

ALL OF GOVERNMENT PRESS CONFERENCE: TUESDAY, 21 APRIL

Hon Chris Hipkins: All right. Good afternoon, everybody. Kia ora. Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou katoa. It's day 27 of our lockdown, and we remain at alert level 4. We'll be waking up to alert level 3 next Tuesday morning. Today, I'm here to set out what moving to alert level 3 next will look like for our schools, our early learning services, and our tertiary institutions, and also a little bit of a comment on what it might mean here at Parliament. I'll update you on the Government's engagement with the education sector to get ready to move to level 3, including key decisions and dates. We'll talk more about the health guidance around the spread of COVID-19 amongst children—and I'm sure the director-general will also comment on that—how our response in education compares internationally, I can give you the latest information on our distance learning programme, and I'll also brief you a little bit about how Parliament may operate under level 3. But first I'll hand over to the Director-General of Health to give you his usual update.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Thank you, Minister. Kia ora koutou katoa. So, today, New Zealand's total number of new COVID-19 cases is five, made up of two new confirmed cases and three probable cases. All of these new cases are linked to existing cases. The new combined total of both confirmed and probable cases in New Zealand is 1,445. Sadly, today I am reporting the death of a woman in her 70s who had COVID-19 infection. This woman was one of six residents from St Margaret's Hospital and Rest Home in Te Atatū in Auckland who has been transferred to Waitakere Hospital on 17 April. The woman, who had an underlying health condition, died yesterday. Our thoughts are with this woman's family and friends, and we ask that their privacy is respected at this difficult time.

Now, residents were transferred from St Margaret's as a number of staff were in precautionary—and continue to be in precautionary—self-isolation following close contact with people who are confirmed COVID-19 cases, and this has impacted on the facility's ability to maintain full staffing. And so, in addition to those six residents who were transferred to Waitakere Hospital because they had COVID-19 infection, a further nine residents from St Margaret's were transferred to North Shore Hospital on 18 April. These residents are not COVID-19 positive but are considered close contacts so are being monitored as well as receiving the usual care they would have if they had been back at St Margaret's.

There are now 1,006 cases of COVID-19 who have recovered, an increase on 32 yesterday. Today, there are 12 people in hospital with COVID-19 infection. This includes three in ICUs in Middlemore, Dunedin, and North Shore Hospital. I'm pleased to say that none of these people are in a critical condition. There are still 16 significant clusters, and four more cases have been linked to extant clusters, including three of the cases we're reporting today.

In terms of testing, yesterday there were 3,203 tests processed around the country, and the new total is now 89,503. The stock in supply for testing is still over 83,000 complete tests. And just a word on testing—and we will put these graphs on our website after today's stand up, but we are seeing from ESR reporting surveillance of what is called influenza-like illness that calls to Healthline, and our monitoring of ILI through HealthStat, which is through general practices, and through the FluTracker app, as well as our monitoring of what are called SARI—Severe Acute Respiratory Infections in hospital—have all plummeted, as we might expect, over this last three to four weeks. And that explains—that's a very good reason for why our testing has dropped, because there simply are not people out there who have got respiratory symptoms. However, I'm still pleased to see that we're processing over 3,000 tests a day.

We will continue some community-based testing this week and, in particular, that's happening in Tai Rāwhiti, in Taranaki, and in Northland. And I know in Tai Rāwhiti—and you can see this on their website—during this week there are mobile clinics around Gisborne from Monday to Friday and, starting today, some mobile testing moving its way up

the East Coast to test those more rural communities. I'll finish there and hand back to you, Minister.

Hon Chris Hipkins: Thank you, Director-General. The first thing I'd like to do is give you a brief update on what will happen here at Parliament next week. As we move to level 3, Parliament will meet again on Tuesday, 28 April. The exact details for Parliament's sitting next week will be confirmed following a meeting of the Business Committee tomorrow, but I do expect that the sitting will adopt the same practices that New Zealanders across the country will use during their working day at level 3, and that includes the correct physical distancing in the debating chamber. I also expect that there'll be reduced numbers of MPs in the House in order to minimise the amount of travel that MPs will be undertaking.

As you all know, many of the normal facilities in the parliamentary complex, including the Copperfield's cafe and other catering facilities, will not be available whilst the House is operating, and we will be keeping as few essential people around the complex as possible. For this reason, we can expect that the normal sitting hours of the House will vary over the next three weeks. Business to be considered by Parliament will include question time, ministerial statements, essential urgent legislation that's directly related to the COVID-19 response, and any other urgent Government business that is essential to keeping Government functioning whilst we prepare to deliver this year's Budget. The Government has undertaken not to progress its normal legislative programme while we are at alert level 3.

I'm happy to take questions at the end on Parliament, but in terms of turning to education, under alert level 3 most children and young people will be continuing distance learning. Early learning centres and schools will be physically open for students up to year 10 for the families that need that, but children who can stay home should stay home. At-risk students and staff, including those who are over the age of 70, should also stay home, and they will be supported to do so. Residential and special schools will not reopen in the early stages of alert level 3 for children to physically attend. They may reopen later during alert level 3 if public health measures can be managed, and we are working through that at the moment. In the meantime, teachers and staff will continue to support these students whilst they remain at home. Things like the Intensive Wraparound Service and ORS specialists continue to work with those students whilst they are at home. Education for students in years 11 to 13 will continue remotely.

For tertiary education, moving to alert level 3 means remote learning will continue, but where that's not possible, some facilities may reopen with strict physical distancing rules in place. Students in hostels, halls of residence, or self-contained flats can stay there—again, with strict rules—but if students went home to join their family bubble, they must stay home. They cannot return to student accommodation whilst we are at alert level 3. Providers are contacting their staff and students directly with more information, so they should be the first port of call for parents and students with questions.

To prepare schools and early childhood centres to reopen next week, from today we are allowing people to enter schools and early learning services for the purposes of cleaning, maintenance, and any other essential preparations that are required for them to reopen for a teacher-only day on Tuesday, 28 April. We expect most children who need to attend will be able to attend from 29 April. I do want to caution, though: it may take a bit longer for some schools and early learning services to be ready, and the Ministry of Education will be working closely with all of them. This is not a normal situation, and we will need to be doing things differently. The Ministry of Education's been meeting with sector groups to work through all of the practical issues. Over the last week, the ministry's kept in close contact with the early childhood education advisory group, and this'll continue as we continue to work through the key guidance that's needed to support the early learning sector. We've also met with various principals' groups around the country and with sector leaders, and we'll continue to do so. Discussions with the sector will continue as more detailed advice is released over the next week to support schools and early learning services.

Our approach to reopening the education system is based on the latest public health advice. I know that physical distancing will be very difficult with children and young people, particularly the youngest children in early childhood education. We've reached the point where the Director-General of Health is confident that there is no widespread undetected community transmission in New Zealand, so the chance of it coming through the door or through the gate in the first place is low. Keeping in mind that there are some 400,000 people going to work under alert level 3, just as we need to keep them safe, we're putting in place measures to keep children and teachers safe.

At alert level 3, the approach in an ECE or school environment is designed to limit the number of people that children have contact with. All of the evidence does point to children having lower risk of getting infected and being affected by COVID-19, and it's possible to ensure that children are within the same group each day and that there is no mixing between groups. To be clear, it is safe, from a public health perspective, to have a group of children learning together. Parents can have confidence that the proposed approach is designed to keep children and their families and their teachers safe. It's really important, though, that parents fully support this approach by doing their bit: keep children home if you can, definitely keep children home if they are unwell and seek medical advice about whether a child may need to be tested, strictly maintain your family bubble outside of schools and early learning, and ensure that great hygiene practices are observed at all times.

Our return to education, along with restarting our economy, is largely on par with what we're seeing around the rest of the world, although New Zealand is within a handful of countries in the enviable position of being able to transition out of lockdown and through the alert levels, so we must take the best position for our own needs.

Distance learning is going to be with us for some time, for at least another three weeks, and I'd like to give you a brief update on the roll-out of the distance learning programme. We've started the distribution of 6,700 internet routers to households. Initially, those are being prioritised to schools that have students doing NCEA in deciles 1 to 3. We've also had 10,000 devices being distributed by schools to students, more than 1,250 internet-ready computers—that's either Chromebooks or laptops—have been shipped to students so far, and an additional 4,500 have landed in New Zealand and are being prepared for shipping. Again, the priority is NCEA students in deciles 1 to 3. We have further equipment waiting to be shipped from overseas. In terms of the hard packs of materials that are going out to those who don't have access to digital devices, I can confirm that so far we have sent out 80,000 packs in English and 10,000 packs in Māori.

And we know that people are tuning into our TV channels to see familiar faces like Suzy Cato on the box. The latest information we've got is that 649,000 people tuned in during the first three days last week. The parental pages from the Ministry of Education's website had over 100,000 visits over those three days. So I want to thank the profession for their goodwill and their professionalism. To teachers, principals, and centre leaders, they've got an important role to play in getting New Zealand back on its feet; I know they know that, and I want to thank them for it.

So, finally, to all of the parents out there who I know are juggling working from home, caring for your kids, my message to you is the same as it's been since the beginning: be kind to yourself. We are not expecting parents to completely replace the classroom environment at home, so be reasonable in your expectations of yourselves. These are extraordinary times, so thank you for your understanding. We're doing our very best to minimise the impact on children's learning and on their wellbeing, as we work together to keep New Zealanders safe. Happy to answer questions.

Media: Minister Hipkins, what are you doing to help those schools who might be disproportionately affected because, for example, in areas where both parents have to go back to work or where distance learning isn't an option?

Hipkins: So, obviously, where both parents have to go back to work, where distance learning isn't an option, that's one of the reasons why we're saying that we do need schools and early learning services to be able to provide support to those families. In some cases, it's also going to be possible, as families look to slightly enlarge their bubble, for them to be sharing care arrangements across other close relatives, for example, so that those kids can stay at home if they don't need to go back.

Media: Aren't there going to be some schools, just by dint of their decile or, you know, where they are and the parents work, that are going to be facing a lot more kids coming than some schools who are well set up for distance learning and may have more parents at home? I mean, is there a breakdown, and are you going to give specific support to those schools that may have many more kids than they might have anticipated or potentially be able to deal with?

Hon Chris Hipkins: So one of the things that this week gives us—and next Tuesday, as well, gives us—is an opportunity for schools to touch base with their parent communities and get an understanding of how many kids are maybe needing to come through the door next week when schools and early learning services start to reopen for kids from next Wednesday. If you look at the overall numbers, we're expecting around 400,000 New Zealanders to go back to work; we're still expecting around a million New Zealanders to be at home. So even in the situations where parents are going back to work, it may be that there are other family arrangements that can be put in place for those kids not to need to go back to school, and we'd certainly—I'd certainly encourage that. So if you're enlarging your bubble slightly by bringing in an aunty or an uncle or someone else who could be at home with the kids because they're working from home anyway, that would be a good arrangement.

Media: Are there going to be some situations, though, where schools are going to have to say "We can't take your kid; we've already filled our complement, and we just can't take any more.", and what would the response be in that particular situation?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, it's too early to say that. We've got—over this coming week, we're keeping very, very closely in contact with schools so that if they do start to get concerned that they're going to have a whole deluge of students that they couldn't adhere to public health guidance in bringing them back through the school gate, then we'll work with them, and it may be that we can help to spread some of that load. But it's very early at this point. We only made these decisions very recently. So we do need to give the education system time to digest that and to reach out to their parent communities.

Media: A lot of ECEs and schools that we've spoken to are extremely worried and many won't be opening under level 3. Is that a choice that they can make?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, we're not being too heavy-handed in this. Obviously, I do want early learning services to reopen if they can. The arrangements are going to be different though, because different centres have different child populations, different needs. They're physically quite different, so the physical layout of those services can be quite different—some are very, very open, and some of them have smaller rooms and smaller spaces that make preserving bubbles within them more possible. So we're working through that with each individual centre, and I'm not going to set a hard and fast rule around that. We are going to continue to support early learning services during level 3 so that we know that they'll be there when we move to level 2.

Media: Teachers are telling us it's impossible to socially distance children under five. You have young children; how would you do it?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, as I've been very clear, one of the reasons that we've got guidance—and the director-general, I'm sure, would be happy to comment on this—one of the reasons we've got the public health guidance out there that we have is that we know that when you're dealing with a small group of very young children—you know, under-five-year-olds—they are going to come into contact with each other, they are going to need to

be picked up now and then by an adult, and so that physical distancing isn't going to be possible in that environment. So there are other things that we can put in place there: keeping the bubble size quite small, making sure that we're doing all of the hygiene things we need to do, and, of course, the work that we have all done as a country over the last four weeks to minimise the risk of COVID-19 coming through the door in the first place.

Media: And can I just [*Inaudible*] comments that the director-general made yesterday. You said that children don't tend to pass COVID-19 on to adults. What evidence or peer-reviewed literature are you basing that claim on?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, the first evidence that came out about this was from the WHO-China combined reviewed in China, particularly in Wuhan, which was a 10-day mission there. And that report came out in March, and that was very clear—in fact, of all the people they interviewed who had been involved in dealing with COVID-19, not one could recall any incidence of a child passing an infection to an adult—

Media: So it's anecdotal.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: —and this seems to be the pattern that has been found in other countries. And we've, of course, got it here in New Zealand: just a small number of our cases are in under-10-year-olds, for a start, and all of those are actually linked to transmission within the family setting.

Media: The epidemiologists and paediatricians that we've spoken to say that there's conflicting evidence that that's the case and it's too early to draw a conclusion. What's your response to them?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, I think there's always emerging evidence. At the moment, I think the weight of evidence does suggest exactly as we've laid out in our public health advice, and we will keep watching that. But I should say that the fundamentals of public health and how it's being applied in the education setting are the same as what we're advising and are being applied in other settings. So it is the physical distancing, the small groups—if there is, and very unlikely, that a case come through the gate, it's confined to a small group if there is any close contact.

But I just would reiterate the point the Minister has made: you know, we're announcing five cases today. We can trace them to extant cases, and we're going back and scrutinising every case back to 1 April, but at the moment there are only four cases left where we're not sure exactly the route of transmission—but even then, it's reasonably clear in two of them where the infection was first got, and it pre-dated, actually, the lockdown. So there's increasingly encouraging information that the likelihood of someone with COVID-19 going through the school gate, as the Minister said, is very, very low in the first place.

Media: Minister, if you're saying that it's safe enough to open schools and for these students to be back, why not open up schools completely, if you're confident that they don't transmit the disease?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Because one of the things that gives us confidence is that ability when we have a smaller number in an early learning service or in a school—that smaller number is a key part of our ability to keep people in smaller bubbles, to stop those bubbles coming into contact with one another. If you start to have services and schools operating at full capacity, that becomes a lot more difficult. So I'm confident that at level 3 they can operate not at full strength but for a smaller number.

Media: Will teachers have the option to say, "No, I don't feel safe coming to work; I don't want to."?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, we do expect teachers to be doing their bit. My message to those who are in a higher-risk bracket—either because they themselves are a higher-risk category or because they've got someone living in their household who is in a higher-risk category—is make sure you're talking to your school or your early learning service about that, because we're going to need people continuing to support the students who are

distance learning as well. And so the pragmatic and sensible thing for schools to do is have those teachers who are in a higher-risk bracket supporting distance learning so that those who are at lower risk can be in the physical school environment.

Media: Minister, the principal of Te Kura o Otangarei, Myles Ferris, says that principals should be making the final call on whether they should open schools. What you say to that?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, I think that would put principals in a very difficult position. If they are concerned that too many of their parents are asking to send their kids to school, then I do want them to contact the Ministry of Education, but I don't want the schools to be put in the position of being police around whether or not parents have a good enough reason to send their kids to school. I think that puts them in a very difficult position. It could potentially strain their relationships with their parent communities quite substantially. So my message to them is if you're concerned that too many of your families are putting their hand up and saying "We're sending our kids to school or to early learning.", talk to the Ministry of Education about that. But my message to all New Zealanders is if you can keep your kids at home, please do keep your kids at home.

Media: You said that 80,000 packs have been sent out in English, 10,000 in Māori. How many packs are still yet to be sent out?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, our capacity to send those out is growing by the day—you know, we're continuing to grow our ability to do that. We know that we could send—the supply line where we've got it set up now is capable of supplying about half a million packs if we need to do that, and, obviously, the longer this goes on and the longer we need to keep supplying that material, then we will continue to do that.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, I have a question around hospital and aged care facility visits. Will restrictions under level 3 change? Will people be able to visit their dying loved ones now?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: We're still working on that guidance and working with our hospitals and aged care facilities. We've seen in New Zealand, even under the lockdown, a number of clusters inside aged residential care facilities, so in that setting I think we want to be particularly careful. But I am very keen to extend the compassionate—there already exists an opportunity for people to visit loved ones who are dying, under compassionate grounds. That is not the case if the person has COVID-19. You'll recognise there is that restriction. It's that latter that we're particularly looking at, whether there may be any flexibility under alert level 3.

Media: What about hospitals for, like, pregnant women?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yes, those are being reviewed, so we will make announcements further on.

Media: Is there enough so that health care workers can have adequate PPE around COVID cases who are vulnerable or have underlying conditions? Is there an argument that family members with the right PPE should be allowed in there as well, and why not get a bit more cracking with that work so that people aren't left alone without their families?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yes, so the work is cracking along, and that is one option—is to make PPE available for family members in that situation.

Media: Just back on schools, what the public health implications of those schools that operate in modern learning environments? You talked about the issue of open spaces. As I understand it, some MLEs also have less favourable ratios of students to bathrooms and wash basins. So what are the unique challenges that are posed by MLEs, and how can the Government, sort of, deal with those?

Hon Chris Hipkins: So the Ministry of Education are working with schools over the coming week to deal with all of their individual needs and requirements. My key message, again, is we want to have as few students at school as possible, because even in a modern learning environment, if you can keep the numbers low enough, there are ways to manage

that. One of the things the Ministry of Education are working through with schools are things like cleaning, for example—so if you've got different groups of students using the same bathrooms, can they be cleaned in between so that you're keeping that bubble nice and tight. So all of those logistical things are being worked through with schools and early learning services over the coming week.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, GPs were expecting a second wave of funding to get them through the second half of the lockdown, but that hasn't happened. How come?

Hon Chris Hipkins: We were just talking about that before, and I'll let the director-general answer that question.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Thanks, Minister. So there have been two payments already to primary care, to GPs: an initial payment of \$15 million and then a further payment of \$11 million out around the country to help offset the costs of their response to COVID-19. There is an active conversation between the Minister and general practice leaders and the ministry on further funding. So that's ongoing, and I can't comment any further on it.

Media: When you said that \$11 million was promised to them, though, and now is being withheld from them—a lot of them have budgeted and staffed for that \$11 million to be in their bank accounts, and now it's just being taken away from them.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: I don't think it's been taken away, but the conversation is ongoing and active between those three parties, as I said, about any further funding that is needed to support the COVID-19 response that is happening in primary care.

Media: So was the \$11 million extra promised to them?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: I can't comment on that. I know the conversation's ongoing.

Media: [*Inaudible*] a morale issue, from what I've been told, if they've been promised the funding, they're trying to ramp up for the tsunami of patients that they're expecting after the lockdown, and then they've been told that and they just don't feel valued because they were expecting this money, they've spent it in their heads, so—

Hon Chris Hipkins: So I think, as the director-general has just said, conversations between general practitioners and the Minister of Health is continuing. So my advice to them would be to continue that discussion, and we'll be monitoring that closely.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, can you tell us just a bit more about the treatment for those patients in ICU? Are new drugs being used?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: At this stage, no new drugs are being used, but you will have seen the announcement last week by the Health Research Council: at least two of the studies funded by the Health Research Council, and some in partnership with the Ministry of Health, are looking at treatments for, particularly, people who are hospitalised and with severe symptoms. Of course, because of the approach New Zealand has taken here, we've had not only a low-ish number of cases but low hospitalisation rates, and so people have been able to be treated, including in ICU, in the most part successfully. So those trials would only go ahead if our case numbers started to increase, and they are linked up to international trials, too.

Media: And also, do you think it's necessary for the Auditor-General to independently review the management of PPE, and what do you think will come out of that review?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Oh, well, I don't want to pre-empt what the Auditor-General will find, but I'm certainly happy and very pleased that he's going to do this, that he and his workers are, and I think we're expecting the results in about four weeks' time. So I'm very open to scrutiny and review of what we have done and any feedback on how that could be done better.

Media: Director-General, do you think that you could've done a better job getting that out, because there's a sentiment there that people feel like they're not protected.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, I think this is a topic we've covered repeatedly. Look, I think we have stood up a system nationwide to ensure that our stocks we have are distributed around the country, that we have taken on that responsibility to distribute it to a whole range of providers that previously we wouldn't have, and that we have done that successfully. We have also ensured good supply lines, and I look forward to any recommendations that the Auditor-General has got about how we could continue to improve that.

Media: It's a topic that comes up repeatedly because you keep offering reassurances and we keep hearing from front-line health workers saying they don't have adequate PPE. You've stated that they have plenty of it, that hospitals aren't recycling gear to reuse it; we know that's incorrect, so why should Kiwi health workers have confidence in what you're saying in these press conferences?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, because I can reassure them, and the feedback I get from many workers around the country—and if I ever hear of any issues, I ring the relevant DHB chief executive. I know they are taking a very personal interest in this. There is very good distribution of PPE. If any issues arise, then those are looked into. That doesn't mean that on any one day, a DHB will be able to distribute all the PPE that a certain provider thinks they need on that day, but that also doesn't mean there's a problem in the system. Secondly, on the recycling, what I do understand—and I think you've said that that's incorrect—actually, in the Auckland region, they are retaining used N95 masks because there is very good evidence from overseas that these can be cleaned and reused if necessary, so they are putting them aside, but there is no reuse of those happening. They have new N95 masks every time they need to use them.

Media: Is it the DHB managers who are at fault with regards to not allowing staff to wear masks when they want to?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: I trust DHB managers to do their job in clinical situations, with the best clinical advice, which they do get, from their infectious diseases specialists and their infection prevention and control teams. And it's not my job to second-guess those individual interactions between clinicians and those who are leading them in their clinical settings.

Media: Can you provide any information in regards to reports that a New Zealander died of COVID in Peru, and whether he was meant to be on that mercy flight?

Hon Chris Hipkins: My understanding is, yes, a New Zealander has passed away in Peru. I also understand that that family was being actively supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and that they've asked for some privacy, and so I can't really divulge any further details on that.

Media: Do you have any numbers on how many students can't access distance learning yet?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, we know, when we started this exercise, our estimate was that around 80,000 households did not have a broadband connection and that that could cover up to 145,000 learners. I'm confident that—as you will have heard the numbers—we're getting more and more households connected by the day, and, with 80-90,000 hard packs of materials being shipped out and more on the way, that we are getting people connected one way or the other, even if it's an old-fashioned connection through the courier service, and, of course, through the television networks that we've got up and running, where we're providing support to those households, as well.

Media: Are you able to say whether that man was meant to be on one of the mercy flights? Had he been in contact with the consulate there?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, I'm not in a position to be able to divulge those details. I got the information relatively briefly before this press conference, but if we are able to release that information, I'll make sure that it is released.

Media: On those repatriation flights, are there any more planned?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Yes, there is further work—I think it's well known there's further work with India, for example, around repatriation flights there. I understand that there was a flight from the Philippines. I think it landed yesterday and has now returned. So there are repatriation efforts ongoing. I do want to say that this is the largest consular effort around the world that the New Zealand Government has ever undertaken, so it is a huge effort, and where we can, we're working very closely to make sure that we can get Kiwis home and get those who are in New Zealand who want to get home also home, but there are a whole lot of constraints around that.

Media: Any more details about that India flight in terms of timing?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Yes, I do, and I can give that to you. I got some dates before I came down here; I'll just have to find the right piece of paper that's got the exact dates on it. In fact, it's the one on top. So my understanding is that the first flight out of India will depart on 24 April. After that departure, we're expecting a further flight from New Delhi and a flight from Mumbai, expecting those will be spaced 24 hours to 48 hours apart so that the relevant practical arrangements can be made both on the Indian side and on the New Zealand side. The commercial Philippine Airlines flight that repatriated 167 New Zealanders and permanent residents and 37 third-country nationals with valid visas landed in Auckland yesterday and returned to Manila shortly afterwards carrying 63 Filipino residents.

Media: Mr Hipkins, what advice are you getting on the impact, especially on those students sitting NCEA, looking at those big exams this year—impact on them, and what are you looking at in terms of, maybe a bit further down the line, the support that you can give to them so that they're either not going to fail or have to come back and repeat a year?

Hon Chris Hipkins: So I guess my first message to them is: make sure they're preserving their mental health, make sure they're preserving their wellbeing in this very difficult time, don't let themselves get totally strung out about it. NZQA have supplied to schools, and indirectly through schools to learners, guidance on the sorts of things they can do to generate an evidence base for assessment when more regular assessment can start to take place. Guidance has been supplied to schools about the sorts of evidence that they should be looking to gather so that in the event that a student cannot do an exam at the end of the year, that that derived grade process that we would normally rely on can still take place.

Media: So there might be a bit of aggregating or—

Hon Chris Hipkins: That's possible. Of course, we're moving to an online assessment environment with NZQA, and we're speeding that up now as a result of this so that we can get more online assessment taking place, and NZQA is leaning very heavily into that. But, again, I do want to reiterate that many students will now spread their NCEA levels over several years. So if you're doing level 1 this year and you don't quite finish it because of the lockdown, you'll be able to finish that next year as you start to do your level 2. And schools are working very, very hard to be able to, sort of, slide things around to accommodate that for students.

Media: So we had a story this week about year 11 to 13 in particular doing more practical, onsite-based learning. Are they a specific group that you'd have concerns about? I mean, are they disadvantaged or limited more than doing other subjects, for example?

Hon Chris Hipkins: There's some things that they can often do from home—so they can do the theoretical components of their work from home. There may be some limitations—if you're doing a science subject for example—to some of the practical exercises you might not be able to do from home, but I know that schools are working very hard to slide that around. So I think the bits that can be done remotely are being done remotely so that when the students are back in the classroom, they could pick up some of the more—you know, the things that require them to be there physically.

Media: Sorry, just coming back to my original question, what advice have you got on the impact on general educational outcomes, or is it too early?

Hon Chris Hipkins: It is too early, but, if you look at the Christchurch earthquake scenario, where schools were closed for quite some time and kids did lose quite a block of learning, that didn't flow through into lower NCEA pass rates at the end of that year. In fact, if anything, those pass rates were slightly better, on average, than they would normally have been.

Media: Minister, will police be given the same powers under the Health Act at level 3 as they do at level 4?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, that's something that the director-general might be in a better position to answer around the enforcement of level 3.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: So what I can say is we are preparing a new section 71 notice under the Health Act that will apply under level 3. And, yes, it will create the same legal basis for police to be able to enforce the expectations on the public around staying at home, not congregating, and not opening certain facilities. So those powers will be similar but tailored specifically for alert level 3.

Media: And just another question on behalf of a colleague: should community midwives be compensated for extra hours they are working during the lockdown and the extra PPE that they are buying themselves?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, the College of Midwives and our community-based midwives is one of the groups. In fact, we're working with each group—pharmacists, midwives, other community-based providers—to look at what their extra costs are during this period of time, and there is work under way to ensure that they are funded for any additional costs that they're incurring.

Media: Is it fair for our front-line health workers, including GPs, to be worried about costs at a time where they're trying to fight COVID?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: I think the Government's moved very quickly, and we've provided advice right from early on and have been in active discussion with the full range of professional groups about extra costs they are incurring because of this, and you've seen the Government make a series of announcements about extra funding going to a wide range of groups to help support them so that they can continue to provide the services New Zealanders need.

Media: Do you, by any chance, have the latest numbers on how many people have come through Government-managed quarantine isolation?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Yes, I do. Again, I'll make sure I get the right piece of paper so I give you the latest numbers. As of 10 a.m. this morning, we have 2,038 in managed isolation or quarantine, which is up 165; we have 1,952 in managed isolation, up 168; and we've got 86 in quarantine, which is down three—348 arrived on flights yesterday.

Media: Sorry, was that both managed isolation—the two numbers?

Hon Chris Hipkins: In managed isolation, we've got 1,952.

Media: Minister, going back to early childhood, if kōhanga reo decide to stay closed during level 3 and continue distance learning, firstly, are they able to make that decision, and, secondly, if so, will they continue to be funded?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, my advice to all early learning services is talk to the Ministry of Education. Our preference is that those services re-open if they can do so consistent with public health advice. That's our expectation. There are families out there who are relying on those services in order to be able to put food on the table, and we need those young people learning as well. So if they're in a position to re-open, then they should. If for some reason there are unique circumstances that mean that they cannot re-open consistent with the

public health guidance that's been issued, then I'd expect that they talk to the Ministry of Education.

Media: But do they have the capacity to say to the ministry, "We don't believe that it's safe to open, so we won't."—is that reason enough?

Hon Chris Hipkins: I think that they should follow the public health advice, which is what we're asking all other New Zealanders to follow.

Media: [*Inaudible*] I've got an education question and a Leader of the House question. Education: what about those university students who can't return to their halls? Will they be getting funding? And then Leader of the House with regard to if Parliament comes back: will the Epidemic Response Committee become redundant?

Hon Chris Hipkins: So in terms of students who are unable to return to where they were studying because they cannot travel—so they've returned home, for example—last week, we announced an extension of student support limits so that they'll continue to be supported during a period of inactivity. So they'll continue to be able to access their student support, their student allowances, their student loans, and so on, even if they're not active in their studies, so they'll still be able to get that financial support.

In terms of the epidemic response select committee that was set up whilst Parliament was not sitting, whilst its role might change slightly as we're in level 3, I envisage—and this is all subject to discussion at the Business Committee—that there will continue to be a role for that committee in scrutinising, for example, legislation that is related to the epidemic response. So whilst question time resumes, and some of that accountability that you've seen delivered through the select committee—while that will shift back to the House, actually, the committee, I think, would continue to have an ongoing role.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, just in regards to this ongoing debate about Australia being able to have fewer restrictions in terms of people going back to work but having similar health outcomes to New Zealand, Michael Baker said this morning that, basically, New Zealand had to go harder earlier because we had a lower base in terms of our public health infrastructure and testing. How does that reconcile with your comments yesterday that Australia is envious of our public health system?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, just on the latter, two different things, I think: when you're talking about public health system, our public health services, which comprise, effectively, our public health units, our ESR laboratory and capacity and also our ministry capacity around public health, that's different from our publicly funded healthcare system. So I was responding yesterday around our publicly funded healthcare system, which I think you were comparing and contrasting with Australia.

In terms of the first issue, I just have a different view from Michael on this. I think if you look at our response, which has been led by, first and foremost, the Ministry of Health and the healthcare system and our public health units, it's done a very good job. That's why we are in the position we are in. Does it need to be strengthened in many areas? Yes, it does, and in particular, strengthening the national networking of that system. So, yes, that is happening.

And, again, also, to go back to the comments that Dr Murphy made at the Epidemic Response Committee last week, in fact, the reality is that Australia's response, and particularly in some states, is very similar—the actual impact of it is very similar to New Zealand, so I don't think there's that big a difference between our two responses.

Media: How will Parliament resume? Will all Ministers be required to attend Parliament when it resumes?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Certainly, we'll be endeavouring to get Ministers to Wellington who are involved in the COVID response so that they can answer questions. We won't have the entire Cabinet at Parliament, and we won't have all of our backbenchers at Parliament, because we're endeavouring to do what we're asking the rest of the country to do, which is

to minimise the amount of movement around the country that they need to do. But my understanding is that key roles like the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Health, and then, obviously, the Ministers who you've seen quite a bit of in the last few weeks will all be available to answer questions in the House. We think that's an important part of the parliamentary process that we are here.

Media: And why has the Prime Minister stopped giving these daily briefings?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Sorry, what was that?

Media: Why is the Prime Minister not here for the daily briefings?

Hon Chris Hipkins: I don't think she's done every single daily briefing since this started. From time to time, there are other things that she also needs to attend to—

Media: Why not today?

Hon Chris Hipkins: —so I am here today in her stead. But I'm sure she'll be back tomorrow.

Media: [Inaudible] Why is she not here today?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Well, you can ask her that tomorrow, if you like.

Media: Just a supp on the parliamentary process: you talked about Parliament only considering urgent COVID-related legislation. There's been some concern about select committees still carrying out their work on non-COVID legislation, the prisoner voting bill being one example. Is the Government, or is Labour going to talk to its select committee chairs and ask that they reconsider that in light of the approach the Government is taking?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Well, look, I think one of the key messages is MPs aren't just sitting at home doing nothing. Actually, we're continuing to be paid as well, and we should continue to work from home where we can. And so where select committees can continue to do their work from home, you know, by having remote hearings, for example, hearing submissions from the public, that's a sensible thing to do. It doesn't put anybody's health at risk. People are Zooming all over the country—you know, virtually Zooming all over the country—and there's no harm in select committees continuing to do that as well. So I think that there's a judgment exercise here, but I'm certainly not going to say to people—to committees who are keen to continue their work—that they should stop their work. If they're not even leaving the house and they're able to do that using, you know, technology, then I think it's perfectly acceptable for them to do that.

Media: With some MPs travelling to Parliament on that week of the 29th, does that mean that other New Zealanders can jump on a plane and travel round if they feel that they have urgent business as well, or that they would consider business that needed, required, travel? Is that setting an example that you want people—

Hon Chris Hipkins: No. There are very clear guidelines around who can or cannot travel during both level 4 and level 3, and members of Parliament fall into the category where if they have to be at Parliament, then they fit within the exemption that exists there. But all New Zealanders are expected to follow that guidance.

Media: Do they pose a particular risk, though, because they've been spread out over the country and are coming to one place? Does that—obviously, there'll be distancing and rules, but—

Hon Chris Hipkins: Well, most members of Parliament have been at home in their bubbles, same as everybody else. Of course, we will be making sure that we put all of the different protection measures in place around Parliament that we can, including social distancing, physical distancing. And my message to all MPs is I think, you know, only MPs should be coming to Parliament if they really need to be here, so the arrangements of that are all subject to agreement at the Business Committee tomorrow. But certainly, on the Government side, we'll have a very minimal backbench MP presence during this time.

We're keeping in contact with our backbench using Zoom and everything else. We will have Ministers here who need to answer questions, because that's actually a very important part of the public accountability process, but we won't have people here if we don't think they need to be here. And that would be my message to all of the other parties, as well.

Media: Is the expectation that the political parties use their most local MPs, so to speak, so you're minimising travel?

Hon Chris Hipkins: That will be a key focus for us. We do have a number of MPs, for example, who can drive to Wellington rather than have to fly, and so—Ministers who can drive to Wellington rather than fly—and so we've been encouraging that where it's possible. There are some who will need to fly, for example the Minister of Health. I think there is an appetite to see him back at Parliament so that he can be questioned by the Opposition, and he will have to fly in order to be able to get here, but Ministers and MPs shouldn't be flying if they don't have to.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, have you provided any advice to the Deputy Prime Minister on whether it's suitable for him to return given his age?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: No, I haven't.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, could I ask you what the ministry's opinion of testing elderly patients is? Ryman Healthcare requires all elderly patients returning from hospital to return a negative test, but Hutt Valley DHB won't test the patients then; it's the ministry's position. Can you tell us why they're different?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, we've had an ongoing discussion with the aged residential care sector about the necessity and, indeed, wisdom of testing every person being admitted to an aged residential care facility. So yes, the DHB is consistent with the very good advice and policy that is currently the one we are using, and we'll keep discussing with the aged residential care association both testing and also what other things they can do to protect residents and staff.

Media: Is it safe for the Deputy Prime Minister to return to work, to Parliament?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, what I'd refer you back to is the—when the Prime Minister was asked about this question when we first went into, I think, level 4 lockdown, the Deputy Prime Minister is considered an essential worker, and so under that category, then, it's appropriate for him to return to Parliament.

Media: He's also a septuagenarian, though, so is it safe for him?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, I think the measures that are being put in place—and Minister Hipkins has talked about those—both here and in every workplace are designed to protect all New Zealanders.

Media: Minister, just on progressing legislation, particularly contentious legislation like prisoner voting, do you think it's appropriate for it to be progressing, particularly when people have the pandemic on their minds?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, we won't be progressing it through the House during level 3. That doesn't mean, as I've said, that select committees can't continue to meet if they can do so consistent with the guidance that's out there for everybody else, which is to work from home where they can. So if they can continue to work from home, they can hear submissions from home, there is actually no harm in doing that. So it's perfectly acceptable for them to do that, but we won't be progressing it in the House.

Media: Just on community testing, Dr Bloomfield—sorry if I've missed this earlier—do you have a total number of tests that have been carried out at these centres?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Sorry, a number of tests that have been carried out—?

Media: At the community testing centres—the targeted community testing.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: We do have the numbers of those. I don't have them with me today. I think I've spoken to those over the last few days. It was—I won't try and do them off the top of my head, but you'll probably find them in our earlier media releases.

Media: So, Minister, just—not to labour the point, but Dr Bloomfield referred to your measures that you would use to keep the Deputy Prime Minister safe. What are those measures?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Well, we'll be putting in place measures to keep everybody safe, as other workplaces around the country are doing. So we're keeping our presence here at Parliament down to a core group of people who are absolutely essential. That includes parliamentary staff. So Ministers like me, I'll be in my office by myself, or maybe with one or two others. All my staff will continue to work from home and support me from home rather than coming back. So we're keeping our numbers here at Parliament as small as we possibly can. We'll be maintaining social distancing right the way through the parliamentary complex. You will remember from the brief period that we had at level 3 before Parliament shut down that that has implications for the public spaces at Parliament, for example, so we are maintaining distancing on the tiles and those sorts of things to ensure that we're doing all of that, and in the debating chamber we're maintaining our distancing. So we are doing what we're asking every other workplace in the country to do, which is to make sure that you're being as safe as possible and you're acting consistent with the public health advice.

Media: Are you aware of any people that have caught COVID-19 who have worked in the parliamentary precinct?

Hon Chris Hipkins: No, I'm not.

Media: It's been hard enough to convince our free-spirited and iron-willed older New Zealanders to stay put anyway, so shouldn't the Deputy Prime Minister be leading by example, because other 70-plus people are going to be wanting to leave their houses and perhaps return to work as well, against your advice?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, you're welcome to ask the Deputy Prime Minister that question, but I certainly—if he wants to come back to Wellington and he's available to come back to Wellington to answer questions, then I certainly would fully support him in his decision to do so.

Media: Minister, in relation to the repatriation flights, are they all coming back to Auckland or will some of them come back to quarantine in Wellington and Christchurch?

Hon Chris Hipkins: My understanding is that the flights to date have all landed in Auckland, but I can't comment on what might happen in the future.

Media: The India flights—specifically the India flights, because if they were coming back to Wellington and Christchurch, wouldn't you need to have set up quarantine facilities here, because all of them are already in Auckland? Is that—am I wrong or—?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, my understanding is that the flights thus far have landed in Auckland. In terms of what may happen in the future around future repatriation flights, of course we will communicate those details to the public as and when we have those details available.

Media: But the flights from India are coming soon, so assuming the Government knows where they're going to put those people?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, like I said, I'm not in a position to release those details now. A lot of that work is still being done. A lot of the logistics of planning those flights, of working out who's going to be on those flights—a lot of that detailed work is still being done.

Media: That person from Peru, are they counted as a New Zealand statistic, a New Zealander, or will they—yeah?

Hon Chris Hipkins: I don't think they're counted as a New Zealand statistic. I'll just—

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: No. No, they wouldn't be.

Hon Chris Hipkins: Last question.

Media: Just very quickly, are you aware of Iona Holsted, the Education secretary, signing off an agreement with kōhanga reo and kura kaupapas and wānanga to let them determine themselves whether they will open or not?

Hon Chris Hipkins: No, that's not something that I've been briefed on.

Media: Can I ask just a final question on midwives. Do you recognise how much more difficult those community midwives—how much more difficult their role has been during the lockdown in terms of doing those face-to-face meetings with mothers, mothers being asked to leave hospital earlier, etc., etc., etc.?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Yes, and, look, I acknowledge that level 4 lockdown has been really challenging for a lot of people, and particularly people who are working in those critical health workforces. You know, babies don't stop coming just because we're in level 4 lockdown. So I take my hat off to all of those who are working in that field and I thank them for the work and for the extra measures that they've put in place to keep themselves and to keep the families who they're working with safe.

Media: And you are promising some Government support for them?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, I'm not in a position to make announcements on that today. Thanks, everybody.

conclusion of press conference