID-19 Press Release
18 September 2020
Testing of Repatriates in Quarantine



Targeted COVID-19 testing in quarantine an additional precaution

Port Vila, 18 September 2020: The Vanuatu Ministry of Health confirms that targeted testing in quarantine for COVID-19 is being being conducted as an additional precaution for those entering Vanuatu from areas classified as high risk.

Len Tarivonda, Director of Public Health stated, "In addition to the ongoing quarantine measures being implemented by the Ministry of Health to stop COVID-19 from entering our borders, an extra precaution is targeted COVID-19 testing in quarantine." He added, "We request the full cooperation of the repatriates to keep Vanuatu safe".

While there is no change to the normal processes for testing people in quarantine that have symptoms (such as a fever, cough or shortness of breath or additional criteria, as defined by WHO), the Ministry of Health will test people returning from settings where there are reported cases of COVID-19 in the community. A selected number of these people will be tested even if they do not have symptoms.

Testing will take place on the fifth (day 5) and eleventh (day 11) after those identified arrive in Vanuatu. A trained and qualified medical professional will collect the swab. That sample will then be sent to the laboratory at VCH to be analysed and results will generally be known that same day.

"Now that testing for COVID-19 is available in Vanuatu, the results of the test can be confirmed almost immediately then medical professionals can respond following protocols in place," Director Tarivonda stated. "As soon as they arrive at the quarantine facility, people who will be tested will receive information from public health officers on when they can expect tests to be done".

Testing will be pooled. This means combining samples from several people to detect SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. This is so that fewer testing materials are used by health authorities. If any pooled result is positive, each of the samples will be individually tested to determine which samples were positive and necessary actions taken.

The Ministry of Health will review lists of settings requiring testing regularly using up-to-date data reported to the WHO. Anyone returning from countries where there is community transmission or settings that have many reported cases of COVID-19 are required to be tested.

"It is important that this extra precaution is followed strictly," stated the Director. "In the case that someone refuses to be tested for COVID-19, the Ministry of Health will require their quarantine period to be extended for an additional 7 days," he added.

Enforceable under the Public Health Act, if any person refuses to undergo testing for COVID-19, he or she is liable for an extended quarantine period for an additional week.

With all these additional precautions in place, it is important for community leaders, pastors, chiefs, women and youth leaders to welcome repatriates back into the community once they are released from quarantine. It is crucial that the right information is being shared throughout the community to support full integration of those released as well as to reduce stigma and discrimination.

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Note to editors

For more information on COVID-19 go to:

- Ministry of Health COVID-19 website www.covid19.gov.vu
- Ministry of Health COVID-19 free mobile landing page: https://bit.ly/vanmoh
- Ministry of Health, Health Promotions Vanuatu Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/Health-Promotions-Vanuatu-1674266667566197/
- WHO COVID-19 outbreak webpage: www.who.int/coronavirus

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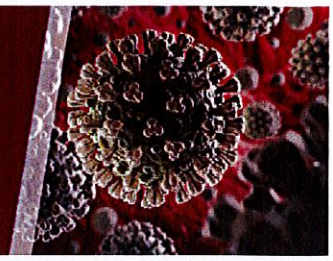

- WHO COVID-19 global situation dashboard: https://www.who.int/redirect-pages/page/novel-coronavirus-(covid-19)-situation-dashboard

For more information, please contact: Director Len Tarivonda, Director Public Health, Media Focal Point for COVID-19, +678 7654903, ltarivonda@vanuatu.gov.vu

REPUBLIC OF VANUATU
MINISTRY OF HEALTH
DIRECTOR
PUBLIC HEALTH
MINISTERE DE LA SANTE
REPUBLIQUE DE VANUATU