



Friday 15 May 2020

For Immediate Release

MEDIA STATEMENT

Bougainville Update

Health- the Quarantine Facility and the Buka General Hospital Critical Ward and Triage, in Buka - North Bougainville, is now ready.

ABG Health Secretary, Clement Totavun, announced this today saying that the quarantine facility is complete and they can now look at taking in people who will be coming into Bougainville from other provinces.

The Isolation Facility at Suhin, Hagogohe Constituency in Buka, is well on track to completion and plans are underway for the official handover to happen in the coming week.

Based on the progress of these facilities, the Health Secretary has met with the Controller this week, to advice on the progress of the facilities and on the possible reopening of the Buka Airport to allow flights to resume services into Bougainville.

The Controller has considered the progressive reports on the facilities, and is now reviewing the orders on flight restrictions.

The Controller will issue new orders by next week for the flight restrictions and this should see a controlled approach in the resumption of flights into Buka over the coming week.

The Health Secretary also announced today that Bougainvilleans will begin receiving short coronavirus awareness messages on their mobile phones and will be able to call the Bougainville COVID-19 Hotline number for free.

Starting this Sunday, all Digicel subscribers will receive text messages explaining what coronavirus is, how to protect yourself and your loved ones, and where to get more information or report an illness.

The Health Secretary said the Health Team is using every channel available to them to make sure that people are informed and confident about what each of us must do to fight the spread of the coronavirus.

He said the text messages have been approved by the National Department of Health and will support the current face-to-face awareness being delivered by Health Workers, MPs and others across the region.

The Health Secretary also announced that the Bougainville COVID-19 Hotline number 74460830 will also become a free call service starting next week.

It is understood that phone credits are a challenge for most of our people so the Health Team is making the hotline number a toll free service so that everyone is able to call the number without needing to buy phone credits.

He further encouraged the general public in Bougainville to share these messages with family and friends and to make use of this free information service to ask questions, and report if they or a loved one is not feeling well.

The SMS blasts and Bougainville Hotline toll free service are supported by the governments of Australia and New Zealand, as part of a package of support to the Bougainville's COVID-19 emergency response efforts.

SOE – Bougainville Controller and Chief of Bougainville Police Service, Francis Tokura, has issued new supplementary orders number 3, for the PNG DataCo Ltd personnel to be allowed to enter Bougainville.

This new supplementary order was issued today based on the urgency of the telecommunications company to complete work on the Kumul Submarine Cable Network link in Arawa, Central Bougainville.

The Controller announced that the PNG DataCo Ltd engineers arrived in Buka today and has gone through all necessary checks upon arrival at the Buka Airport. This includes compliance with the National Airports Corporation Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) followed by medical quarantine checks by the Buka-based COVID-19 Health Response and Preparedness Team.

The engineers will travel to Arawa with police escort and will be received in Arawa by the Arawa-based COVID-19 Health Response and Preparedness Team where they will conduct thermal checks on all engineers.

The Controller has issued a strict order that restricts the movement of the engineers only to their place of work and back to their place of lodging.

He also clarified that he has allowed this team of engineers into Bougainville to ensure that Bougainville does not miss out on this valuable opportunity of improving the telecommunication network in the region.

Meanwhile, Quarantine Instructions for domestic travellers into Buka have also been issued today by the Controller which now ensures a proper and effective quarantine process is in place before the resumption of flights into the region.

The Controller says while they have relaxed some of the emergency orders under the SOE, it does not mean that Bougainville is not at risk of the coronavirus.

He appealed to the public to remain cautious, maintain social distancing and keep good personal hygiene at all times.

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.

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