

ALL OF GOVERNMENT PRESS CONFERENCE: SUNDAY, 30 AUGUST 2020

PM: Kia ora koutou katoa, and good afternoon, everyone. I want to spend a little time this afternoon going over where we are to date with the current cluster in Auckland. I'll then remind people of the restrictions that will be in place from midnight tonight for Auckland, Aucklanders, and of course then the rest of the country. But, before we do that, I'll hand over to Dr Caroline McElnay, our Director of Public Health, for an update on our case numbers for today. Dr McElnay.

Dr Caroline McElnay: Thank you, Prime Minister. Tēnā koutou katoa. There are two new cases of COVID-19 to report in New Zealand today. Both are cases in the community, and both have epidemiological links to the Auckland cluster. One new case is a household contact of a previously confirmed case associated with the Finance Now workplace. The other new case is associated with an existing Tokoroa case. This new case was reported yesterday evening and is a healthcare worker who works at a medical centre in Tokoroa. It is believed they came into contact with the existing case on 17 August. As per usual protocols, a test was carried out following exposure, which returned a negative result. The positive result was picked up on a second test when the person became unwell.

The medical centre they work at is closed pending further contact tracing and is undergoing a deep clean. The centre had been operating under level 4 precautions, with PPE use, telehealth, and patient screening. The potentially infectious period for this case was between 25 and 27 August. The case, who lives alone and has no household contacts, has been in isolation since 27 August. Contact tracing is actively under way, which includes contacting staff and patients of the medical centre. Two testing sites are available in Tokoroa today. The first is at Tokoroa Hospital and is open until 3 p.m. The second is at South Waikato Pacific Islands Community Services and is open until 5 p.m. If you are in Tokoroa and have concerns about whether you need to be tested, please contact Healthline—0800 358 5453—or your doctor, and have a test if it is offered.

Since 11 August, our contact tracing team have identified 2,587 close contacts of cases, of which 2,475 have been contacted and are self-isolating, and we are in the process of contacting the rest. There are 138 people linked to the community cluster who have been transferred to the Auckland quarantine facility, which includes 86 people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and their household contacts.

There are 10 people with COVID-19 in hospital today: two in Auckland City, three in Middlemore, three in North Shore, and two in Waikato. Eight people are on a ward, and two are in ICU—one each in Middlemore and Waikato hospitals. There are two previously reported cases who are considered to have recovered today. With today's new cases, this means our total number of active confirmed cases remains at 136; plus one previously reported probable case remains active. Of the 137 active cases, 20 are imported cases in MIQ facilities and 117 are community cases. Our total number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 is now 1,378, and that's the number that we report to the World Health Organization.

And just on testing: yesterday our laboratories processed 10,487 tests for COVID-19, bringing the total number of tests completed to date to 750,808. Widespread testing remains a critical part of eliminating COVID-19 in our communities, and our advice remains: if you develop symptoms consistent with COVID-19, wherever you are, contact Healthline or your doctor immediately and arrange for a test. Details about where to get tested, both in Auckland and in the rest of the country, are on the ministry's website, and if you are offered a test for COVID-19, please take it. To help speed up the process, it's helpful if you have your National Health Index number with you, and on our website there are details of how you can find out what your number is.

And a reminder, a COVID-19 test is free of charge. And, lastly, on the COVID tracer, the New Zealand COVID Tracer has now recorded 1,940,800 registered users. There have been 336,785 posters created and 25,954,068 poster scans to date. And, in addition, there have been just under 2 million manual diary entries recorded in the app. Thank you.

PM: Thank you, Dr McElnay. As you'll have heard from the update, we still do have cases coming through from our current cluster in Auckland, and we do expect that will continue. Today's cases, for instance, are contacts from right at the beginning of the outbreak. That shows two things: the vigilance we need to keep applying but also the fact that the tail of this cluster, as we've said before, will be long.

Here is what the science tells us about this cluster as well: analysis from ESR shows that, to date, cases have been what they call genomically linked. That means we know that they have come from the same single source, and we can feel confident about that. Over the course of this outbreak, we've undertaken a huge amount of testing—268,401 tests, in fact. In that time, the only case that hasn't been genomically linked, you'll recall, was our Rydges maintenance worker, and that case was well contained and isolated. That means we are still dealing with a single source and a single cluster.

While the source of the cluster has yet to be identified, genomic analysis tells us that the starting point for this outbreak was the Americold site in Mount Wellington. While there could well be another case in that chain that came before this one, it has not been detected to date. No links have been found with genomes currently available from cases in managed isolation facilities, and our sweep of border staff also hasn't resulted in any evidence to show the source of the outbreak, if there is one, beyond Americold.

I want to turn quickly to the latest information on this cluster. We've continued with wide testing and isolation, as Dr McElnay has pointed out, to contain what had been some of the newer elements of the outbreak. Obviously, some of the newer elements include the group around the Mount Roskill Evangelical Church. It is highly likely we will see more cases through that proactive testing, which includes contacts of contacts. So a very wide sweep is taking place there—sorry, casual contacts.

But as you'll see from the alert level 2 framework that we set early on in our fight against COVID, we did anticipate being in level 2 while having to stamp out a cluster like this one. In fact, the description for the alert level 2 framework does list limited community transmission and active clusters as one of the possibilities while we're in alert level 2.

And here is probably, then, the most important message I will share today: our system is good. It is designed to keep us on track with our elimination strategy at level 2 in the scenario we now have, but it will only work if people follow the guidance. I understand that it is easy to become complacent, that if you hear a message that there are just, for instance, as we did today, two cases, you may question what the likelihood is of you coming into contact with those two cases. Everyone, I'm sure, who has experienced COVID-19 probably thought that same thing at some point until it was them.

And so for Auckland, I want to say thank you for all of your efforts to date, but also keep going. You can see from this map [*Ardern holds up map*] which depicts where we have had cases in Auckland that there is no corner that has been untouched by this cluster. That's why the rules are for everyone, and we need everyone to stick to them, no matter where in Auckland you are.

So a quick reminder of what changes at midnight tonight: for New Zealand as a whole, you remain at level 2. For Auckland, you are at a form of level 2 that I am going to call level 2.5. Here is what it means: first, social gatherings are limited to 10. That means everything—birthdays, social gatherings, family gatherings, even friends or neighbours. No gathering can be larger than 10. I cannot stress how important this is. Much of this cluster has stemmed from social gatherings. If we want to stop the spread, we have to stop socialising for a time.

If you are a business and have any questions on what this means for you, revert back to the protocols you used the last time we stepped into level 2. The expectations are the same for those limits. And, as was the case when we had these restrictions in the past, there will be a limit of 50 people for an authorised funeral or tangihanga.

But there are some differences from the way we did things last time, and mask use is one of them. From tomorrow, masks will be mandatory on all public transport for anyone 12 years and older across the country while we have level 2 restrictions in place. A bus ride was the source of cases in this cluster, and is one of the few settings where people are in close proximity for a sustained period of time with people they do not know. And on masks generally, please wear them, Auckland. If you go to a shop, wear a mask. If you go to a mall, wear a mask. Basically, when you step out of your home, we are asking you if you can, please wear a mask. This will be one of the key ways we can protect you and those around you. Some will ask why we haven't mandated the use of masks beyond public transport. I will not rule out mandating their use in the future if we see people failing to use them as we are encouraging them to do right now.

In this level 2.5 in Auckland, we are also keeping aged care facilities on very strict settings. To those this affects, I am sorry. I know how hard this will be, but we need to keep everyone in our aged care facilities safe. If you want to find out what those more strict settings are and how they'll affect you or your loved ones, please do contact the aged care facility where you have a loved one there.

And here it's important to note—these aren't just rules for the city of Auckland. These are guidelines for Aucklanders. We are asking you to apply them no matter where you are in the country. If you are an Aucklander, please don't just pop into an aged care facility, no matter where it is in the country. Please don't attend a mass gathering, even if it's not in Auckland. And if you are sick, stay home—definitely don't travel. Here we are relying on common sense and care rather than enforcement to make this work when it comes to Aucklanders who are travelling.

Our testing shows that it is highly unlikely there is COVID anywhere else in the country, and we want to keep it that way. The last thing we want from reopening Auckland is to spread the virus around the country, and that is one of the reasons we continue to have level 2 settings across New Zealand. I know that these new normals will take a little while to get used to, but these are measures that are in place for a good reason. Our testing regime is good. Our contact tracing system is very good. But they will only work if we all play our part to support them. Our collective health and livelihood is in each other's hands, so we owe it to everyone to abide by the rules to stop any further spread and do what we have done before—get case numbers down and enjoy the freedoms at level 1 once more.

In addition to these requests of all of you, we're also continuing to step up our ongoing response as a Government. The display of the New Zealand COVID Tracer QR code is mandatory, and so I urge everyone to use it. Businesses are doing their part by displaying them; I encourage you to use them—it helps support our contact tracing. When we contact trace, there will be more occasions now where contacts of contacts will be asked to isolate and be tested. This is to match a step-down in alert levels and the extra precautions we need to apply. We do want to continue to keep up our testing rate, so here is the ask: if you have cold symptoms, get a test. If you have flu symptoms, get a test. We will also keep up testing of people who have no symptoms as part of our surveillance, and we'll do that through the Ministry of Health.

I hope this gives you a good sense of what we are asking of everyone. We have some way to go. We will step up levels again if we need to. But if everyone plays their part, we can stamp out this outbreak as part of our elimination strategy with the measures we are all being asked to follow today. So a final reminder again: wash your hands regularly. If you have cold or flu symptoms, get a test. Stay home if you're sick. If you're in Auckland, I strongly encourage you to wear a mask. If you take public transport, you must wear a mask. We remain in a strong position relative to the rest of the world, with lower numbers of cases with a strong public health system, but that will only take us so far. We need the team of 5

million to help us get back where we need to be. Our system is only as good as our people, and our people are amazing. If anyone can do this, New Zealand can.

Happy to take your questions.

Media: The national Māori pandemic group has just put out a release saying it's too early for Auckland to move out of level 2 because there are simply too many cases in the community. What can you say to reassure them?

PM: Yeah. And my message would be, actually, our alert level framework is built for an elimination strategy that still has cases, in the way that we do at the moment, all attached to a cluster. But you'll see we have stepped up our expectations on Auckland and Aucklanders, and we've also stepped up the work that we're doing as a Government and as the health system to make sure that we're meeting the challenges of this current cluster.

Yup, feel free—another question.

Media: Why was the call put out last night online for west Aucklanders with no symptoms to get tested?

PM: I put that down to—I was made aware of that this morning. I would put that down to oversimplified communication. That is not the ask coming from health officials currently. As I set out, our ask is if you have cold symptoms, get a test. If you have flu symptoms, get a test. And, of course, if you have any connections to those involved in this cluster, we have been asking also people to get a test. From what I understand of that message that has gone out, the detail within the message was correct. Some of the top-line headings were simply oversimplified and they were wrong.

Media: Do you think that you've caused unnecessary panic by that miscommunication?

PM: It's wrong. It was oversimplified, and we're working very hard now to deal with what that's created with the community, and making sure that, of course, we're correcting that. I'm told—I haven't seen it, but within the message itself I am told the details were correct. The top-line messaging was simply oversimplified and it was incorrect. So we will keep correcting that. Essentially, the messaging we've been putting out still stands.

We'll be working with the Ministry of Education, Health, and others to make sure where there are concerns that we're addressing those as quickly as we can. We've also—as I understand, the all-of-Government group has gone out to media outlets to help support the correction of that messaging as well.

Media: What has that messaging caused in the community?

PM: Well, I can tell you for me it's caused me to be incredibly angry. We have to be very clear in our communication. We have to be very direct in our asks. And you'll see that in a very dynamic environment, by and large, we're able to be very, very consistent. I think, ultimately, what's happened here is that there's been an attempt to keep a message simple and it's just been done badly.

Media: But what's it caused in the community, then? Why does it make you angry? What's—

PM: Because it's made an ask that was not correct. We are not asking every single person in west and south Auckland to get a test. That is not our ask. That's not what we're encouraging. We're asking people who have cold symptoms, who have flu symptoms, and if they have any connection to the cases that we are currently very focused on—those are the individuals we want tested. We do have asymptomatic testing that is going on in certain environments and we will keep that up. But we are not asking over 700,000 New Zealanders to get a test without reason, at this point in time.

Media: Does it in any way demonstrate that there's concern around getting enough people to these testing stations?

PM: No. No—no, it was a mistake. So, no, it's not about that at all. In fact, yesterday, on a day where traditionally we tend to have lower numbers, we had very good solid numbers at that 10,000 mark. So, no, it's not a demonstration of that at all.

Media: Will you apologise for this? It seems like there's been a lot of confusion around something as—I mean, it's a pretty critical mistake.

PM: Jason, the *Herald* can certainly help us with this issue. We do need to make sure that we get that correct messaging out, and we will keep asking for that support. I'm working very hard to establish what happened here because we do need to make sure our messages are nice and clear.

Media: I mean, by your own admission it was a mistake, and you only heard about it this morning when it went out yesterday. So surely there needs to be some sort of apology?

PM: So one of the issues we have, of course, is that not all of the comms is individually signed off by me. There need to be processes in place that make sure that we have those who are, of course, very deeply embedded in all of the messaging we're asking, particularly from a health perspective, to make sure they are totally involved in the process for signing off communication to make sure we don't have the oversimplification of messaging, because that's what's happened here.

Media: So there's been work to make sure this never happens again?

PM: Oh, that has to be the case. That's my expectation. I've made my views very, very clear with those involved today about what my expectations are, because we just can't afford to have messages like that go out incorrectly.

Media: Yeah, who signed off on the communication?

PM: So Unite against COVID-19 is run through the all-of-Government group. So essentially that's who I'll be working with to make sure that we don't have anything like this happen again. It is a separate process. Of course there's been, previously, issues have been raised, we are making sure it's a completely apolitical process. Doesn't involve—particularly in this period of time, it's very strictly and tightly kept with an officials' group. So we will be making sure, though, that within that the processes are in place to make sure it's checked by everyone who needs to check it. *[Interruption]* I'll just canvas around; anyone who hasn't taken a question?

Media: You say today you're angry; it's a mistake. Why didn't you front-foot it then today in your statement before the questions and say "Look, this was an error, this was a mistake."?

PM: Oh, I certainly knew I'd have that opportunity in questions, and I've set out what our testing regime is. So, it's very, very clear in what I've said today what our expectations are, and I had every anticipation that you'd give me a chance to then talk about the incorrect comms. It's always a line call; in restating a mistake you amplify it. I want to make sure that people hear very clearly what our ask is of them; it is that if you have cold and flu symptoms or if you're connected to any of these cases that's where we need testing.

Media: Have you gone to the health ministry, and gone, "Look, we need to figure this out."? Had talks to try and see who's accountable?

PM: I've been doing that since this morning. So you can rest assured we will get to the bottom of that. But actually the most important is what we tell people now.

Media: When did the message go out? I mean, you've said it's on the onus for the media companies to correct it. Did you go to them personally—

PM: No—no. I'm asking for your support to correct it, not onus, because ultimately you've told a story around a piece of comms that we need to correct.

Media: Right, but did you go proactively to some of the major news sites and say, "This is wrong.", or did you wait for this opportunity now to do it?

PM: No. So earlier today, on a phone call with the all-of-Government group, I asked them to very proactively make sure that they were, as a team, going in and contacting those who were reporting on it to make sure that they were utterly clear on what the actual ask is. And also, from this morning, I've been working on the processes that are in place that allowed this situation to happen to make sure we can correct that too.

Media: Any concern that testing stations might be overloaded as a result of this?

PM: Not that I've had reported to me. I'm sure, again, if we can get that message out nice and clearly—and again, as I understand it, and I haven't seen the piece of communication, but I have asked how far and wide it's gone and in what channels it was shared. But as it's been explained to me, the information within the body was correct; it was simply the headline that wasn't.

Media: People in south and west Auckland are being asked to get tested. Are they also expected to self-isolate until they get their test results back if they are asymptomatic?

PM: Of course, again, just we're not asking everyone in west and south Auckland to do a blanket test. But I'll hand over to Dr McElnay to set out where there is a difference in when you're—if you're symptomatic we ask you to isolate, but when there's more general testing I'll ask Dr McElnay to—

Dr Caroline McElnay: Thank you. Yes, certainly if you're symptomatic and you've had a test, you should self-isolate until you have the results of that test. There may be some other specific examples or situations where the public health unit is doing some local contact tracing, in which case they will advise you to self-isolate until your results are available.

But outside of those, generally, if you're asymptomatic and have been tested, you wouldn't need to self-isolate.

Media: Dr McElnay, what was the ministry's advice to Cabinet regarding any potential extension of the lockdown? Did you say that it needed to be the level 3 lockdown in Auckland? Did you or Dr Bloomfield—

PM: Just on process I'll, just if I can, Jason, and then we can see if there's a—remember this decision was made from an earlier Cabinet meeting on Monday. Cabinet has not reconvened. We very clearly set out then that if things continued as we anticipated with this particular cluster, and they have, that we would still retain those settings. So Cabinet did not reconvene, and so there was no further reconsideration. But I'll hand over to Dr McElnay to expand on anything further from Health's view.

Dr Caroline McElnay: From Health's perspective, what we're looking at here is an outbreak that is generally well contained. We only have one case that is not connected genetically or epidemiologically. There may be some further cases that would continue to occur within the community, but our level of comfort with the control of the cluster is high, and our consideration is that our existing public health systems and protocols can effectively deal with any further cases and the management of those cases and their contacts.

Media: Yeah, and sorry, just—

PM: I think it is important to keep in mind that we did anticipate being in the place we're in now when we made this decision. You'll remember we said Auckland will have different settings. There will be gathering limits. We have, of course, stepped up our expectation on masks. That's all been in anticipation of this cluster running as exactly as it is now. So we put those in from the beginning of the decision. Nothing about the cluster has therefore changed, except the fact that we are reiterating why Auckland is in a 2.5 situation.

Media: Yep. And if you went to the all-of-Government's COVID team this morning to ask them to put out the message to correct—

PM: Just to our representative from the all-of-Government group, yep.

Media: But as of 1.26, the Unite Against COVID Instagram page still has the important message about if you're in south or west Auckland to please have a test. So why is that still coming from their social media accounts?

PM: That's something I would have to put to them. They've certainly been very clearly advised that that needs to come down, because, as Health have reiterated, that is not the message we have asked. So they've been advised of this some hours ago. So I'll be following up on that again. But, again, I do appreciate the help of everyone in this room to make sure we get that clear and consistent messaging out there as we intend.

Media: How strictly will mask wearing on public transport be enforced tomorrow?

PM: So, of course, it is now part of a health order, so there is a very clear expectation that people be wearing masks. We will be mindful, and we've worked alongside transport providers to make sure that in these early stages we're working to really support people around masks and face coverings. So they have options available to them that if people have nothing, they can support people so that we don't have people stranded as a result of not having masks and face coverings. That won't be, of course, for ever, but in these early days we want to create an environment where we support people to hear and learn about what we're asking but also comply.

Media: Last time we went down from alert level 3 to 2, we had three days of zero cases. Now we've got a handful in Auckland. Is your decision a political one or a health one?

PM: Not at all. In fact, one of the reasons that I wanted to actually share, again, the framework was to be clear that, actually, this hasn't, at its core, changed. This has been the same all the way through. And within that, we have talked about there being community transmission and active clusters, and so that's what the framework is designed for. We have added a layer to it. So for Auckland, we're very mindful of the status of the cluster at the moment. That's why they have extra restrictions; they are in a different form—they're in a version of 2.5 because of that. But the framework's always been designed like that. Never ever have we made a political decision in the management of COVID-19. We have made health-based decisions and evidence-based decisions because that's the best way we support our economy, and I'm going to stick with that model of decision making.

Media: On masks, I mean, why exactly haven't you mandated their use more widely? You did say that you reserved the right to do so in future, but you didn't quite articulate why the Government hasn't done that now—

PM: Well, if anything, we probably will have picked up from the requirement—and I will ask Dr McElnay to speak to this as well. But one of the things, of course, from even mandating their use on public transport, there are a range of issues that you have to become really mindful of: how do you make sure that you're enforcing it? What's the penalty regime? Who is responsible for enforcing—for instance, would you require retailers to bar people from entering a shop if they're not wearing a mask? You then have to think about what happens in cases of escalation. It's not a simple thing to ask to suddenly mandate and create a legal framework around that. We are going as far as we can, though, in saying we are strongly encouraging their use, and as a Cabinet we will reserve the right to mandate if we believe that it's not being appropriately used, particularly in Auckland, where we're really encouraging that use. Dr McElnay, anything you want to add there on mask use?

Dr Caroline McElnay: I'll just merely reiterate what the Prime Minister says and that our advice was very focused on what should be mandated, and in an alert level 2 environment, which is a low level of community transmission, we considered that the highest risk was in our public transport situation—an uncontrolled environment—and that therefore there would be merit in mandating mask use in that environment. But that's a different situation to generally encouraging mask wearing—in addition to all the other public health interventions that are available.

PM: Keeping in mind as well that, at level 2, very clearly, social distancing is required, and so social distancing in retail, social distancing in hospitality are all built into the rules. Mask use is not a replacement for social distancing—it must be in addition to—and this is something that health officials have been very clear on. So I wouldn't want anyone to think if you've got a mask, you can then be in close proximity to strangers. We're asking for both, and embedded in our system is both.

Media: Will people apply any work on that legal mandate—what a legal framework might look like? Is that something that you've asked them to go away and work on in the background?

PM: Look, I think they are very—I couldn't say that they haven't, because they are very conscious of the things that we set out. So when we talk about the potential, they will often go away and do that background work.

Media: Prime Minister, with the case today of the health worker, were they wearing PPE when they were in contact with this person?

PM: My understanding is that they were utilising full protocols, because they were aware of COVID within the family.

Media: So how concerning is it, then, that even with wearing PPE they've contracted it?

PM: Look, and of course, they were tested as well. So they were wearing PPE, they were tested early on and tested negative, and then subsequently have tested positive. That is something that we encountered in our first wave. We had healthcare workers who wore PPE, who were very well trained and experienced in PPE use, who still contracted COVID. This again highlights how tricky it is, and so that is why we have the protocols that we have. Health are working on the ongoing testing regime and protocols that make sure that we keep up regular asymptomatic testing of those involved in testing itself, just for this very purpose.

Media: And is there any thought to maybe upping the restrictions in Tokoroa for a time being as a result of this?

PM: No, and again, level 2 environment, we have—again, the whole purpose of our system is to enable us to continue with life, albeit with restrictions, whilst managing situations like this. So, of course, as you will have heard, contact tracing is happening, testing stations have been established. Keep in mind Tokoroa, all the way through, has been at alert level 2 and we have successfully managed cases within the area, and so we'll continue to do so. And last question?

Media: Some parents are perhaps concerned about whether it's safe for some schools such as Mount Albert Grammar to be reopening. How confident are you that it is going to be safe?

PM: So I'll give Dr McElnay the chance to give you a little update on some of the testing numbers there. So the advice, as I understand it, from the public health unit in Auckland was that they undertook testing across the school as a precautionary measure and that, I understand, to date that precautionary surveillance testing, with the exception of one that was a household contact—so, unrelated—has not demonstrated any further positives. That's obviously a school in my electorate; so I've been staying in contact with the principal. He feels very confident of the work that they've been doing with the public health unit to look after their staff and students. Anything further, Dr McElnay?

Dr Caroline McElnay: Yes, certainly. And yes, the testing that was being done at Mount Albert Grammar was highly precautionary, and it was to determine if there may have been some undetected other cases as a result, or connected with the case, that we didn't know about. And I was advised this morning that there's been over 2,000 tests undertaken of staff and students. All of those are negative.

Media: Just to clarify: so since Cabinet's decision to move the alert levels and extend it out until tonight, have you received any health advice with concerns or advising against the alert level move tonight?

PM: No—no. And obviously I've let Dr McElnay speak. She's obviously already shared Health's position and perspective. As I outlined earlier, the very clear advice to Health was: if we are to make sure that we are really containing and continue to undertake the "stamp it out" strategy at level 2, those extra limits on, for instance, social gatherings were really key. So that's why we baked that into the first decision, because they anticipated how important it would be as we lifted out of level 3 restrictions, and so that's why that's there. That's why Auckland is in a form of 2.5. That's based on public health advice.

Media: Will people be fined tomorrow for not wearing masks on public transport?

PM: That all comes down to enforcement on the ground, but we take the same approach that we have all the way through. You know, in those early stages of new rules we take the opportunity to educate and engage, and there are ways that we can make sure that everyone's complying in the beginning, even if they don't have a mask. And we've been working with the bus companies in particular to make sure that we can de-escalate situations in the early days.

Media: And that advice that went out to south Aucklanders about being tested has been online since Friday and is still online on the Government's—

PM: I've already answered that question about my expectations. I can only do so much while I'm at the podium. The sooner you release me, the sooner I can make sure that that is all being corrected.

Media: But how can New Zealanders trust the information that's coming out from the Government? Chris Hipkins has stood here before and said that the 1 o'clock briefings and the information from the Government is—

PM: And, Jason, I'll think you'll find that actually we have been utterly consistent. If you refer back to what Minister Robertson said on Friday in the stand-up, he said exactly what I'm saying now. So there's never been any inconsistency from this podium. Unfortunately, when someone has written an Instagram ad, there has been, and we're working very hard to correct that.

Media: Prime Minister, why not prepare the sort of legal framework for mandating masks more widely so that when there is another outbreak—

PM: Oh, and I haven't ruled out that that work isn't taking place. So I've made clear that we haven't ruled it out, and therefore what I can't tell you is whether or not Crown Law of their own volition have started. But we frequently work behind the scenes around potential orders, so more than likely something probably is already under way. I haven't explicitly seen the advice on it yet, though.

Media: The 2.5 acknowledgment—there's a 2.5 alert, you know—does that show that there's a need to revise or reset some of the alert level settings, or are you still comfortable with where they're placed?

PM: I am still comfortable, because, of course, the rest of the country is in that full alert level 2. The way we described it last time, we called it "stepping into alert level 2". Look, I think it's just easier to describe it as a form of 2.5. I think, for those on the ground, we know that Aucklanders have extra restrictions on them that the rest of the country doesn't, and whether or not you call it a stepped or a graduated or a 2.5, the messaging is clear. We've got the restrictions in place for a reason. They are there to support our "stamp it out" plan and strategy, but that strategy will only be as good as our people. So we are asking people to make sure they observe it. They did last time. It was well understood last time. We need them to do that again.

Media: So no greater revision of the alert system in the near future?

PM: Well, we constantly look at those settings, and, of course, we've added on things like mask wearing on to those settings. So we will overlay, but the framework itself has stood up well, and so we'll keep using that as a broad way of communicating what we're doing.

Media: The advice to—

PM: Yeah, I'll just come over here, if I may.

Media: In regards to the Mount Roskill church, we understand that some people have been defying lockdown, refusing tests, refusing to go into isolation. Are you concerned that they're not cooperating with officials?

PM: So I've actually had feedback that the group involved here has actually been cooperative and compliant, as that testing has been taking place over the past—you know—over 24 hours and beyond. So that's the feedback I've had from people on the ground, and we checked in on that again this morning and that's the feedback that we've had.

Media: The advice for south and west Auckland post that went out online is also on the Ministry of Health website. It's not just a headline. It's on the last paragraph—

PM: And, again, I'll reiterate: I'll take last questions so that I have the ability to go and make sure that everything is correct and as it should be. Again, I suspect what's happened in that case—and I haven't verified that that has happened. That would be an administrator, because that my understanding is that Health did not sign off on some of that advice, which is clearly not the process we should be adhering to. Again, everything you've heard from this podium consistently has said the same thing. Someone who, unfortunately, has been working on the comms hasn't adhered to what is being said here. OK, final question in the front.

Media: Thank you. The decision's been made now to move out of a form of lockdown while case numbers are still present, right? That shows that you're sort of—does it acknowledge that the Government's accepting that the systems are in place now, putting more trust in those systems, and therefore using the alert levels as described, and, that being the case, what's sort of next? What does the Government need to do next to develop their response?

PM: Yeah. I'll reflect two things. Firstly, the system as it stood—you know, the broad principles of that were all the same the first time. We just happened to be in a position, of course, where we had level 4, which was very successful in moving us very quickly back down through the alert level framework. So it was never that the alert level framework required zero cases at level 2; it just so happened that that was the trajectory we managed to get to. We did take a bit of time to get to that place, because the number of clusters we had across the country was wider, and so a bit of extra time gave us that reassurance, so that's what happened in that first round.

What we rightly picked up is that, yes, we do have very solid systems. We have the ability to be able to manage the nature of the cluster that we have in an alert level 2.5 environment, but we can only do that if people live by those rules. So if we have a situation where we put out those restrictions, but people continue to have large gatherings or people don't follow social distancing, or people go to work when they're sick, it won't work. And it won't work anywhere in the world, so we are placing trust in our system, but we are also placing trust in our team of 5 million.

Media: But in terms of what the Government should do to further bolster the systems and the capacity to respond so that maybe next time an outbreak occurs it means it can just be level 2 and not point five, you know—

PM: So that, in part—I'll just finish on this. Yeah, I know the point you're making. In part, that will come down to the nature of the outbreak. So we've since discovered, of course, that the beginning of this outbreak—as far as we've been able to trace it—is

Americold Mount Wellington on 31 July. We did not know that in those early days. In the early days, we knew we had some individual—a household—unwell. We knew it was linked to a Finance Now workplace, we linked to Americold, and we knew there were symptomatic people within that workplace too. That told us that there could have been wider chains of transmission we weren't aware of. That's why we had to use those alert levels in the first place, was to get a good understanding of what was going on, get a sense of the perimeter of the cluster and, once we had that powerful information around the genomes—knowing we had one—was very, very helpful and key to being able to get us to where we are now. So that's what's been important in the decision making. It's why 3 was used as a tool in the beginning, and it's why we've been able to move to the restrictions we have now.

Media: People are urging the Government, you know, even in the Roche report on contact tracing that came out, that digital contact tracing, those sort of mechanisms are sort of that next threshold of measures are required. What's most urgent to you, for the Government to complete before the next outbreak?

PM: My view is that all of the fundamentals for a system that allows us to stamp out COVID-19, we have. Everything else that we do is in addition to continue to tweak the system as we go, and learn from COVID-19. And, if anything, I very much believe that New Zealand has proven itself to be agile. We've brought in mask use because of what the evidence has told us. We have used QR codes as an additional tool. We will keep using technological solutions, and we are still doing work on—for instance—CovidCard, but they're all in addition to an existing very strong foundation. We have now a national contact tracing system that links up the country. That means that we can have a national contact tracing centre, as well as, on the ground, individuals within our public health units. We can deploy our public health units into those areas where we have a significant cluster or outbreak. We are in a vastly better situation than we were when we had a much more significant outbreak in the beginning.

But, again, our system will only be as good as our people. So my final note is, to everyone, thank you for what you've done to date, but we need you to keep going, and this is imperative. There is, of course, always the chance that we'll need more restrictions in the future, unless we all work together. So, on that note, thanks everyone.

Conclusion of press conference