

**ALL OF GOVERNMENT PRESS CONFERENCE: WEDNESDAY, 8 APRIL 2020**

**Sarah Stuart-Black:** Kia ora koutou. I'm joined by the new Commissioner of Police, Andrew Coster, who will share the latest on how police are managing their response during the level 4 restrictions. After that, I will give you an update on the all-of-Government response to COVID-19. Over to you, Commissioner.

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** Tēnā koutou. Today, I wish to provide an overview of police enforcement of the level 4 restrictions, with a focus on travel over the Easter period. I'll provide a broad summary of crime trends, and I wish to cover some of the challenges our staff are facing every day on the front line.

I'd like to start by acknowledging the majority of New Zealanders who are following the advice and obligations of the level 4 restrictions. Our staff have encountered many people who are being very conscientious in following the rules. It is, of course, a minority that continue to pose the biggest risk around the breaches.

You'll have noted today that we have issued a clear warning to those intending to travel out of town for Easter that they should change their plans immediately. Police will have an increased presence in the community. People can expect to see more checkpoints and more mobile patrols. Districts will have some flexibility as to how to best manage this, but I know that in some areas checkpoints will be the most logical way of checking legitimate travel.

We've recorded a total of 367 breaches of the civil defence and emergency management or Health Act notices—up 76 on yesterday. There are 45 prosecutions, 309 warnings, and 13 youth referrals. We're continuing to receive a huge number of reports of potential breaches, which tells us that members of the public clearly want others to comply—a positive signal. To date, we've received 37,000 reports of breaches. Just under 7,000 of those were about businesses or organisations.

In relation to self-isolation checking for those who have come across the border, since 3 April, police have conducted almost 1,200 face-to-face checks on all arrivals into New Zealand; 575 of those were conducted yesterday alone. I'm confident that by the end of the week, we will have 100 percent of those arriving in the country being visited by police as part of a compliance check. For the moment, we're continuing to use the text service to help us with our understanding of where people are, and, if they don't engage, who we need to add to our lists for visits.

In terms of crime: based on the trends to date, we're not forecasting any significant increase in crime over the coming period.

We have been seeing an increase in family harm - related calls service, and we're working closely with our partners to ensure those people can be looked after. We take family harm calls very seriously, and we will attend. We urge people to call us on 111 if they're concerned for themselves, others, or their neighbours. Our initial data, and based on what we know happened overseas, suggests we can expect an increase in calls about mental health as people struggle with the impact of isolation and the general stress of this situation.

Similarly to mental health calls, international research suggests there may be an increase in self-harm situations. However, thankfully, we have not seen this yet.

In relation to police staff safety, the total number of staff who have tested positive for COVID-19 remains at just two. They continue to be supported and managed appropriately. We have, currently, some 600 staff in self-isolation, with half of those being constabulary members.

The behaviour of a small minority of people in targeting police staff or members of the public by coughing or spitting is extremely disappointing and concerning. We have identified

spitting as an escalating risk to both police officers and the community. There have been multiple reports of hospital staff and supermarket workers being spat on or being threatened in the same manner. Since the introduction of the level 4 restrictions, eight of our people have had to self-isolate after being spat at by people who either said they had tested positive for COVID-19 or who had symptoms of being unwell.

If someone does spit or cough on another person and infect them, they risk being charged with infecting with disease under the Crimes Act and face a penalty of up to 14 years' imprisonment, should they be found guilty.

While we have a range of measures in place to protect our people, given the front-line nature of police work, there are risks. This completely unacceptable behaviour of spitting puts our people and others at risk; it causes stress and anxiety, as affected staff are then required to self-isolate until we can confirm whether or not COVID-19 may be present. I'm incredibly proud of our staff, like many hundreds of other emergency workers and essential workers, who commit themselves to the work they are doing for the sake of a safe and well community. Thank you.

**Sarah Stuart-Black:** Thank you, Andrew. Firstly, I'd like to echo the police commissioner's comments about non-essential travel over Easter. We're asking for you to do the right thing and please stay home—it is saving lives.

Today marks almost two weeks since we entered alert level 4. For many of you, this will have been the longest 14 days of your life. I genuinely want to thank you all for uniting against COVID-19.

For those of you who planned to go away over Easter, it's tough having to be stuck at home instead. Easter is usually a time for relaxation, celebration, time with loved ones, but you can still do that—just stay home. Hang out with friends and family online or by phone, or even have a Zoom party.

You'll also need to worship at Easter from home. Hopefully, your church is conducting services online or by other broadcast technology.

And please continue to reach out to those who you know may be vulnerable or at risk or need help. A friendly phone call could really make someone's Easter.

I've got a few updates on some measures that I've talked about before that I thought would be useful to talk through. I mentioned last week the phone outreach programme that's being led by the Ministry of Social Development and the National Emergency Management Agency to support people over 70. This is for those who are living alone and for whom we have no email address. They're potentially people who may not be receiving information on where to access help.

So far, more than 11,000 calls have been made, and we're asking people how they're faring in self-isolation. On a scale of zero—for not coping well—to 3—which is coping very well—the average score is 2.8. It's really heartening to know that most of our over-70s are managing in self-isolation, and if they do need help, they're getting the support that they require. But if you know older New Zealanders in your neighbourhood, I'd still really encourage you to give them a call or have a chat over the fence, and just see how they're doing.

The Government has put in place a broad range of extra measures to support communities to off-set the impact of COVID-19. Your first point of call for finding out what you need should be the all-of-Government helpline, which is 0800-779-997. This call centre will be able to assist with the right information on which agency can best help, and there's also a wealth of information on the COVID-19 website, which is [covid19.govt.nz](https://covid19.govt.nz). If you need help accessing essential goods or financial assistance, it's important that you ask and ask early for help, especially for things like food, medicines, or transport to get these essentials. If you're in this situation and it is urgent, help is available from your local civil defence emergency management group. All 16 CDEM groups around the country have dedicated

helplines you can call, and they're on the covid19.govt.nz website, on the Life at Home page. So, again, you can call that all-of-Government helpline directly, or you can reach out in your local region. Please do ask for help if you need it—it's there to support you.

Civil defence emergency management groups are also supporting in the distribution of food parcels to households that are unable to afford or access these. As of Monday, they had distributed 7,727 food parcels and 528 food vouchers across New Zealand. They're now providing reimbursements directly for food banks, and most calls to CDEM group numbers are in relation to support for food, so, again, I encourage you to reach out. If you're in that situation; these mechanisms are there to support you.

Finally, yesterday, the Minister of Civil Defence extended the state of national emergency for a further seven days. Under the Civil Defence and Emergency Management Act, a state of national emergency expires seven days after it is declared, unless extended or terminated earlier. The Minister has extended the state of national emergency to ensure we continue to have all the resources, support, and powers that we need to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our communities and support the alert level 4 measures. This is the second time it has been extended. I just want to reiterate: the extension of the state of national emergency does not mean we're in alert level 4 for an extra seven days; it's within the alert level 4 time frame.

Thank you, and we can now take questions.

**Media:** Commissioner, the eight staff who were spat on—are any of them displaying symptoms? Have they been tested?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** So staff will be tested where the circumstances dictate—that was staff required to self-isolate because of exposure to bodily fluids. We would start by testing the person who did that to assess whether it's needed.

**Media:** How distressing is it for police and others to have to deal with that sort of behaviour?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** Incredibly distressing. You end up with people who don't know whether they are at risk; don't know what that might mean for others around them—so incredibly distressing.

**Media:** On those breaches and the prosecutions, it seems like they've gone up quite a lot in the last day or two—can you talk around that?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** We have seen, over the first period, a lot of people who genuinely didn't understand; who needed to be guided, educated, on the controls in place. We're now at a stage where most people do know and are doing the right thing, so the people we come across who aren't, more often, are likely to be flouting the rules and, therefore, warrant some kind of firmer action.

**Media:** What are the most likely excuses you're being given for why people are out and about or doing whatever it is they're doing?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** Their excuses are often not plausible, based on what I've just said. People know the guidelines about what you can and can't do are very clear, so where we're finding things, we're finding things that are—you know, where we're prosecuting, it's well outside the range of what people know is allowed.

**Media:** Can you give us a flavour of what those breaches are, or what the most common breaches are—some of the most odd breaches?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** So we've had breaches, for example, with people surfing who have just insisted on carrying on surfing. Most often, many of the examples are people who have been previously warned and we've recorded a warning for being in breach, and then we find them again doing the same thing—so, most often, repeated breaches of the rules.

**Media:** And are there some particular areas of the country where there are problem spots?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** The challenges are sort of around some of the places where people recreationally will go, so beaches are particularly common, but it can be across the board. We had one example recently of someone found driving on the motorway in Papakura who had been caught doing the same thing before without good reason.

**Media:** Is there a concern that as the lockdown rolls on, people will become more and more frustrated with lockdown conditions and look to flout the rules?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** I believe the vast majority of New Zealanders are (a) doing the right thing and (b) believe that we are making a difference and, therefore, resolving to keep making that difference. The situation with this weekend approaching: some people might feel like “We’re doing well so we can be a bit more relaxed”—exactly the opposite is true. We’re doing well, so we should really double down on the control on doing the right thing, so that we can be in this control level for as short a time as possible.

**Media:** Are you confident you have the resources to ramp up this weekend?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** We are well placed—so, the demand on police at the moment across most crime types is less than it would normally be. With people in their homes, simply less is happening, with the exception of family violence that I’ve mentioned. So we are very well placed within our BAU resourcing to go after people who are flouting the rules.

**Media:** If someone carries out one of these spitting attacks but they later turn out to not have any illness, is there still a measure that you can prosecute these people under?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** There are a range of things for which they could be prosecuted. The most obvious one is assault. It does constitute an assault to spit on somebody, so yes.

**Media:** In terms of family harm, do you have the numbers of the increase of family harm?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** I don’t have those numbers to hand. The increase is statistically significant, but not a massive increase—I think that’s the best way for me to describe it.

**Media:** How many police staff are now in self-isolation, and how many have COVID-19?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** So we have 639 staff in self-isolation: 365 of those are sworn officers and 274 are non-sworn employees. Just two have tested positive for COVID-19, and they are doing fine.

**Media:** This must have been quite a baptism of fire for you, coming into this job at this time. How have you found the transition?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** I have been leading a lot of police’s response for the two weeks prior to my start, with previous Commissioner Bush occupied in the all-of-Government role, so I’ve been doing it for a little while. It wasn’t what I planned when I applied for the job, but that’s what we do. We’re always responding to crises, so it’s been good.

**Media:** Is it against the rules to drive from one part of the North Island to another to do your job?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** Essential services travel is one of the exemptions, but if we accept that, then travelling outside the locality of your residence—where you live—is a breach of the rules and travelling across the North Island without an exemption would be a breach.

**Media:** Do you think it’s appropriate that the Opposition leader travels such long distances to do his job?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** The operation of Government, local and central, is an essential service. It's not for me to comment on whether—for that essential service—that travel is appropriate. That would be a matter for the Speaker of the House.

**Media:** Has David Clark been given any type of warning for his travel?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** David Clark has very publicly apologised and has had a conversation with the Prime Minister that I suspect would carry more weight than what police would be able to do at this point.

**Media:** But the police are able to issue warnings—as you said, there have been plenty before. Has he been issued with any sort of warning, given the fact that he has publicly admitted to these shortcomings?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** We don't believe that a further conversation is required with him, given the outcome that we've seen.

**Media:** But if any other member of the New Zealand public were to do the same thing, surely, they'd receive a warning, wouldn't they?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** Our approach with the initial intervention for anybody who has been in breach of the guidelines has been a conversation, first, to educate; second, to encourage compliance. I don't think any more encouragement is required in that case.

**Media:** So could you walk me through how somebody gets from being out and getting a warning the first time to actually being prosecuted? What's the—how many times do they have to be warned: is it a written warning, is it a verbal warning—how does that work?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** We have, in many of the cases where we've prosecuted, recorded warnings for the people—so we have discovered a second breach and then taken enforcement action. So that's one mechanism. The other is a straight-out flouting of the rules, which is plain to see, may lead to a prosecution in the first instance. That's a matter of discretion, so each case depends on the situation.

**Media:** So there's not a specific playbook to say that you're out once, one warning; you're out a second time, another warning; third time, you're out—it's not like that?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** We've issued publicly the guidance that we have given to front-line staff about enforcement, so that's available for anyone who wants to see it. It's not a prescriptive guide. Our people exercise discretion every day in dealing with offences, and our approach to this situation is no different.

**Media:** Just on that guidance, the prior guidance seemed to indicate that under the prior—I forget; there's a few documents here—section 74 order, there wasn't really—some powers were lacking in terms of enforcing some of the aspects of the lockdown. Do you think Police is now been opened up for having actions taken prior to this current guidance being subject for review?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** The initial approach was inviting people to comply with a set of guidelines. The available directions under the initial health notice were more limited than the directions available now. The second health notice is a clarification of police powers. We've been very clear to our people that it doesn't represent either a tightening of the settings or a signal that further enforcement is required. We are not aware of any legal risk that we may be carrying about the way we've done our enforcement.

**Media:** If someone was stopped at a checkpoint last week, for instance, they—is that checkpoint was still valid?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** We have a range of powers under which we may stop and speak to vehicles, including powers under the transport Act, so each situation would turn on its merits. We do run checkpoints regularly for a range of things, and in the course of those we may speak to people about a range of things.

**Media:** On the support being provided to people, we heard today that maybe as many as, I think, 3,000 travelling workers in Queenstown were receiving support from civil defence because they can't receive welfare payments. Are they part of the 7,000? How many such people are you assisting?

**Sarah Stuart-Black:** I don't have a complete breakdown of either which parts of the country or how broad that definition is, but my sense would be the fact that we're actually looking to reach out and make sure people have that support—so if people are sitting at home thinking, "Actually, I could really do with some help.", what we're trying to do is encourage people to say come forward and let us know—let us know about your unique situation, because there's a range of support mechanisms in place. We just want to wrap around people that need that help, regardless of what their situation is.

**Media:** That 7,000 number—was that all the people who are receiving food assistance from—

**Sarah Stuart-Black:** That's correct.

**Media:** —civil defence?

**Sarah Stuart-Black:** Yes. So, as of Monday, we've distributed 7,727 food parcels and 528 food vouchers, and we're continuing to ramp up the access to those services for those who need it.

**Media:** The Prime Minister described a man in Christchurch that was sneezing on supermarket workers as an idiot. How would you describe people that are spitting on officers, supermarket workers, and hospital employees?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** I wouldn't disagree with the Prime Minister.

**Media:** You'd call them an idiot as well?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** I don't think I need to add a gloss on her description.

**Media:** Do you think you could take it further? I mean, is "idiot"—is that a hard enough thing to say about these people that—no, I'm serious—that are really causing public health concerns and just straight-up disrespect [*Inaudible*]

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** There's no doubt that people who undertake these actions are either thoughtless or particularly malicious, and we've seen both. It's very disappointing.

**Media:** How many people have the police put into forced isolation so far, if any?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** You're referencing our people?

**Media:** Yes.

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** So we have 639—

**Media:** Sorry, of the public who have broken the rules—that go outside of their regions?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** It's not our place to direct people into self-isolation; the health notice does that. Our role is to ensure that people are abiding by the terms of the public health notice.

**Media:** So if they've not abided by the terms, what then do the police do—do they put them somewhere that they can't go out back into the public, or what?

**Sarah Stuart-Black:** We may direct them to comply under the Civil Defence and Emergency Management Act, and if they comply, then that may be the end. We can also speak to them about an offence of failing to comply with the health notice, which may lead to education, encouragement, a warning, or prosecution.

**Media:** Has anyone been prosecuted for staying in a house that's outside their bubble—those travelling to a partner's house and bursting their bubble that way?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** I'm not aware of a specific case matching that, but I would need to dig into that for you.

**Media:** How are police actually going about policing that particular constraint—that is, people in their own household not being able to see partners in another household?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** There is some provision in relation to children in shared custody. We have many people reporting; I think I gave you a number—37,000 reports of non-compliance. Amongst those reports could well be situations similar to the ones you're mentioning, and we are out on the streets speaking to people to establish the purpose for travel, which might be another avenue there.

**Sarah Stuart-Black:** I think one of the really key things that needs to also be recognised in amongst all of these discussions we're having about compliance and staying within the rules is also for those people that are at home unwell, which might be related to symptoms for COVID-19, but, in fact, might be unwell with other things: please go and see your doctor. We want people to recognise that this is not a "You can't leave your home." if there is a need medically to be able to seek that medical support, being able to make an appointment, have a conversation with your doctor, and, if you need to go and seek medical assistance, doing that. So sometimes people will be out for legitimate reasons, and we just need to make sure that people are supported to do those important things like actually accessing medical support.

**Media:** Mayors in tourist hotspots—particularly the Grey District mayors and Westland mayors—have said they want to establish their own road checkpoints. Do you want them to do that, and can they do that under the law?

**Commissioner Andrew Coster:** There is provision for police district commanders to work with local authorities, and civil defence and emergency management controllers, to talk about local risks and decide a way forward. We can, as I have said, put in place checkpoints to assess whether the travel that we are seeing is appropriate, permitted travel. All of New Zealand is under a lockdown at the moment, and this setting means there shouldn't be travel anywhere. This weekend, we will be particularly focused on holiday hotspots, knowing and understanding people will want to travel. But our key message here is: now is not the time to start departing from what we're trying to achieve here. We are being successful. Let's finish this through so that we can come out of the controls that we have.

**Sarah Stuart-Black:** I think the key thing—just to finish off, and we'll end it here—but just to say we've done so well. We're two weeks in, we're doing amazingly well, and it's holding that commitment to "Let's see this through.", because the action that every single person takes will now make that difference in getting through the rest of the lockdown. So we know it's disruptive for people. We know Easter is a time when lots of people go away, but, please, we're asking you just to stay home. Help us—help us get through this, and really make a difference. Thank you.

#### **conclusion of press conference**