



AROB HEALTH RESPONSE TEAM

2019 Coronavirus Outbreak

TO THE PUBLIC:

In view of the declaration of the World Health Organization (WHO) that the novel coronavirus, named the COVID-19, is a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC), the AROB Health Response Team was established following the announcement by the PNG National Department of Health's (NDOH) that PNG is on heightened surveillance for suspected cases of COVID-19. The team is headed by the Buka General Hospital's acting CEO Dr Tommy Wotsia and the acting director of medical services Dr Mathias Tovilu.

As of today's date there have been no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in PNG, however the health response team has remained vigilant in tracking the global spread and response to the COVID-19 outbreak as well as following the most up to date information and recommendations from the NDOH, WHO and other relevant national and international organizations. The team is also collaborating with other relevant Bougainville government departments/agencies which include customs & immigration, Buka Urban Council and the air and sea ports officials in organizing measures to prevent local transmission and prepare for possible cases of the virus. Measures have included the activation of the region's emergency operations center with weekly meetings, developing and budgeting of an action plan to be submitted to BEC, media awareness to the public on the disease with a hotline to be soon established, sensitizing of health staff to the disease and training for patient care, organizing isolation unit and planned regular intergovernmental coordination meetings. At this time with no PNG cases confirmed and air and international ports of entry being confined to Port Moresby, Lae, Rabaul, most of the high level surveillance activities and measures at point of entries are at present only being undertaken at these sites, however the health department in AROB as well as other provinces are on high alert to scale up their activities in these areas at any given notice by direction of the responsible lead international and national coordinating bodies.

FAQs on 2019 Novel Coronavirus

What is Coronavirus Disease 2019?

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a virus (more specifically, a coronavirus) identified as the cause of an outbreak of respiratory illness first detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province of China. Chinese authorities identified the new coronavirus, which resulted in hundreds of confirmed cases in China including cases outside of Wuhan. It has now spread to 25 countries which includes our neighboring countries of Indonesia and Australia. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that cause the illness ranging from the common cold to more severe illnesses such as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). The COVID-19 is a new disease and therefore not much is known about the disease. However from knowledge gained from the previous outbreaks of SARS and MERS, the virus is spread through animals and human to human transmission can occur through droplets, contact and fomites, which suggests that this disease can be transmitted through the same modes.

What are the symptoms of Coronavirus Disease 2019?

People who are infected with Coronavirus Disease 2019 have developed mild to severe respiratory illness with symptoms including, fever, cough, shortness of breath and potentially respiratory distress. There are many types of illnesses that can cause these types of respiratory symptoms. However those individuals who have these symptoms plus either have:

- lived, travelled to or visited Wuhan, China in the last 14 days prior to the onset of the above mentioned symptoms;
- Has close contact (working, living, studying, travelling etc.) with a confirmed case of COVID-19; or
- A health worker who has cared for patients with respiratory infections, or has worked in the environment where the cases are cared for, regardless of place of residence or history of travel;

need to be medically evaluated.

What if I recently travelled to an outbreak area or came in close contact with a confirmed case of Coronavirus Disease 2019?

If you develop fever, cough, shortness of breath, within the 14 days of travelling or coming in contact with positive cases of COVID-19, you must:

- Go to your nearest health facility for treatment and testing. Be honest in reporting your travel and exposure history with the health workers.
- Bring along any travel companions or companions you live alongside with who have the same symptoms

Hotline numbers will soon be established for general enquiries and information about the disease as well as for referrals by the public for any suspected cases. Please continue to watch this page for further information on this.

How is Coronavirus Disease 2019 diagnosed?

The disease is only diagnosed using a laboratory test known as PCR test or Polymerase Chain Reaction test. At present, the only existing PCR test equipment in PNG is located at the PNG Institute of Medical Research in Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province and so all suspect cases' samples will be sent there for testing.

How can I help protect myself?

The basic principles to reduce the general risk of transmission of acute respiratory infections include the following:

- Avoiding close contact with people suffering from acute respiratory infections.
- Frequent hand-washing, especially after direct contact with ill people or their environment.
- Avoiding unprotected contact with farm or wild animals.
- People with symptoms of acute respiratory infection should practice cough etiquette (maintain distance, cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or clothing, and wash hands).
- When visiting live markets, avoid direct unprotected contact with live animals and surfaces in contact with animals;
- The consumption of raw or undercooked animal products should be avoided. Raw meat, milk or animal organs should be handled with care, to avoid cross-contamination with
- uncooked foods, as per good food safety practices.

**The AROB Health Response Team would like to remind the public to believe only official statements from duly constituted government authorities releasing status updates pertaining to the COVID-19 in AROB, instead of circulating fake news so as not to cause undue public scare and confusion.*