



## NATIONAL EMERGENCY COMMITTEE

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*Planning, Mitigation,  
Preparedness, Response  
and Recovery, The  
essential ingredients for  
a successful Disaster  
Management.*

### PRESS RELEASE

March 29, 2020

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

As of today, the Republic of Palau still has no suspected or confirmed cases of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). The number of COVID-19 cases continues to rise globally, including in neighboring jurisdictions such as Guam and the Philippines, with the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) now confirming its first cases.

The National Emergency Committee continues to collaborate with the Ministry of Health and the Office of the President in developing and implementing plans and measures to better prevent and prepare for the entry and spread of COVID-19.

In line with the Ministry of Health's *Directive No. 60-20: Certification of Unavoidable Public Health Emergency* and the President's *Executive Order No. 437*, the following actions and measures have been put in place and are moving forward:

#### 1. Prevention and Preparation Action Plan

The National Emergency Committee (NEC) with the Ministry of Health (MOH) adopted a revised COVID-19 prevention and preparation action plan to address this unprecedented pandemic. The plan outlines specific actions and steps to enable the National Government to prepare for and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, more specifically to ensure the continuity of essential public services and minimize the impact of this pandemic on public health, safety, and economic activity. The plan includes Palau International Airport dual screening and passenger flow control procedures, and a mass quarantine protocol to be implemented by the NEC with the MOH. Implementation trainings will be conducted throughout the next two weeks, while isolation and quarantine facilities are completed and COVID-19 testing capabilities are established in the Republic. All infrastructure and implementation capacities will be complete by April 9, 2020.

#### 2. COVID-19 Testing Kits

Through partnership with the government of the Republic of China (Taiwan) and Shin Kong Hospital, 1,000 COVID-19 test kits, along with important medical supplies and equipment, are scheduled to arrive in Palau on April 1. A technician and expert from Shin Kong Hospital is scheduled to arrive on the same flight to install equipment and train MOH personnel on testing and operation. The donated test kits, supplies, and equipment are being flown to Palau via chartered aircraft made possible by MOH funding and grant assistance.

MOH is also working closely with other partners to bring in additional COVID-19 testing supplies and rapid testing kits over the coming days and weeks

### 3. Airline Service

The Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Industries and Commerce, in coordination with United Airlines and Caroline Islands Air, has modified the flight schedule to ferry in (cargo & mail only) and live out (passengers, cargo, and mail). This modification will allow MOH and NEC adequate time to finalize quarantine facilities and procedures, and to obtain test kits for COVID-19. United Airlines is scheduled to resume flights with passenger arrivals and departures once a week beginning April 9, 2020. From 10pm to 2am access to the passenger terminal building and parking lot will be open only to travelers and essential airport personnel.

For cargo and mail services, APA (Asia Pacific Airlines) will provide air transport service once per week to the Republic without interruption.

### 4. Isolation and Quarantine Facility Preparation

The NEC continues to work with MOH, MPIIC and other relevant partners to set up quarantine facilities. These facilities will house all incoming passengers into the Republic who will be required to undergo a mandatory 14-day quarantine to ensure the safety and health of all of Palau's residents.

#### Alternate Care Sites (ACS)

Major infrastructure works to enable the Kalau Gymnasium in Meyuns to accommodate isolation of up to 50 patients (with provisions to extend should need arise) are complete. Works over this past weekend were to connect power and minor miscellaneous works. The ACS will be operational on Monday March 30.

#### New COVID-19 Test Lab

The Ministry of Health has requested the Bureau of Public Works to erect two (2) specially modified containers at the Belau National Hospital between the Oral Health Unit and the Medical Ward for the purpose of a COVID-19 testing facility. Construction started on Friday March 27 and will be completed on Tuesday, April 2.

#### Hotel Isolation/Quarantine Sites

The National Emergency Committee and the Ministry of Health are working with numerous hoteliers that have offered their properties to accommodate 14-day passenger quarantines. Agreements between government and hoteliers are being developed and plans are under way to establish protocols for hotel quarantines.

## 5. Temporary Closure of All Schools

The Ministry of Education (MOE) temporarily closed all schools from March 23 to April 3, 2020. MOE is conducting school clean-ups and putting in place measures to keep students safe, and continues to work with MOH to prepare schools for the return of students.

The Ministry of Education is working closely with the Ministry of Health to develop online coursework and other alternative learning options should it become necessary to extend school closures.

## 6. A Whole-Of-Society Effort

The MOH urges everyone to practice preventive measures to help prevent the spread of COVID-19:

- Frequent handwashing with soap and water, or use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers (at least 70% alcohol);
- Proper coughing and sneezing etiquette – use a tissue to cover your cough or sneeze, throw the tissue away immediately, and wash your hands. If a tissue is not available, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow;
- Practice social distancing – avoid close contact with sick people, and stay at least six feet away from others;
- Avoid large crowds – avoid going out, except for essential activities like grocery shopping; and
- Stay home if you are sick with mild symptoms. But if you need medical attention, please call the Belau National Hospital Emergency Room at 488-2558 before going to the hospital.

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