



Monday 27 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.

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

Health - Bougainville's focus has been on intense preventive controls and measures to ensure the virus does not enter Bougainville.

Globally, the number of COVID-19 cases continues to increase on a daily basis. As of yesterday 2.8million cases have been reported around the world. The Bougainville Health Response Team continues to monitor these figures and global trends. According to the World Health Organization, the global risk assessment remains very high.

It is based on this data that the Controller, Deputy and the Health Secretary are adamant to uphold the emergency orders to maintain strong preventive measures in Bougainville, and to protect the health of the people of Bougainville.

The Suhin Health Center in Buka, North Bougainville is the facility that will be used to isolate people who travel into Bougainville. It is currently undergoing renovation work and should be complete in about four weeks from today.

The Buka General Hospital Triage Center development is progressing well and is in construction phase. Work is expected to be complete by the end of this week.

Law and Order - Under the State of Emergency, there has been an increase in breaches recorded across North, Central and South Bougainville. In North Bougainville, there was a total of 18 breaches recorded in the past five days, Central Bougainville had 4 breaches while South Bougainville had only 1 breach. Most of these breaches were related to Emergency Order No. 19 (overloading of PMVs).

There has also been an increase in normal law and order offences across the region in the past five days, which indicates an increase in crime, and therefore a public call is made again to the general public to work closely with local community authorities and the police to maintain safety and law and order during the emergency period.

A public appeal also goes to all vehicle owners and drivers to comply with the restrictions on the number of passengers they are allowed to carry.

On security, border surveillance is still ongoing around the region with Immigration, Customs and Police conducting patrols along the Solomon Islands and PNG borders.

Sea and air ports continue to remain closed in Buka and Kieta, except for cargo ships and/or flights as approved by the SOE Bougainville Controller.

Government - At the government level, the Joint Task Force Agency against COVID-19 has established nine main teams for Health, Security, Disaster and Emergency Support, Economic, Public Utilities, Churches, ABG elections and Development Partners.

All teams have provided response strategies for the COVID-19 to the Deputy Controller and ABG Health Secretary. This planning process is to ensure a 360 degree view of all that is happening and to maintain a high level of alertness and preparedness for Bougainville over the next few months.

The Economic Sector team has identified certain orders under the SOE that can be relaxed to ensure businesses remain operational throughout this period. For example, extending the business hours to be from 08:00am to 05:00pm, however, in order for shops to be allowed to be open for this duration, they must be certified by the Health authorities that the shop is in compliance with health safety standards. Additional plans include an economic stimulus package for local businesses who meet a set criteria such as being registered under IPA, have a trading license, and be a member of the recognized business association to name a few.

The Disaster and Emergency Support Team has plans in place to address food security, social livelihood, distribution of food rations to targeted households and assist in building back communities after the COVID-19.

The Buka Urban Community Government have proposed to allocate a convenient temporary location that is open and suitable for market vendors to sell fresh produce in a safe manner that maintains social distancing.

Under Education, the team presented options for elementary, primary, secondary schools based on strict and full compliance of certain health and safety measures such as restricting movement of teachers, students and public during school hours, restriction on selling cooked food items at school, and having hand-washing facilities in every classroom and other specialized buildings.

Once a decision is made on the options provided by the Education Sector, the Controller will issue new orders for the schools to follow. A team from the Bougainville Health Response Team will also be visiting schools to ensure that proper facilities and preventive measures are in place before classes resume.

These are some of the plans that are in progress to ensure that the government is responding across all sectors and in the best interest and more importantly, the safety of the people of Bougainville.

CALLS TO ACTION

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.

Ends...///