



Friday 24 April 2020

For Immediate Release

MEDIA STATEMENT

The Autonomous Bougainville Government through the Office of the Controller of the Bougainville State of Emergency and the Health Response Team wants to assure the public that we are committed to ensuring that the COVID-19 does not enter Bougainville.

The ABG Department of Health as the lead agency has activated its Emergency Response Plan and is being implemented by its Emergency Response Team. This includes health experts and officials who are responsible for key actions and prevention measures.

According to the PNG Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan, we are currently in Stage 2: Containment Level. This simply means that PNG has already had confirmed cases of the COVID-19. To date, 8 cases have been confirmed in the country.

BOUGAINVILLE– UPDATE ON PREPAREDNESS

For Bougainville's case, we are focusing our response efforts to ensure this virus does not enter our borders, and to prevent at all costs, any human-to-human transmission. The Health Response Team is working around the clock to contain the situation through surveillance to identify, quarantine and isolate potential cases in Bougainville.

The Bougainville Police Service and other law enforcement agencies are working hard to ensure that the public adheres to the Emergency Orders that were issued by the Controller. We therefore call upon our people once again to help us help you by adhering to the emergency orders. The restrictions being placed on movement of people and social distancing is the best way that you can help us, your families and yourselves to stay protected from the COVID-19.

We are fully aware that this pandemic has not only health implications, but is multi-dimensional and includes sectors such as economic, education and social sectors to name a few. In response to this, a Joint Task Force Agency against COVID-19 has been established with nine main teams for Health, Security, Disaster and Emergency Support, Economic, Public Utilities, Churches, ABG elections and Development Partners.

These teams have developed their response strategies for the worst-case scenario in Bougainville to ensure a high level of alertness and preparedness, should we have a confirmed case in Bougainville.

Key institutions on Bougainville such as the sea and air ports have activated their Standard Operating Procedures in response to the preparedness efforts.

The Health Response Teams have also intensified their awareness efforts to ensure the public receives factual and credible information and to help counter the spread of rumors and misinformation that can cause unnecessary fear and panic. We are working on making the Health Response Hotline Number become toll-free so that people across Bougainville can easily call the hotline number for any public queries or community concerns about the COVID-19.

We are working closely with our development partners to secure support for specific key areas such as the establishment of the required facilities such as isolation and quarantine facilities. In North Bougainville, the Isolation Center will be built in Suhin, Hagogohe Constituency, Buka and is funded by the Australian Government. The Buka General Hospital Pre-Triage Center is also in construction phase with support from the Office of the National Member for North Bougainville.

CALLS TO ACTION

We are looking after our health workers who are the front-liners in this health crisis, by providing them with the required equipment to keep them safe. You can also help our health workers with care, compassion and simply to stay at home.

We must all be supportive of one another during this time. It is important that we show care and support for our families and neighbors. Do not stigmatize or tease someone who is ill. Stigmatizing can lead to people being shy or scared to seek health care immediately and this will not help in our efforts to prevent the spread of the COVID-19.

Share the correct information amongst your families and communities, and if you want more information, see your local community health worker, or call the Bougainville Health Response Team Hotline number 74460830.

And finally, remember to practice the Five Preventive Measures at all times:

- Maintaining social distance (a minimum of 1.5 meters)
- Frequently washing hands using clean running water and soap, or alcohol-based hand rub
- When coughing and sneezing, cover mouth and nose with flexed elbow or tissue — throw away used tissue immediately and wash hands
- Avoid close contact with anyone who has fever and cough
- If you have fever, cough, or difficulty breathing, stay at home (self-isolate) to protect others and call the Bougainville Health Response Team Hotline Number 74460830.

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