Ministry of Health
Vanuatu Government

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Vanuatu Situation Report #13 – 17 April 2020

HIGHLIGHTS

- On 11 April 2020, the President of Vanuatu signed a **declaration for a State of Emergency (SOE)** over the whole of Vanuatu for a 30-day period, for the dual purposes of strengthening COVID-19 prevention and containment measures and for response to Tropical Cyclone Harold which caused widespread damage in Vanuatu from 6 – 7 April (see TC Harold Situation Reports).
- Currently, there are **no confirmed cases and no suspected cases** of COVID-19 in Vanuatu.
- Currently, there are **no individuals in quarantine or isolation** in Vanuatu.
- As a part of ongoing surveillance and vigilance, selected samples are being taken and sent for testing as a precautionary measure.
- COVID-19 prevention and mitigation, risk communication, surveillance and clinical preparedness activities continue, though some interruptions are expected due to prioritised response to Tropical Cyclone Harold.
- All persons are being urged to avoid spreading rumours and incorrect information. The Ministry of Health is the primary source of credible and up-to-date health information for Vanuatu and provides information and fields questions through multiple dedicated platforms: website, Facebook, Hotline, free webpage and email. Further details are below.

These Situation Reports are issued regularly. For the latest Situation Report, see: covid19.gov.vu/index.php/situation-reports

BACKGROUND

On 31 December 2019, the Government of China reported a cluster of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause in Wuhan, Hubei Province. A novel coronavirus was identified in January 2020. Since then, cases have been reported in other parts of China and 189 other countries or territories. On 30 January 2020, the WHO Director-General declared the COVID-19 outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). On 11 March 2020, a Global Pandemic was declared.

The purpose of this document by the Ministry of Health (MOH) is to provide an update on the epidemiological situation and preparedness/response health actions taken in Vanuatu. Further health information is available on the MOH COVID-19 webpage (covid19.gov.vu), free-access mobile page (https://bit.ly/vanmoh) and the Health Promotions Vanuatu Facebook page. WHO also issues regular updates and communication materials on the WHO COVID-19 Outbreak webpage and WHO Vanuatu Facebook page.

LOCAL EPIDEMIOLOGICAL SITUATION

- At present, there are **no confirmed cases** of COVID-19 in Vanuatu.
- At present, there is are **no suspected cases** of COVID-19 in Vanuatu.
- Clinical samples are usually only taken from individuals who fulfil the WHO case definition for COVID-19, which is to have symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath) plus travel or contact history. As a precautionary measure, samples may be taken from additional individuals based on clinical suspicion.
- To date, twenty-four (24) samples have been sent to Noumea for testing. Two (2) samples were from suspected cases which came back negative and therefore are no longer suspected. Twenty-two (22) were taken as a precautionary measure from individuals who displayed some symptoms but were not considered to be suspected cases because they did not fill the WHO case definition for COVID-19. All twenty-two (22) samples were negative.
- Recent international arrivals (returning citizens and residents) were placed in quarantine in a hotel for 14 days. Daily health checks, psychosocial assessments and support were provided to quarantined individuals and hotel staff (n=62 passengers). No individuals displayed signs or symptoms of COVID-19. The quarantine ended on 05 April 2020 following final health clearance in line with Section 12(1) of the Public Health Act, which does not require testing of samples for healthy individuals.

- Aneityum Island was quarantined due to the visit of a cruise-ship (11-12 March) that had passengers who later had COVID-19. Recent visitors to Aneityum considered contacts (n=32) were also quarantined. Quarantine was lifted on 26 March 2020 for Aneityum Island and for contacts.
- All persons are being urged to avoid spreading rumours and incorrect information on health and other matters.
- Specific details of individuals who are in, or have been in, quarantine or isolation, or details of patients, is not to be requested or released.

REGIONAL AND GLOBAL EPIDEMIOLOGICAL SITUATION

- Confirmed cases and/or deaths continue to increase worldwide and in the Pacific region, though the rate of new cases appears to have slowed. Eight (8) Pacific countries, territories or areas have reported either sporadic cases or clusters of cases. Four (4) countries have reported at least one death. Widespread community transmission has not been reported for any countries of the Pacific. No cases have been confirmed in the Pacific Island countries or territories of Federated States of Micronesia, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Pitcairn Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Wallis and Futuna.

Based on information available from various sources, as of 17 April 2020 at 10.00am Port Vila

Reporting Country/ Territory/ Area	Total confirmed# cases	Total confirmed new* cases	Total deaths	Total new* deaths	Transmission classification^	Days since last reported case
Vanuatu[1]	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**na**	**na**
Australia[2]	6,468	21	63	2	Clusters of cases	0
New Zealand[2]	1,086	2	11	2	Clusters of cases	0
Guam[2]	135	0	5	0	Clusters of cases	1
French Polynesia[2]	55	0	0	0	Sporadic cases	2
New Caledonia[2]	18	0	0	0	Sporadic cases	13
Fiji[2]	16	0	0	0	Sporadic cases	5
Northern Mariana Islands[2]	13	0	2	0	Pending	1
PNG[2]	2	0	0	0	Sporadic cases	7
TOTAL Pacific[2]	**7,793**	**23**	**81**	**4**		**0**
TOTAL Global[3]	**1,991,562**	**76,647**	**130,885**	**7,875**		**0**

Sources: (1) Vanuatu Ministry of Health; (2) Information available in public domain; (3) World Health Organization Situation Report for 16/04/2020. # including probable for some countries; * in the last 24 hours; ^ Transmission classification: Sporadic cases: Countries/territories/areas with one or more cases, imported or locally detected. Clusters of cases: Countries/territories/areas experiencing cases, clustered in time, geographic location and/or by common exposures. Community transmission: Countries/area/territories experiencing larger outbreaks of local transmission defined through an assessment of numerous factors.

DECLARATION OF A NATIONAL STATE OF EMERGENCY

On 26 March 2020, the President of Vanuatu signed a declaration for a State of Emergency (SOE) over the whole of Vanuatu for a two-week period (until 9 April 2020), for the purpose of strengthening prevention and containment measures in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic. This Declaration allows special powers of the Government as set out in the Disaster Risk Management Act No. 23 of 2019 in relation to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE PLAN

The *Vanuatu COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan* was disseminated on 12 March 2020 and was revised based on feedback from the Health Cluster on 09 April 2020. The Plan aims to:

- Prevent importation of cases from affected countries
- Slow and stop transmission, prevent outbreaks and delay spread
- Provide optimized care for all patients, especially the seriously ill
- Minimize the impact of the epidemic on health systems, social services and economic activity

COORDINATION

The following groups have responsibility for coordinating and implementing COVID-19 preparedness and response activities in Vanuatu:

- National Disaster Management Office (NDMO): national coordination including inter-cluster coordination and response management.
- National Cluster System: includes an Inter-Cluster (Chair: NDMO Director) and eight technical clusters (Education, Emergency Telecommunications, Food Security and Agriculture, Gender and Protection, Health and Nutrition, Logistics, and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) responsible for coordinating within and between sectors.
- Health Incident Management Team: day-to-day health sector operations (Chair: MOH Director of Curative and Hospital Services).
- Hospital and Provincial Health Emergency Operation Centres: day-to-day health sector operations in facilities and provinces (Chairs: respective senior management).

ACTIONS TAKEN

The following update is issued by the COVID-19 Health Incident Management Team (IMT). The Team is comprised of staff from MOH and development partners including WHO, DFAT/VHP, UNICEF, Red Cross, ODI and IsraAID.

Management and Coordination

- In light of the State of Emergency (SOE), focus of the MOH and partners has been shifted to response to Tropical Cyclone Harold. Nevertheless, COVID-19 prevention and mitigation, risk communication, surveillance and clinical preparedness activities continue.

Information and Planning

- Ministry of Health has developed multiple sources of credible local information on COVID-19 to reach a broad audience. These include:
    - MOH COVID-19 Updates webpage (www.covid19.gov.vu): primary source of official local information and supporting resources with over 10,000 visits and almost 5,000 unique visitors since launch on 25 March.
    - Zero-data landing page (https://bit.ly/vanmoh): provides key messages to the public and is free from smart phones with Digicel and TVL.
    - Health Promotions Vanuatu Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/Health-Promotions-Vanuatu-1674266679566197/): used to disseminate new information and links to the webpage.
    - Information Hotline (119): operates 7-days a week from 6.30am to 10.30pm. Over 3,000 phone calls have been received since operation commenced on 24 March 2020. A log of all queries is being generated so as to update key messages and Questions and Answers for use during community engagement and on the website. Many non-health queries are being received (mainly on directives related to the State of Emergency) so the Hotline scope will be expanded in coordination with NDMO and VCCI.
    - Email address (covid19@vanuatu.gov.vu): for additional information not available elsewhere.

Health Operations

- *Prevention and mitigation:* Intensive community awareness campaigns have been conducted throughout Port Vila since 21 March, with 12,105 people reached in the 5-wards by 16 April. It is anticipated that the community awareness teams will complete their first rounds this week; however, numerous requests have been received from the public for teams to revisit their wards so this will be considered based on other prioprities. Shefa Health has set up awareness teams, with activities to also target elsewhere in the province. Other provincial teams in collaboration with Government departments (ie. Department of Water Resources, Ministry of Education and Training) and partners have established plans and have commenced activities in the provinces. Teams disseminate key messages (eg. 5 things to know, 5 things to do) and field questions, which are then used to revise awareness materials (eg. Questions and Answers). Various trainings have been conducted including for medical staff and hotel staff who supported quarantines. Coordination is being strengthened to track relevant community awareness activities by MOH and partners;

an online tool has been adapted for reporting, tracking and visualisation. Quality testing of samples of locally-produced hand sanitizers in use by the community (n = 4) indicated that the concentration of alcohol in the products was low or absent; results were communicated to manufacturers with a recommendation to adhere to WHO guidelines. The importance of good hand washing with soap and water is therefore to be emphasised during community awareness.

- *Risk communication*: Mass multi-media campaign continues on various platforms including radio interviews, talkback shows, jingles, SMS messaging, TV and newspaper. Increase in social media presence through social media (FB) and the zero-data landing page. Information Education Communication (IEC) materials targeting community members and health workers have been developed, translated and printed. Files and printed materials continue to be sent to provincial teams. Additional materials for specific target audiences (e.g. pregnant women) and targeting specific public spaces (e.g. workplaces) have been finalised for release. Establishment of a clearing house with requisite process to expedite clearance of partner communications materials while ensuring consistency of messaging prior to use. To date 44 materials have been cleared. Partners are encouraged to: 1) share existing MoH materials that are posted on the website, 2) contact MoH before making new materials to reduce duplication efforts, and 3) send any new materials developed to covid19@vanuatu.gov.vu for approval before use.

- *Surveillance*: Capacity for surveillance has been strengthened, such as ongoing review of data collected from health facilities across Vanuatu and private clinics in Port Vila for influenza-like illness, and in hospitals for pneumonia. Three existing sources of information (suspected case investigations and contact management; Early Warning Alert and Response System using influenza-like illness surveillance; influenza testing at VCH) and three new sources of information (Port of entry surveillance; sentinel syndromic surveillance of ILI among private clinics in Port Vila; hospital-based surveillance of respiratory-associated admissions and deaths) are being used with another planned (pharmaceutical consumption surveillance). Options are being actively explored to establish coronavirus testing capacity in Vanuatu. Contact tracing SOPs and plans including for provinces have been developed for implementation as needed. Private healthcare providers have been engaged and will support MOH on case notifications. DHIS-2 is to be used for data management.

- *Clinical management*: All provincial teams and VCH, NPH and Lenakel hospitals have activated their EOCs. VCH EOC met with specialists and sectional heads for coordination. TB ward has been renovated at VCH to be used for isolation. Action flow for triage, quarantine and isolation is under refinement. Sanma, Shefa, Malampa, Penama, Tafea and Torba provincial teams have activated EOCs and have produced Situation Reports, EOC structures and response plans. Activities have commenced. Training of healthcare workers on prevention, case management and use of personal protective equipment (PPE) has been conducted.

Finance, Administration and Logistics

- Renovation of the isolation ward at VCH is near complete. Tents set up for triage at VCH.
- Construction/renovation of facilities at MOH and VCH. NPH needs to be reviewed due to TC Harold.
- PPE stocks have been received from partners and are being continually reviewed for re-stock. Coordination for supply of essential medicines and equipment to be strengthened between MOH and NDMO.
- EOC requests for finances and procurement of equipment/assets to be sent to NDMO for actioning.
- Resources and materials have been committed or provided by numerous partners. The Ministry of Health wish to express appreciation to the following for financial or in-kind contributions (alphabetically): ChinaAid, Daily Post, DFAT, Digicel, French Embassy, IsraAID, MFAT, SPC, Red Cross, TVL, UNICEF, Wan Smol Bag, WHO, World Bank, World Vision, Vanuatu Beverages and other partners. A mechanism for tracking partner support and activities will be established as time permits.
- The support of other Government sectors is also gratefully acknowledged.

MORE ONLINE INFORMATION ON COVID-19

- Ministry of Health COVID-19 webpage: 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-1674266679566197/
- WHO COVID-19 outbreak webpage: www.who.int/coronavirus
- WHO Vanuatu Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Nonprofit-Organization/WHO-Vanuatu-466878253487162/

CONTACTS IN VANUATU

- Emergency only, Vila Central Hospital: 112. Emergency only, Ambulance (Paid/subscriber service): 115
- COVID-19 Information Hotline: 119
- MOH NHEOC email address: nheoc@vanuatu.gov.vu. MOH COVID-19 email: covid19@vanuatu.gov.vu
- Health Surveillance Monitoring: Ms Wendy Williams – Mobile: 773 6759 / 533 3081
- Health Incident Management Team Coordinator: Dr Posikai Samuel Tapo - Mobile: 773 7178
- Media Focal Point for COVID-19: Mr Russel Tamata - Mobile: 710 8442 / 530 0158

Approved by:	Dr Len Tarivonda, Health Incident Management Team Health Operations Lead
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**The intention is to issue Situation Reports regularly though the frequency will depend on the evolving situation.*