

**PRIME MINISTER AND DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF HEALTH PRESS CONFERENCE:
WEDNESDAY, 6 MAY 2020**

PM: Tēnā koutou katoa. Good afternoon. I wanted to talk today about some of the work taking place in New Zealand's economy to get us working again and how we can leverage our strong health response to COVID to create some economic advantage for New Zealand going forward. But, first, I'll hand over to Dr Bloomfield for his health update.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Thank you, Prime Minister. Kia ora koutou katoa. So today we have two new cases of COVID-19 to report. This comprises one confirmed and one probable case. The confirmed case is linked to the Marist College cluster. The person who has tested positive for COVID-19 is a student who has been, like the rest of New Zealand, in lockdown under alert level 3, and then under the alert level 3 restrictions—sorry, lockdown under alert level 4, and then under level 3, since March 20th. They had been contacted by Healthline in the first week of April as part of the contact tracing and were not unwell at that time, so did not progress to testing at this stage. So it was part of the broader testing of Marist students and staff as they head back to school. Around 250 people have been tested so far. This is the only positive result from that group. The student has what we would call a weak positive test, and is almost certainly late in the course of an infection.

The significance of the weak positive result so late in the course of the illness when the symptoms that the student reported were actually some weeks ago—it's not fully understood, and it's likely the person is not infectious at this stage, and this is a pattern we have seen in some of our recent cases and it also has been observed internationally. And the South Koreans have done a study on a group like this and subsequently followed that up with a study that suggested that this was the result of some viral fragments still being detected by the testing but not that the people were infective.

In so saying, we are taking a precautionary approach—as we should—and the student will remain in isolation and be retested in a week's time. I think this case that's been discovered through this testing across the Marist community shows the importance of that sort of testing, and I'd encourage others from the Marist College community to go and be tested if they haven't as yet.

The other case we're reporting—the probable case—is linked to the St Margaret's Hospital and Rest Home cluster, and this is a household contact of a known case. It's a probable case because the person has symptoms, but it has been tested as negative but still considered to have COVID-19. It will be important to understand the transmission path of any cases we do find in coming days, as we've said before, and our teams are working very closely with public health units to ensure that we get that information as quickly as possible.

So the total number of New Zealand's COVID-19 cases is 1,488, and 1,138 of those are confirmed and we will be reporting that number through to the WHO. There are—88 percent of all probable and confirmed cases are now considered recovered. We have two people in hospital today. One is in Auckland City and one in Middlemore Hospital, and neither are in ICU.

Sadly, today, I have another COVID-19 - related death to report. This is associated with the cluster at the Rosewood Rest Home and Hospital. The person who has passed away is a woman in her 60s. She had underlying health conditions and was considered a probable case of COVID-19 due to her clinical presentation and past exposure history, despite testing negative. This woman has been at Rosewood since 2011 and was a much loved member of the Rosewood family, and I'm pleased to say—and you will, I'm sure, join me in understanding that a staff member was comforting her when she passed away. She was not one of the residents who had been transferred to Burwood Hospital, but was still at Rosewood, and our thoughts of course go out to her family and her friends today in the days and weeks and months ahead.

Regarding our testing, there were 4,772 tests processed yesterday, bringing our total to 160,700 tests. There are no new clusters and, as I've reported previously, three clusters are now closed.

So, finally, our low number of COVID-19 cases continues to be encouraging, but we are by no means out of the woods. We need everyone to stick to the plan and continue to follow the rules around alert level 3, and not doing so does risk undoing all the good work we have achieved so far. We have seen how quickly this virus can spread, both here and in other countries, so do not give it an inch.

Thank you, Prime Minister

PM: Thank you, Director-General. Some of you will be aware of the news announced by Microsoft this morning that it is set to make a significant investment to establish a data centre region in New Zealand for its cloud services. I do note that this is subject to normal regulatory approvals. However, this is a hugely welcome development, not least for job opportunities in the near term for our construction industry, and in the longer term for our ICT industry and local innovators, but because it serves as a signal to the world that New Zealand is open for business and quality investment.

Our decision to go hard and go early on the health front for COVID-19 has been our best economic response. Now, it's about positioning New Zealand to recover, and building on investment opportunities such as this one. More broadly, it is my view that by tackling the virus, we have positioned our economy to be able to rebuild ahead of many others globally. That is our safe haven, strategic advantage. International companies like Microsoft wouldn't be investing here or looking to invest here if they didn't have full confidence in the New Zealand economy that we are ready to welcome quality investment and to offer a safe place for operation in both a health and business sense. Today's announcement also represents a vote of confidence in New Zealand's digital future. It means the Government and New Zealand businesses and New Zealanders will be able to access the scale and security of cloud services offered by a major global provider in a way that hasn't been done before here in New Zealand.

I have two other pieces of economic news that I would just like to note, as well. Trade Minister, David Parker, has announced that the 21 APEC economies have committed to working together to ensure trade and investment continues to flow to help counter the economic impact of COVID-19. This will promote a more stable trading environment for our food exporters and it will also help provide reliable access to medical supplies. To quote the Minister: "In these troubled times, our region has recognised how important it is to act in concert to keep supply chains open and trade flowing, especially in essential goods and services."

And employment figures released this morning by Statistics New Zealand, while covering the period before the worst of the COVID-19 impact, show the economy's underlying strength heading into this global pandemic. In the three months to the end of March, the number of employed people rose by 19,000, while the number of unemployed was up by 5,000. The employment rate rose to 67.5 percent, while the unemployment rate also rose slightly from 4 to 4.2 percent—remaining near its lowest levels in a decade.

Obviously, a huge amount has changed in the last six weeks in New Zealand, and this global, one-in-100-year health and economic crisis will contribute to unemployment rising—of that there is no doubt. But we will continue to support people, to help protect jobs, to help grow jobs, and help support people's incomes.

Fittingly, our Kiwi ingenuity story for today is a business story from the West Coast of the South Island, where people are working together to make sure that they are supporting one another. I recently had a letter from Development West Coast to let me know that a coordinated effort has brought together an online directory of 180 local businesses that are back operating under level 3. There's also help for small and medium businesses in the form of a rebate of \$5 per delivery, up to a maximum of \$250 per establishment, to help offset some of the costs associated with running a delivery service or using a courier

service: www.nowopen.co.nz is a great initiative and a platform built in collaboration with EPIC Westport, a PGF-funded digital hub. And I say well done to them.

Ready for questions.

Media: Prime Minister, did you have a chance to hear the submissions at committee today?

PM: No, on account of, often, the overlap between Cabinet committees and the epidemic committee. But I do make a habit of getting a read out and feedback from those who are appearing and sharing testimony at the committee.

Media: If I could just run you through a few of the things that we heard—if you'll bear with me. There was a woman with breast cancer who was left financially vulnerable because she had to pay for her own mastectomy. There was a woman who learnt of a miscarriage on her own in hospital while her husband was in the hospital carpark. There was a mother who learnt she had terminal cancer. We heard of a mother who learnt she had terminal cancer over the phone. We heard the story of another mother whose enduring image of her son will be when he was taken away by paramedics after taking his own life, and he wasn't able to have a funeral. Do you recognise that there is a real urgency to address the hurt and harm that's being caused?

PM: Yes.

Media: What are you going to do about it?

PM: Well, you will have seen all the way through this, every time there's been a death, every time there's been a traumatic experience that someone has had—because, ultimately, we've had to make decisions to try and protect people's health—we have never discounted the impact that's having on people's lives. Some of the stories I've heard today, though, don't fit with our expectations that we have. No one—no one—should birth alone. Everyone should have been able to have a support person with them through that experience. So there are some stories and testimonies that I'm sure the Director-General will want to be looking at, because there are some expectations that I don't think have been met, from what we've heard today.

Media: Are you calling into question those stories from those people—

PM: No, no—not at all.

Media: —or the actions of the—

PM: Just the implementation, because I don't think anyone would think, even in these extraordinary times, that that would be reasonable. Yes—of course—in the period thereafter, there has been the ongoing risk of having visitors coming and going and what that presented for patients. But when it comes to, for instance, someone having a baby, no one should go through that experience alone.

Media: That woman and all those others, though—it feels totally out of control. Where is the compassion?

PM: Oh, what I've just expressed is the expectation that we have. Some of those experiences shouldn't be had alone, and it was our expectation that they shouldn't be happening alone.

Media: So will the Government take—just on a case by case basis, actually—take a bit more care and consideration in considering those exemptions and considering whether or not people can have—

PM: Again—as I've already said—for instance, there already is an expectation that no one should birth alone. What we're hearing is someone sometimes—the experience of what's happened in individual DHBs, and at that level, decisions are being made, often, by clinicians. So it's probably best for me to hand over to Dr Bloomfield on that.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Thank you, Prime Minister. Yes, so I got to hear most of one testimony and all of the last testimony before I answered questions to the committee, and the point I made is that it's very important to hear these stories and understand the impact on individuals and their whānau. These are things that we will use to inform, not just our approach as we move through and down the alert levels, but also updating our policies in case we have to move up through alert levels, and I guess the point I did want to make is, you know, what we always aspire to—whether it's a pandemic situation or not—is it should be consistent, as appropriate, and different, as appropriate. And, ultimately, that comes down to clinical decisions and discussions between individuals and their whānau and clinicians. But we will be looking to make sure that where there is every reasonable expectation of consistency, that will be the case.

Media: Did you fail those people?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: I didn't personally fail them, and what I—

Media: But did the Government fail these people?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: No, I don't think the Government did, and what's important, though, is that we have heard those testimonies and that we work with the district health boards to get a good understanding of just what happened in those situations, and use them as a learning experience. And I know that they will be paying careful attention, because they will have been listening as well.

PM: One of the other things to keep in mind, of course, is these are, in and of themselves, potentially very traumatic events that are even made more traumatic by the fact that they have happened during a global pandemic when the country has been in lockdown. What our duty of care is is to try and reduce that burden as much as we can, and, as the Director-General has said, there are cases where it doesn't sound like we've done that to the best of our ability. We have to be willing to go back and learn from that.

Media: That same select committee heard from the Cancer Society about screening. Screening was off the table during the lockdown. They're concerned that hundreds could die in the coming months or coming years due to cancer because it wasn't caught during the lockdown. What's being done to mitigate that risk?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: So, first of all, in terms of screening—yes, no cancer screening was done during the lockdown. But that is now up and going again, and so I'd like to encourage anyone who does get an invitation for screening to take that up, and it's important that we do deliver screening services as part of our cancer prevention and early detection. The second thing I think Dr Jackson was talking about was the need to catch up rapidly on undertaking assessments and diagnostics on people who may have symptoms and maybe need to be investigated. And that's one of the things the district health boards are looking at very promptly, working both with us and with the new Cancer Control Agency with Professor Sarfati, who's the interim CE there. So there's a very big focus on getting those people in to be assessed and to get any tests and investigations they need as quickly as possible.

Media: Can you guarantee, though, that there won't be loss of life because of this lockdown and the lack of cancer screening?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: What I can say is I have no doubt that those who deliver cancer services are more committed than anyone to making sure that people timely assessment and investigation to ensure that any possible harm that might have accrued because of the lockdown is averted. So I think that—well, the other thing I can say is—and I know—that 80 percent of the cancer surgery that we would have expected to have happened during that lockdown has happened, and that clinicians are working very carefully with the Cancer Control Agency to ensure that people are prioritised to avoid any harm arising.

PM: That's my understanding—that the vast majority of cancer surgery continued, and I believe bowel screening—well, at least bowel screening is by post. So there's a different set of circumstances for bowel screening.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: That's right. The actual faecal occult blood test is done through the mail. [*Interruption*]

PM: OK, just coming through—yes.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, does it concern you that there's a shortage of propofol—I hope I've pronounced that property. Pharmac has just come out and said there's a shortage, and that's used in all surgeries and it's the only one that we use in New Zealand. Is that of a concern, given that elective surgeries are going to be up and running again soon?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: So, yes, I do know that there's a challenge with the supply of propofol—it's a global issue. But I do have a lot a confidence in Pharmac that they will be using every possible route to ensure that we can maintain supply here, because it's important for both surgery and for use in ICUs when people are being ventilated. So I know they will be working very closely with the professions to make sure we can avoid any problem with a shortage.

Media: Do you have any special powers under the emergency Act to maybe get Pharmac to bring in a different brand if they need to?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, they've got all the expertise and they'll get the clinical advice they need, and if they need to, I have no doubt they will do that, and, in fact, we've been working closely with them as part of ensuring our supply chains through alert level 4 and into 3. And, where necessary, we are only too happy to actually organise a flight to go and get pharmaceutical supplies, and that has already happened over the last few weeks.

PM: Heta—here in the front.

Media: Prime Minister, the Kōhanga Reo National Trust were disappointed that they weren't asked to present in front of the Epidemic Response Committee. Given that the people that presented, there was a raft mainstream education providers, ECE, principals, universities—should Kohanga Reo National Trust be approached to present?

PM: Well, whilst I wasn't privy to some of the urgings that were made by other members of the committee, I am told by at least the Government members on the committee that there was a general message sent that they would've liked greater diversity amongst the representation, be it Māori health professionals—and also representation across the board generally. But, ultimately, we do not hold a majority on that committee, and it is chaired by the Leader of the Opposition.

Media: There was zero Māori representation in the education-themed committee yesterday—no kōhanga reo, and no kura kaupapa Māori, either. Should there have been?

PM: Oh, I think there needs to be diversity of voice, and that includes, you know, within health, within education. As I have said, though, unfortunately, we didn't hold a majority on that committee. We did give the opportunity for the Opposition to lead it and they are, and so, ultimately, it is determined by the chair and the Opposition who appears before that committee.

Media: The Māori Party said Simon Bridges is willing to let racist politics take precedence over public health. Do you agree?

PM: Oh look, you know, I haven't been intimately involved in the way that the committee has run, but I do know from our members that we have sought that kind of representation. [*Interruption*] In the front.

Media: Prime Minister, are you concerned that the Solicitor-General being issued a summons sets a bad precedent?

PM: Well, obviously, I'm more focused on the substance, really, of the issue at hand, and so when it comes to the substance, I just want to note a couple of things, and that is, ultimately, that the legal underpinnings for our lockdown and for the enforcement are all in the public domain because, of course, they include the epidemic notice, the section 70 notice under the Public Health Act, the national state of emergency, and, of course, the Cabinet papers that underpin each. They are all in the public domain. What the Leader of the Opposition is seeking is legal advice, which, of course, he himself strongly defended in the past—the practice of not releasing advice that is provided to the Crown. So I think that's an important distinction to make.

Media: Just on police and their powers, will they need new legislation to clarify their powers under alert level 2?

PM: Yes. What we have said is that, actually, greater clarity is required as you move down from what are more generic provisions, as you move down into lower levels—that we believe it would be right and proper for us to create more specificity around those enforcement powers. And so that is something we've been working on with Crown Law.

Media: So are you confident that you won't need any retrospective legislation to validate those sort of early days of the lockdown?

PM: I've been consistently advised that there were no gaps in our enforcement powers throughout our response. What we have acknowledged is that, actually, some of the legislation that we have had to utilise—which include, for instance, the epidemic notices and so on—actually probably could be more fit for purpose going forward, because they tend to be designed for individuals rather than when you're dealing with the likes of a global pandemic such as this. So we've acknowledged that there's a time and a place, going forward, where we may wish to look at the legal framework and ensure it's fit for purpose in the future.

Media: But no retrospective validation?

PM: No. No, our view—the advice that we have been provided is that there's been no gap in our enforcement powers.

Media: Prime Minister, the 24 cases that are being looked at who had exemptions declined to visit dying loved ones—could you give us an update on that? Has anyone been granted one?

PM: It's being dealt by the Ministry of Health, so I'll hand over to Dr Bloomfield.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Thank you, Prime Minister. So, by the end of yesterday, over half of those had been reviewed. I don't have the results of what those reviews are yet, but I'm pleased to say that it is continuing apace. I expect them all to be done by today and have the results and the outcome of that—again, affirming that it is being done independently by another group; not the group that originally did the assessments.

Media: Were any exemptions made?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: I don't know as yet.

Media: Now that the National Cabinet has wrapped up—because you, obviously, weren't able to talk about it yesterday. We've seen the communiqué on Trans-Tasman bubbles, so you can leave that. What else did you learn or what else did you share, or what else can you tell us about what was discussed at the National Cabinet?

PM: Again, I'll apply the same rules that I apply domestically for discussions in Cabinet, so—

Media: It's not a real Cabinet. It's just a forum for—

PM: Yeah, I won't—

Media: So there's no Cabinet story?

PM: Well, I'm not sure it's for me to determine that on behalf of the Prime Minister and the Premiers. But just to give a general sense, what stands out for me is that we are all grappling with the general issue of getting control of the virus, and then, as you do that, safely resuming economic activity. Everyone, globally, is dealing with that issue, and so, obviously, in New Zealand, we're charting our own path in such a way that we do not run the risk of yo-yoing back into greater restrictions—because nobody wants that—but, equally, we're trying to move as quickly as we can safely. So I felt a real sense of solidarity because we're all in that same boat together.

Media: Is there a case to invite Scott Morrison to a New Zealand Cabinet for any particular reason—to do the opposite, to learn anything?

PM: I wouldn't rule that out—I mean, because, ultimately, these are all exercises in sharing information, particularly given we are such closely linked economies and because we have shared aspiration that when it is safe to do so, we would like to continue the exchange of people and, therefore, trade and business as well. So to have that commitment from both sides is helpful, but it also gives a sense of our direction to our business community and to New Zealanders and Australians. The one thing I'm mindful, though—today, I see Australia is grappling with little cases springing up, as we continue to as well. So we are having similar experiences; what neither of us want is to go backwards.

Media: Prime Minister, you've previously talked about, I guess, your scepticism about the efficacy of a contact-tracing app—issues around uptake and around the accuracy of the tracking. Could we theoretically go it without a contact-tracing app?

PM: Yes, but there are different—yes, you could, because it is always an enhancement on top of what the World Health Organization, from memory, characterises as public health boots on the ground—it's always in addition to—but there are also other things that we can explore. One of the things that we of course already said to the hospitality industry prior to lockdown was “You must ensure that you have ways of contact tracing everyone who comes into your premise.”, and so whether or not you're engaging technological tools to do that or doing it in a more traditional way, we do have an expectation that that will be occurring. There are also other ways of gathering information that aren't necessarily apps that you'd want to do with people's permission, but we need to explore all of those tools to help us with contact tracing. *[Interruption]* Yeah, I'll let you come in with a follow-up.

Media: Is the Government still planning to release an officially sanctioned Bluetooth app?

PM: Yeah, so we've always kept our options open around the range of different tools, and we are still working in earnest on each of them.

Media: Prime Minister, do you believe you and Scott Morrison are on the same page when it comes to the trans-Tasman travel bubble, or are you keener than he is to have flights resume, or the resumption of travel between the two countries? Because in his opening spiel yesterday, it was a lengthy opening spiel—a length of 20-plus minutes—he didn't even mention trans-Tasman travel.

PM: Oh look, I think we are in exactly the same place, as you would expect when you release a joint press statement. By default, obviously, you're in the same place on it.

Media: But he neglected to mention it in his media conference post - National Cabinet until he was asked about it.

PM: That does not in any way undermine the position that we both hold on this issue, which is that neither of us wishes to be responsible for cases popping up on either Prime Minister's country. No one wants that responsibility on our shoulders, so I think what we're both driven by is a desire to get our countries in relative positions to be able to do this safely. We are on the same page. We see the economic benefit, but we also see the risk. We're determined to try and find a resolution.

Jenna, yeah.

Media: Sorry, just back on the contact-tracing app—does that have to be made available before we go into level 2? Is that on track to happen—

PM: No, we're not making it contingent, but of course we will have obligations that we expect of certain industries. So that will be—that, for instance, is part of our expectations for moving levels.

Media: So could those hospitality guidelines be broadened to include retail, for example—would you look at that as a framework for other sectors?

PM: Yeah, and, look, I've been really impressed by the work that retailers and the hospitality association are doing, because they can see already what needs to happen for people to be able to resume safely, and so they themselves have been doing some of the work in this space. But I'll be commenting a bit more on that tomorrow.

Media: We've heard of payday lenders setting debt collectors on people during lockdown. What's your response to that?

PM: You will have seen that we have expedited some of the work that we have been doing to put a bit more rigour around the way that some who operate as payday lenders and as loan sharks have operated. I think it's probably in keeping with the kind of behaviour we've seen from these people in the past, and it shouldn't be tolerated.

Media: Do you think that they should show some form of compassion?

PM: Basic humanity is what I think they should show, but we don't always see that from that sector.

Media: Just back on contact-tracing apps, is there any real point in pursuing them when you need quite a high download rate and 20 percent of people don't have smart phones, and even in Singapore, where people are very cooperative with their Government—

PM: Fourteen percent.

Media: —they only got 20 percent penetration?

PM: Yeah. One of the issues in Singapore that they freely identified was compatibility with iPhones. I note that they do have high Android use, but that still would be a significant issue for the likes of New Zealand and Australia. My understanding is Australia overcame that. They also—it was a significant drain on battery life and it interfered with people's Bluetooth headphones. Anything that, I think, acts as a barrier to making it as simple as possible to engage in a tool like that is a problem. So I think that's why you've heard me be sceptical, because I don't wish for us to rely on that being the answer, because it never will be. It will be a helpful supplementary tool.

Dr Bloomfield, though, you'd have views on that.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yeah, look, I think the more we learn—and I'm looking at European countries as well, and I think the UK made an announcement yesterday and they're trialling something. Any of these apps has drawbacks—none of them are perfect. The important point for us is we've got our core contact-tracing system solid and achieving the sorts of time frames that we were aiming to achieve. I think one of the other things we're thoughtful about too is we would like to think about—what we have seen through the COVID-19 response from the health system is some quite significant changes in the way that care is delivered to people through virtual means. And what we're really interested in is thinking, if there is a role for an app, that it's not just around contact tracing but it may have some potential longer-term benefits for people in terms of access to information—their information—about their health and enabling them to take better care of themselves and their whānau.

Media: Are you still looking at the CovidCard—the Bluetooth-only card?

PM: Yeah, so you will have seen that there's been a number of options to get around the fact that people may not have the devices required for apps. So those were all things

that we have given quite broad consideration to and haven't yet settled on. One thing you also don't hear people talking about too much—but I think is quite a useful device—is QR codes, because, of course, that potentially removes the requirement to have people physically registering at the door when they're coming into hospitality—for instance, bars, cafes, restaurants. QR codes are a simple technological fix for that. So these are the range of options that we'd be willing to look at in our response into COVID.

Media: In a level 2—

PM: I'll just come in the front of you, if you don't mind.

Media: Thank you. So, further to that, Rob Fyfe said recently that a solution could be a device that people carry around—

PM: Yep.

Media: —and that New Zealand could be world first in our contact tracing capabilities. Is that the CovidCard, or is there another device—

PM: I believe that he's talking about the CovidCard—a card—which has the same kind of functionality as a Bluetooth app. I believe that's what he'll be referring to.

Media: So how far away would that be—do we have any time frames on it?

PM: Again, as I've said, you know, we've been considering a range of different supplementary options, and there are a number of issues that you have to work through. Of course, it all comes down to human behaviour. The thing that stops a person downloading an app might well be the same things that stop a person from carrying something with them. That's not to say that we're not giving really thorough consideration to all of the options. Final decisions on something like that, though, you'd imagine you'd have to take a lot into account.

Yeah, Jenna.

Media: Looking at the current level 2 guidelines, the one that kind of sticks out like a sore thumb is the gatherings of up to 100 people indoors and 500 people outdoors. That's a mass change from what we're seeing at the moment. Will that remain tomorrow?

PM: So I'll be giving more detail tomorrow on the alert level framework, and what you will have seen us do as we've gone through the different stages, we do take a fresh look at the system that was created at the beginning of the pandemic, and what we apply is the latest knowledge, information, and evidence to that framework. We as a world, as a global community, have learnt a lot about COVID-19 in a short space of time, and that includes in the last four weeks. So you'll see when we talk about the framework tomorrow that we will be using the most up-to-date information we can.

Media: So should people be expecting to be able to have, say, a wedding of 100 people under level 2?

PM: Again, you'll see the advice that we provide tomorrow, and you'll see that, as always, we do give guidance in advance to prepare people and then lots of advance notice before we move into the different levels as well.

Media: On the Microsoft announcement, are there any large global companies which you know are looking to do similar investment in New Zealand, and also are you looking to invite other companies to set up headquarters or temporary offices here to sort of weather out the COVID crisis?

PM: This actually is an issue that I've raised with the Minister for Economic Development but also Minister Woods. Within MBIE we do have a team who proactively go out and connect with often high-tech, high-wage emerging businesses to help facilitate entry into the New Zealand market and also help them navigate our regulatory environment. They do that in a really proactive way—in the same way that NZTE supports our exporters—in order to encourage high-quality investment in New Zealand. My view is that

now is the time to continue with real extra effort and enthusiasm that work. New Zealand's brand has always been that we are a sound, high-quality, reliable place to invest. I'd like to think that our response to this health crisis only further underpins or emphasises that approach. Now is the time for us to sell that message internationally. In terms of specific pitches, though, you know, some of that I leave to our Ministers, but I have certainly shared my view that now is the time to tell that story.

Media: Prime Minister, you mentioned that we've learnt a lot about COVID-19 in a short space of time. Does that mean that we could see some considerable changes to some of the level 2 restrictions tomorrow?

PM: No, I think you'll see that we're willing to use evidence in our decision making, and that's important. There are things, of course, that we know about—lag times. Now, we see that you can still get a positive result for COVID many weeks after you've had it, and you may not be infectious but you can still test positive. We know the lag time of the virus and the vulnerability that presents, but we also have some of that core guidance—that if you're with someone indoors for longer than two hours, that's risky; if you're in close contact with people, that's risky. So it's all about using that evidence to build a framework that gets people back to normal, but a safer normal.

Media: Sorry, I know you've already made some points about the regional alert levels, but if we remain at level 3 beyond next week—if it is extended—would that be the point that you'd then look at changing alert levels on a region by region basis?

PM: Again, some of this I wouldn't mind just picking up tomorrow, because then I'd be able to talk with you with a little more specificity around the different arrangements at alert level 2.

I'll take the last few questions. Bernard, yeah.

Media: On the Microsoft issue, there was your suggestion about trying to get more big companies to come here. Are you confident—

PM: Trying to get quality investment to come here.

Media: Yeah. Are you confident that Microsoft or Google or Facebook or some of—Amazon—would be proper taxpayers if they came here, and would you get assurances from them that they would pay their taxes properly here?

PM: Look, everyone who comes into New Zealand knows the expectations that we have for how people will operate here, but one thing I want to point out is actually the relationship between New Zealand—and, again, I say this, all under the umbrella of certain regulatory processes needing to be complete for this particular investment. But what I want to say broadly is that actually Microsoft is a good example of a relationship that has strengthened in recent times. We've worked closely with Microsoft on initiatives like the Christchurch Call. We've got good personal relationships with the senior executives, and I think what you've seen as a reflection of their investment is that they see not only a strong regulatory framework here in New Zealand but also a strong digital future here in New Zealand as well.

Media: But isn't it also crowding out local firms who are more open-source—

PM: No.

Media: —and locking the Government into a single software provider?

PM: No. What I've seen, actually, as a reflection of this kind of investment is the number of potentially smaller ICT companies who could benefit from it. It also adds a bit more comfort when it comes to data sovereignty through onshore storage, which has been an issue that's being raised in many quarters.

Yep, I'll take the last few questions, and I'll finish with Tova.

Media: Just a couple of quick ones. COVID: the potential for an alert level 2 law—how far away is that, and could it hold up the move to level 2, figuring there’s only a small handful of days—

PM: Yeah, obviously, we know this is work that needs to be completed with urgency. But for further questions on that, I’ll have the Attorney-General provide a little more context around the work that’s being done.

Media: In all contact tracing, are you looking at any way—like South Korea has done—at a combination of like cellphone-tracking data and retail-spending data in order to sort of aggregate people’s movements and who they may have come into contact with?

PM: You can imagine that, of course, all of the expectation we have as a society around people’s privacy means that whatever we do, we’re looking for people having an acceptance of the role that technological solution and handing over their information can play in this response. So we’re working with the Privacy Commissioner on the kinds of initiatives that can actually balance people’s privacy with also the need to respond to this pandemic.

Media: So it’s off the cards, such a—

PM: Not in—we wouldn’t do it in an automated way, but that’s not to say we aren’t thinking about all the different tools we could use that would satisfy privacy issues and people’s permission being given for being involved in anything that really reaches into their privacy.

Media: Prime Minister, people who normally live in New Zealand and have permanent residency or work visas are struggling to get home from South Africa, despite the flights being available. Do officials need to do more to get everyone home who lives in New Zealand, and not just citizens?

PM: They’ve been doing an extraordinary amount of work—tens of thousands of New Zealanders being supported in what is the biggest consular exercise that we can remember in MFAT’s history. It is a big exercise, though. I know that there is more work that MFAT’s doing within certain parts of the world, but that is an ongoing piece of work. Bringing New Zealanders home has been tough, but they have done an amazing job.

Media: But are we doing that at the expense of perhaps some people who live here but aren’t citizens or residents?

PM: We’ve of course been involving—it hasn’t just been citizens who have been coming home. But anything with more specific detail, I would need to ask MFAT to help provide that advice.

All right, thank you everyone.

Media: On Mother’s Day, can you quickly please—

PM: I’m back tomorrow.

conclusion of press conference