



*Republic of Palau*

# Ministry of Health

P. O. Box 6027 Koror, Republic of Palau 96940  
phone: (680) 488-2552 or 2553 fax: (680) 488-1211  
email: [administration@palauhealth.org](mailto:administration@palauhealth.org) website: [www.palauhealth.org](http://www.palauhealth.org)

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**CONTACT:** Ministry of Health Public Information Officer  
Tel: +680-775-1138 Fax: +680-488-1211  
Email: [edolem.ikerdeu@palauhealth.org](mailto:edolem.ikerdeu@palauhealth.org)

### UPDATES TO THE US SECRETARY OF DEFENSE MARK ESPER'S VISIT TO PALAU

**August 29, 2020**

The Ministry of Health (MOH) would like to provide the following updates to recent news regarding potential exposure to COVID-19 during US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper's visit to the Republic of Palau. According to the US Embassy in Koror, the individual who was reported positive of COVID-19 did not travel to Palau, and neither the Secretary of Defense nor any in his delegation who traveled to Palau came into contact with the individual who was reported positive of COVID-19, or with any of the Department of Defense advance team. Further note that no DoD advance team came to Palau.

The delegation that traveled to Palau was tested before arrival, and MOH reviewed negative test results for every delegation member before arrival in Palau. The entire delegation was tested again in Guam after departing Palau, and all results were negative for COVID-19.

Pursuant to Section 7 of MOH Directive No. 170-20, and in consultation with the National Emergency Committee and the Office of the President, the Minister of Health issued mandatory quarantine exemptions to the Secretary of Defense's delegation based on the extensive measures taken prior to arrival in Palau. All travelers completed a pre-travel process of quarantine or "restriction of movement" within the US Military system, or are subjected to special restrictions and precautions as senior government officials, and traveled into the Republic of Palau via military transport, which doesn't share the "high-risk" characteristics of civilian transportation. All travelers were subjected to all testing and screening requirements prior to arrival in Palau.

MOH understands the public's concerns regarding quarantine exemptions; however, such decisions are made after thorough assessment and careful deliberation with all relevant partners. The health of the community and nation remains our top priority.

While we have yet to identify a confirmed COVID-19 case in Palau, MOH continues to urge the public to practice preventive measures including proper and frequent handwashing, respiratory etiquette, cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces, isolating from others when sick, and calling the Hospital for advice. These measures not only prevent COVID-19 but also other infectious diseases.

If you have any questions or need further information on quarantine or testing for COVID-19, please contact the MOH EOC Deputy Incident Commander/Liaison Officer, Mr. Gaafar Uherbelau at 775-1310.