Ministry of Health
Vanuatu Government

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)

Vanuatu Situation Report #29 – 15 November 2020

HIGHLIGHTS

- **On 10 November 2020, the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was detected during routine day 5 testing of an asymptomatic person in quarantine**. The case was isolated and will remain so until cleared for release.
- Risk assessment and contact tracing was initiated immediately. All persons on the same flight as the case were already in quarantine and tested negative. Those at risk of exposure were temporarily quarantined and tested negative. It was concluded that there is no additional risk to the Vanuatu community.
- Intensification of risk communication and community engagement continues.
- Hospital readiness has been enhanced for Vila Central Hospital; over 49 hospital beds have been identified for COVID-19 patients including in a dedicated isolation ward and intensive care unit.
- Extensive training conducted to date is being augmented to ensure good adherence to correct process and procedures, including for surveillance, sample collection, quarantine, and PPE use.
- There was a report of one breach from a quarantine facility in Port Vila; assessments indicate no risk to the public and the individuals involved will be dealt with under the Public Health Act.
- There was a report of a foreign yacht entering Vanuatu and located in North Tanna; assessments and contact tracing have been conducted and the 3 persons and 7 potential contacts are in quarantine and will be tested.
- As per the *COVID-19 Health Sector Preparedness and Response Plan*, Vanuatu is now in **Scenario 2A** ie. border case(s) only.
- People are urged not to spread misinformation/rumours. Further information is available at www.covid19.gov.vu

Major updates relative to the previous Situation Report are indicated in yellow.

DETECTION OF FIRST CASE

On 10 November 2020, the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Vanuatu. The case is a 23-year old male ni-Vanuatu citizen repatriated from USA with an arrival date to Vanuatu of 04 November 2020. The case was identified in quarantine during routine day 5 testing with re-testing to confirm. Laboratory evaluations indicate a very low level of virus (low viral load) meaning that it is unlikely he would have been able to transmit the disease to anyone else. He had no recent history of illness before or during travel and was asymptomatic (no COVID-19 signs or symptoms) in quarantine; he remains asymptomatic. Physical distancing and personal protection measures were applied and maintained during the flight, throughout the arrival process, during transport to and during registration at the quarantine facility. Arrival screening was undertaking following established protocols. The person had been identified during pre-travel registration as travelling from a higher-risk location, therefore was seated separately from low risk passengers at the back of the plane and was screened and transported separately from other arriving passengers. The case did not share a room with anyone else at the quarantine facility and is reported to have adhered to all appropriate measures throughout the travel and quarantine process. The case is isolated at VCH and will remain so until health clearance is given for release. Psychosocial support has been provided for the case and his family.

PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE ACTIONS

In accordance with the *COVID-19 Health Sector Preparedness and Response Plan* (version 5), Vanuatu is now in **Scenario 2A** (one or more cases detected in quarantine). A case detected in quarantine is considered a **border case and not an outbreak**. The following measures have been initiated as per the *Plan*:

- Isolate the asymptomatic case until health clearance provided
- Contact tracing and quarantine of close contacts
- Maintain all persons from the same flight in quarantine and monitor and test as per protocols
- Increase risk communication about the situation, transmission and prevention measures
- Increase community engagement for preparedness and response activities

RISK ASSESSMENT AND CONTACT TRACING FOR FIRST CASE

- Risk assessment and contact tracing commenced on 11 November 2020 immediately following confirmation of the first COVID-19 case.

- The case was interviewed to identify people they may have contacted. Investigations also targeted workers involved in the repatriation process (including airline, airport, customs, immigration, biosecurity, health, transport and hotel staff) so as to identify those who were at occupational risk.
- All 152 passengers on the same flight as the case (who were already in quarantine) tested negative. Those 12 additional staff at risk of exposure all reported to have correctly used PPE; as a precautionary measure they were temporarily quarantined and tested negative.
- It was concluded that there is no additional risk to the Vanuatu community from the case that is in quarantine. A report of conclusions from the risk assessment and contact tracing was provided by the Ministry of Health on 15 November 2002.

Summary of contact tracing and quarantine of close contacts, as of 15 November at 05.00pm [Port Vila]

CLOSE CONTACTS of Case 1 (on plane)			OTHER PASSENGERS on plane with Case 1			PERSONS WITH POSSIBLE OCCUPATIONAL EXPOSURE to Case 1		
Number identified	Number tested	Number positive	Number identified	Number tested	Number positive	Number identified	Number tested	Number positive
17	17	0	135	135	0	12	12	0

*A close contact is a person who experienced any one of the following exposures during infectious period of a probable or confirmed case: Within 1 meter for more than 15 minutes; Seated within two rows of a confirmed case on a flight or bus; Direct physical contact without using proper personal protective equipment; Direct health care for a patient without using proper personal protective equipment; OR Other situations as indicated by local risk assessments.
^ A person who may have occupational exposure is any worker involved in the repatriation process (including airline, airport, customs, immigration, biosecurity, health, transport and hotel staff) who worked on the day of flight arrival and who were potentially exposed to COVID-19 either through direct physical contact or within close physical proximity to any passenger.

REPATRIATE QUARANTINE AND ROUTINE HEALTH MONITORING AND TESTING

- In accordance with the Public Health Act (Cap. 234), international arrivals (returning citizens and residents) have been placed in mandatory quarantine for 14 days in hotels and provided with food, daily health checks, testing for SARS-CoV-2 at days 5 and 11, and psychosocial assessments and support.
- Phase 2 of repatriations commenced on 01 August 2020. So far, 2,250 passengers have arrived (with travel originating in 21 countries) and have been placed in quarantine in Port Vila until completion of the quarantine duration; 230 are currently in quarantine.
- Daily health monitoring is undertaken for everyone in quarantine. 6 persons have reported symptoms of COVID-19 during Phase 2. All have tested negative for SARS-CoV-2.
- Testing on days 5 and 11 of quarantine is now being done for everyone in quarantine. A total of 365 tests have been conducted in Vanuatu to date. Since January 2020, only 1 person has tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 on 10 November 2020, as discussed above in 'Detection of first case'.

Phase 2 summary of repatriated persons in quarantine and status, as of 15 November at 05.00pm [Port Vila]

Number of repatriates quarantined in Phase 2		Number of repatriates quarantined with fever or respiratory symptoms		Number of repatriates quarantined and confirmed to have COVID-19
Since August 2020	Current	Cumulative	Current	Current
2,250	230	6	0	1

KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED

- A breach of quarantine protocols was reported on 13 November 2020. The incident involved a person in quarantine exiting their room to attempt to meet with a visitor. No one else was involved or came in close contact with the repatriate during this incident. Both involved persons are now in strict and secure quarantine. There is no risk to the general public as a result of this breach. The individuals involved will be dealt with accordingly to legal provisions of the Public Health Act.
- An Australian-registered yacht was sighted in North Tanna on 15 November 2020. There was reportedly no direct contact with any individuals although a gift was passed via fishing net and hook. Risk assessment and contact tracking has been initiated, with quarantine of the 3 persons on the yacht and 7 other individuals in quarantine facilities, with testing to be conducted accordingly.

INCREASED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND RISK COMMUNICATION

- *Consultations* conducted with key community leaders and stakeholders including Chiefs, Churches, Women, Youth and People with a Disability. These included sessions with community stakeholders and partners about risk messaging and community outreach, with further sessions planned.
- *Community awareness* activities commenced on 14 November 2020 in the 5 Port Vila municipal wards and will continue.
- *Mass media awareness* (television, radio, print media, social media, SMS) is being increased including information on key public health prevention measures to be taken (hand washing, respiratory hygiene and avoiding touching of face)
- *Press releases, press conferences and interviews* with radio, television, print and other media will continue to provide key updates as they become available.

HOSPITAL READINESS

- A COVID-19 Preparedness, Readiness and response Plan has been developed for Vila Central Hospital, with activities and assessments ongoing.
- While significant progress has been made, urgent action is required for some key components (see below).
- For patients confirmed with COVID-19, currently there are 16 beds in the Isolation Ward, 24 beds in the General Ward, 5 beds in the Intensive Care Unit (with additional for neonates), and 4 assigned delivery beds. Additional bed capacity is currently being identified.

Overview of hospital readiness for Vila Central Hospital, as of 13 November at 5.00pm [Port Vila]

Component	Score	Percent Achieved
1.Leadership and incident management system	5.5	79%
2.Coordination and communication	4	67%
3.Surveillance and information management	4.5	75%
4.Risk communication and community engagement	2	50%
5.Administration, finance and business continuity	3.5	44%
6.Human resources	3	50%
7.Surge capacity	5	100%
8.Continuity of essential support services	5	83%
9.Patient management	3.5	88%
10.Occupational health, mental health and psychosocial support	3.5	70%
11.Rapid identification and diagnosis	5	83%
12.Infection prevention and control	13	81%

TRAINING

- Good implementation of processes by the health operations team before and after detection of the first case have confirmed the success of the extensive training carried out to date.
- Refresher training as well as training of new officers is ongoing. This includes training on surveillance, contact tracing, sample collection, infection prevention and control, quarantine and border processes, as well as other technical trainings related to COVID-19 and health sector preparedness and response activities.

Approved by: Mr Len Tarivonda, Health Incident Management Team – Health Operations Lead
Approved at: 17 November 2020, 09.00am

**This report is produced by the National Health Emergency Operations Center and presents the situation up to the end of the day as dated. Situation Reports will be issued as and when needed depending on the evolving situation.*