

**PRIME MINISTER AND DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF HEALTH PRESS CONFERENCE:
THURSDAY, 9 APRIL 2020**

PM: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to day 15. I'm going to start by handing over to Dr Bloomfield to give us an update on our latest case numbers. Then we'll come back to me and I'll be giving a slightly longer scene-setter, given the milestone that we've reached recently with lockdown at alert level 4. So Dr Bloomfield, I'll hand over to you.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Thank you, Prime Minister. Kia ora koutou katoa. So today there are 29 new cases of COVID-19 to report, and this comprises 23 new confirmed cases and six probable cases. There are no additional deaths to report, however we do have 14 people in hospital, and that includes four in ICU. They are in North Shore, Middlemore, Dunedin, and Wellington Regional Hospitals.

We now have 317 reported cases of COVID-19 we can confirm have recovered. That's an increase of 35 on yesterday, so today's number of recovered cases, at 35, is higher than the number of new cases, at 29. And the combined new total of confirmed and probable cases is 1,239.

For the cases we have information on, we've still got a strong link to overseas travel: 41 percent of cases. That continues to decline. Forty-four percent are contacts of other cases in New Zealand, and 2 percent are community transmission. Thirteen percent of cases are still under investigation. We still have the 12 significant clusters, and the three largest are at Matamata, with 64 cases; the Bluff wedding, with 87; and the Marist College cluster, with 84 cases.

In terms of laboratory testing, yesterday there were 3,990 tests processed, and the total number of tests undertaken to date has increased accordingly—I'll just find the correct number there—but our seven-day rolling average of tests is 3,547 per day. We still have good test capacity and that continues to increase as supplies come in as expected this week.

Just a quick word on the clusters; we talked about those a little yesterday. We do take a particular interest there because when we have a cluster, either in a geographical place or at an event, or in a particular location, like a workplace or a school, there is the potential for quite rapid spread there, and our intention is then to try and ring-fence those clusters as quickly as possible, and stop any further spread. So we do know that our ability to contain those clusters has been greatly enhanced because we are in the alert level 4 lockdown situation. So we're confident now that we are on top of those clusters and that any additional cases are largely within bubbles, within each of those clusters.

We've also worked to streamline information flows between the district health boards, ourselves, and ESR to ensure we are able to get on top of those clusters, to contain them, to get good information about the timing of the onset of symptoms and of diagnosis of new cases, and also the proportion of close contacts that we are successfully tracing. And just to help, sort of, reassure me about that contact tracing system, I've asked infectious diseases specialist Dr Ayesha Verrall to do a rapid review of that today. I'm meeting with her later in the day, and look forward to getting her views on how robust our process is and whether there are any improvements we could make to it.

And finally, just on flu vaccination, we've now distributed over a million doses of the vaccine around the motu. They are in general practices, pharmacies, and in district health boards. There are good supplies in every region; I have looked at the figures. We have sufficient vaccine for all our priority groups, and I encourage those people to call their GP or their pharmacy and make a time to go in and be vaccinated. And Associate Health Minister Julie Anne Genter announced earlier today we are extending for two weeks—out to the end of April—the time for those priority groups to be vaccinated, and those who are not in priority groups just to wait until after that time to get their vaccination.

And finally, please, if you have any health conditions that you require care for—either acute care, or you have a chronic condition that requires care—contact your usual healthcare provider or talk to Healthline if it's an acute condition. We really want people to keep showing up for and seeking care that they need, and not delaying care so that they end up being worse off. So that's all I have to say. Prime Minister, back to you.

PM: Thank you, Ashley. Today is day 15 of alert level 4 lockdown. And at this rough halfway mark, I have no hesitation saying that what New Zealanders have done over the last two weeks is huge. In the face of the greatest threat to human health that we have faced in over a century, Kiwis have quietly and collectively implemented a nationwide wall of defence. You are breaking the chain of transmission, and you did it for each other.

As a Government, we have had pandemic notices. We've had powers that come with being in a national emergency, but you held the greatest power of all. You made the decision that, together, we could protect one another, and you have. You have saved lives. Modelling provided to my office by economist Rodney Jones on the eve of the lockdown suggested New Zealand was on a similar trajectory to potentially Italy or even Spain, and that our 205 cases on 25 March could have grown to over 10,000 by now without the actions we have taken together.

And new modelling, due to be released later this afternoon by Te Pūnaha Matatini, suggests that the current controls at alert level 4 have already had a significant impact on new case numbers, and we are on track to meet their most optimistic scenario. Instead of the horrific scenes we've seen abroad, we are at 1,239 cases, and the total number of cases has fallen for the last four days, with, as Dr Bloomfield said, just 29 cases today, the lowest daily number of cases since 23 March before the lockdown began. We are turning a corner, and your commitment means our plan is working. But to succeed, we need it to keep working. Success does not mean we change the course. Removing the restrictions now would allow the virus to spread rapidly once again, and we would be back to the starting line within two weeks. That's also why we will keep enforcing the rules.

In addition, you will have seen an increase in police enforcement in recent days. I expect that to continue, including roadblocks in some places this Easter weekend. While most are doing the right thing, some are not. We cannot let the selfish actions of a few set us back, and we won't, especially after all that everyone has sacrificed to get us here.

I've read messages from those who have lost loved ones that couldn't come together to grieve for them. I've read stories of brand-new parents whose most joyful time has been made so difficult because of separation; businesses who are worried for their livelihoods, and for the family that are their employees. I am acutely aware of the pain many New Zealanders are feeling.

Over 1 million of our fellow citizens are now supported by a wage subsidy, many of whom will be experiencing a cut in income. At the end of March, there were already an extra 4,866 Kiwis on a benefit, and last week that number increased by another 10,000. Many businesses are also reporting that they may not be able to reopen at the end of the lockdown. I want to give you all the assurance that I can that the health and wellbeing of you and our communities has always been on our minds as we have made decisions on COVID-19. But so has your livelihoods. We will continue to stand alongside you.

We've made record investments to keep as many businesses as possible afloat, and people in jobs. We're doing what we can to cushion the blow and plan for our recovery. But, as I've said, this is going to be a marathon. Our plan for that marathon is to keep eliminating the virus from New Zealand. We can do that by keeping it out of the country, but also by rapidly stamping out any outbreaks that flare up, and that plan is the very best thing that we can do for the New Zealand economy. The best economic response continues to be a strong health response. And that's why I'm announcing the next stage of initiatives to scale up our health response, to put us in the best possible position to exit level 4 and prepare for level 3.

PM: No matter what level we are at in the future, there are three areas where we need to become watertight. Firstly, our borders must be tightly managed. That's why, from midnight tonight, every New Zealander boarding a flight to return home will be required to undergo quarantine, or what we have called "managed isolation" in an approved facility for a minimum of 14 days. I am also signalling that the requirement for 14 days of quarantine or managed self-isolation in a Government-approved facility will be a prerequisite for anyone entering the country in order to keep the virus out.

As an island nation, we have a distinct advantage in our ability to eliminate the virus, but our borders are also our biggest risk. As a Government, we have gone harder earlier, with broader measures compared to other countries. But even one person slipping through the cracks and bringing the virus in can see an explosion in cases, as we have observed with some of our biggest clusters. The quarantining of returning New Zealanders will be a significant undertaking. For context, nearly 40,000 New Zealanders have returned home since 20 March, when we closed the border to foreign nationals. That is more than all of the hotel rooms across the country that we could have properly housed people in. There has always been urgency around this matter, but, simply put, we could not have done it from the beginning, but we can and are doing it now. A network of up to 18 hotels will be used to implement this approach, of which, one to two will be specifically set aside for those under strict quarantine conditions—and just as a reminder, those are for those travellers who are symptomatic or are being tested for COVID-19.

The second aspect of our ongoing COVID response is significantly scaled-up and faster contact tracing, and greater use of technology. The more we move to improve the speed and effectiveness of our contact tracing, the better placed we will be in breaking the chain of transmission. The Ministry of Health is already working on a locally developed app that will assist with contact tracing. I should caution that it is in the early stages. It will have basic functionality, but even that will be important, as it will help update our national health database with user's contact details. Then they will look to add functions.

We are investigating the Singaporean Government's Bluetooth-based app TraceTogether, that can record interactions between a phone and any other phones nearby that have the app installed. I should caution though that it will often pick up phones at quite a distance, so it's not perfect technology. The data is stored on the phone, and if the user tests positive, they then release the data to the Government for contact tracing. Close contacts can then be automatically notified of their need to self-isolate and be tested. Singapore are planning to open source their technology in the next few weeks. We have made initial contact with the Singaporean Government and registered our interest, and I have a phone call with Prime Minister Lee of Singapore this evening where I'll be discussing this technology further.

I do again think it's important to note that these kinds of apps are useful but they don't solve everything. What's most important is that you have good people and enough people working on contact tracing as quickly as possible. We do, and we continue to improve and work to improve every day, as Dr Bloomfield has set out.

And finally, this ongoing plan must be underpinned by testing. We already have incredibly high rates of testing compared to others, but we want to be even better. We will be maintaining high levels of testing and supplementing it with additional testing to ensure we have greater levels of certainty around the decline in the virus' spread. With these three pillars: border controls, rigorous testing and contact tracing, and making sure, of course, that we use all the technology available, we have what we need to win this marathon. But I know in a race it's important to have signposts to know where we are and exactly what we need to do when we get there so we can all have a plan.

Let me set out some of the time lines then for some key decisions that will affect everyone. Level 4 has come with some heavy restrictions. It has required difficult decisions around services and businesses that can and cannot operate. We need to give similar detailed guidance on what life at level 3 looks like, and we will do that next week.

PM: That will give us a window to iron out questions and issues and make sure we're as prepared as we can be when it comes time to eventually move.

It is then my intention that on 20 April—2 days before the lockdown is due to finish—Cabinet will make a decision on our next steps. That's because we need to use the most up-to-date data that we have to make that decision. That means, if we are ready to move to alert level 3—if we are ready to move to alert level 3—business will have two days to implement arrangements. But let me say again: we will not be moving out of level 4 early. If we move too early, we will go backwards.

In the meantime, I ask every business to use the time you have to prepare for what every alert level means for you. Treat COVID-19 like a health and safety issue. Ask whether it's possible for your business to operate with social distancing. Can you build in contact-tracing tools or mechanisms to keep track of your supply chain and customers? Help us get ready as a nation for the marathon that we must run together.

I do know that we can do this, and I know that because we are already. So as we head into Easter, I say thank you to you and your bubble. You have stayed calm. You've been strong. You've saved lives, and now we just need to keep going.

Happy to take questions.

Media: Prime Minister, the Government's always maintained that between, kind of, seven and 10 days, or at least the half-way mark, we'd have a sense of whether we'd be coming out of lockdown or not. It's the uncertainty that's killing a lot of businesses. So two days out from the lockdown lifting, is that enough time? And what sense can you give us on what level 3 looks like? What kinds of businesses will be able to open again?

PM: My message to businesses now is prepare now. Prepare now for every alert level. You will be getting the data that we're making our decisions on in real time, only a few hours after we receive it. But we need to make sure that we don't move too early. If we do, we risk losing all of the gains we've made.

Media: In the mandatory quarantine, what will that look like for people who are there? Are they going to be able to leave at all, and for what reasons, and how will they be supervised?

PM: We already have—so just to give you the clear distinction between what we're operating. We're operating this already, but what's different is now everybody who arrives will either be put into quarantine or into what we're calling assisted self-isolation. Both are utilising, at present, hotels. The difference with quarantine is that's where our people who are symptomatic or being tested for COVID-19 go, and they cannot leave their rooms. They must stay where they are. Someone in assisted self-isolation is able to leave their room for a walk or fresh air but nothing else. So they are very similar.

Do you want to add anything on that, Dr Bloomfield, on those distinctions?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: I think just on the latter, Prime Minister, recall when we brought the flight back out of Wuhan and we had people up at Whangaparāoa. The latter group is like that. So, yes, they can—we'll make sure they are looked after so they are not putting themselves or others at risk, but, yes, they will be able to get outside for fresh air and do other activities. They're not confined to their rooms.

Media: Why have you decided not to quarantine everyone like Australia is doing?

PM: Just to be really clear—just a bit of background—we essentially are. Everyone who now comes into the New Zealand border must go into a hotel that is being provided by the New Zealand Government. They cannot go home for 14 days. So essentially they are. The reason we just use the word “quarantine” is it comes with different legal powers. So “quarantine” is applied to those who are symptomatic and been tested for COVID-19. But, to be absolutely clear, no one goes home. Everyone goes into a managed facility.

Media: [*Inaudible*] security be available at those facilities?

PM: Well, at the moment, we're utilising the skills of public health to particularly monitor those who are symptomatic and we're also using the police to monitor the facilities. There is a reason also why we've been using particular hotels. We need to make sure that we can keep them secure, and, of course, we've got the ability to keep an eye on people's movements within the hotel. And, also, it means that we can have people in the same facility without being in contact with each other. So these are all assessed to make sure that we can keep people safe and distant from one another, and those are the kinds of hotels that we're choosing.

Media: How long are you planning for this regime at the border to be in place?

PM: There is no end-point as yet. As I've said, this will be a marathon, and our borders will continue to be a high-risk element for New Zealand. We benefit from a very large moat, but we need to make the most of it and manage and assess every single person who is coming into the country. I cannot give you an end date for when that will cease.

Media: The number of people arriving has been 300 or fewer for the last week—

PM: It has.

Media: [*Inaudible*]

PM: Sorry, what was that?

Media: Why not implement this a week ago?

PM: Well, of course, we have been operating the system for some time. We already have 1,000—roughly 1,000—people in motels; 90 on top—155, forgive me—on top of that who are considered in formal quarantine, so we have already been operating the system. Now it is operating for everyone. You would have heard from the numbers I gave we have for a significant amount of time had a large number of people coming through—40,000 more than we could have accommodated. Now we have more consistent numbers and so these rules will apply for everyone.

Media: The lockdown's having a significant impact upon the economy—the benefit numbers showed us that today. To what degree will the impact on the economy factor into the decision-making process about when to lift the lockdown?

PM: And it already does, because the best thing we can do for our economy is get our health response right. That is how we stop ourselves from being Italy, from being Spain, from being the UK, who have had to have extended periods of lockdown, which then has a significant impact on the economy. The sooner we get on top of the virus and have control of it, the sooner we can start lifting some of those restrictions and help get our economy moving again.

Media: Will Kiwis at the border have to pay for hotel rooms?

PM: At this point, because we wanted to move with speed, the Government will be providing these facilities, but we will continue to do work on how we manage border controls over the coming weeks and months, because they are likely to be a part of our system for some time to come. So we have not ruled out using things like co-payments to provide that in the future, but for the sake of getting this up and running now, we have moved to provide it.

Media: [*Inaudible*]

PM: Sorry?

Media: Will the Defence Force be used to enforce the quarantine?

PM: At the moment, we've been using the police, but we've always been open to using a range of different enforcement forces in order to bring surety to New Zealand that people are doing what they're meant to. Keeping in mind, as well, in these hotel facilities,

we can keep an eye on people's movements; they have security arrangements attached to them.

Media: Can I just ask—it's a stunning number today, a stunning drop—how likely is that these sorts of numbers are the numbers we're going to see in the days forward, or do you think there's potential for a spike?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: It's hard to predict the future, I've found, but it is encouraging—as the Prime Minister said, this is the fourth day in a row where we've seen a drop day-on-day, so we're expecting the numbers to continue to stay low. There may be the odd bump up and down, and we know—we still are finding and confirming the odd case from some of the clusters. Those, we are hoping, will be the mainstay of our additional cases. The important thing here is those lab testing numbers and our intention, as the Prime Minister said, to keep testing widely to be sure that we are finding any cases—so very wide testing of anyone with influenza-like illness symptoms.

Media: Will the Government commit to deleting all the data that's raised in this app when the pandemic is over?

PM: Look, ultimately, it would be around how long you were trying to manage COVID-19 generally, but I can be very clear that the only reason we would be utilising the app is to manage outbreaks of COVID, and it would only, therefore, be a tool that would be used by health for health purposes. I had explained to me last night that health is working very closely with those who need to make sure that we're overseeing privacy concerns, so they are reaching out to the Privacy Commissioner and to those who may have security concerns.

Media: Will people have some sort of, I suppose, veto over their personal information—

PM: They would choose whether they have it or are a part of it. So that's been the feature of many of the countries who have used these apps—they have been voluntary—but I have to say, for it to be successful, we would need wide uptake, so we would really need the public to buy into the idea that this will help protect them and protect their families. Ashley, did you want to add anything on the app?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Just that we're very careful in any of these developments in health to balance up people's privacy issues and their confidence that their health information or any information about their health is being safeguarded and only used for that purpose, so we will apply the same level of rigour to these developments.

Media: Prime Minister, not being able to attend tangi continues to be an area of distress for Māori. Given that the parameters for what qualifies as an essential item or essential worker looks to be being adjusted as we go, why not have restrictions around tangihanga instead of a blanket ban for those outside of the bubble, have restrictions around things like hygiene, a cap perhaps of maybe 10 people—why not restrict that to protect whānau instead of a blanket ban, and trust whānau to stick to that?

PM: One of the reasons is that, in all of the assessments we've made around what is essential and not, it's all come down to: how do we limit everyone's contact with one another to the bare minimum? And so there are some parts of our lives where actually contact is just built in. And if you look at the areas where we have clusters of cases, they're just a slice of life in Aotearoa—they're weddings, they're functions when loved ones have got together before weddings, they're rugby teams, they're social occasions, because that's when we're really physically close to one another, and so that's where we haven't been able to let any room for that kind of contact to happen, and I know how horrific that is for tangi. I've watched friends who have had to go through funerals through live streaming, and that just feels wrong for New Zealanders, but it's the only way that we can protect one another.

Media: But the Government, though, Prime Minister, has shown some trust in New Zealanders, like people returning from overseas in weeks past to self-isolate at home.

There's a trust there for New Zealanders to follow the rules. Why not trust people to follow the rules and parameters set by the Government for tangi?

PM: Because the rules are stay away from each other, not come in contact with one another, not interact with anyone who's not in your bubble, and that fundamentally goes against everything that tangi is about, and so that places a huge burden on anyone who would be holding a tangi for a lost loved one or a funeral. So you are—if someone you've lost is in your bubble, you can be there for them, but for anyone else, we just haven't been able to let that in because that, ultimately, could lead to other people becoming ill.

Media: Can I just ask, Prime Minister, the passing of esteemed Māori leader Huirangi Waikerepuru—what do you know of his contribution to New Zealand and what words do you have for the whānau?

PM: I'm so sorry that people are losing loved ones, particularly those of high esteem in our communities during this period of time, and I know this is cold comfort but I hope, for all those whānau who have lost loved ones at level 4, that there will be a time and a place where people can be properly recognised and people can properly gather.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, two nurses have contracted COVID-19, two nurses at Waikato Hospital, why aren't you calling for mandatory use of masks for all hospital staff in all clinical settings and for the public right now?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: So we've provided very good guidance to all our health workforce, whether it's inside hospitals or outside, on the use of PPE, including masks, and inside hospitals I think you're seeing there is quite wide use of masks. But the guidance is good. It's based on the advice of specialists and likewise it's consistent with the advice from the WHO and that includes the advice for the general public in terms of wearing masks.

Media: How many staff and/or patients at Waikato Hospital are now being tested for COVID-19?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: There are the two nurses who are the cases on a ward, and that ward has been locked down and the medical officer of health will make a decision about who needs testing. In that sort of setting we would use testing of some asymptomatic people, including other staff members and possibly those in the wards as well, but I don't have the numbers as yet.

Media: You say that the guidance is good, but it's clearly not good enough if two nurses have contracted COVID-19.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: What we don't know is where they contracted it, and it may be that it wasn't in the workplace, that's—part of the investigation is to look into that.

Media: Prime Minister, can you say when, definitively, the election will be?

PM: Sorry?

Media: Can you say definitively when the election will be?

PM: At the moment, we're sticking with the date that we have. Of course the election period, the period that we consider for, for instance, for campaign finance purposes, is only three months prior to that. From our perspective it is too soon—we're two weeks into a lockdown—to make a determination of where we will be, even in a month's time from now. So it is something that we will keep under review, but at the moment we've kept it to 19 September. I spoke to Simon Bridges just yesterday, just said that we would keep staying in touch over whether or not there's likely to be any movement there, and so, ultimately, it's in no one's interest to have a situation where we can't campaign as parties, but equally I don't want to make a judgement yet that that won't be able to happen.

Media: What factors will you take into account when determining when the election will be held? Is it purely advice from health experts?

PM: Sorry, is it purely advice from health experts?

Media: Yeah.

PM: Well, of course, the alert level you're in will make a big difference, because we need people to be able to go out and physically vote. So that will be a significant determining factor. I think if we based it solely on the idea of whether or not we'll be able to have mass gatherings, actually that may be a fixture for some time, so I don't think that alone would be enough of a guide. So we really do need to just keep assessing New Zealand's position as we go.

Media: Yesterday we heard from the Police Commissioner about a number of individuals spitting on police officers, hospital workers, and other members of the front-line community. What would be your message to people that think this is acceptable?

PM: I think it's appalling, and particularly targeting people who are already making sacrifices for New Zealanders by being on the front line every day. I think it's appalling. I have other words, but I probably can't use them here.

Media: For those people who go into quarantine when they get back, will Air New Zealand still be doing the regional flights to bring them to their homes after the 14 days are over?

PM: After. Yes, after the 14 days. So we recognise that after people have been in that quarantine that they will need to get back to their homes, and often that will be potentially in the South Island if they arrived in Auckland, and so there will be the ability for them to use the regional airline capacity to get home.

Media: How do they do that? I mean, they'll be sitting here wondering how on earth—do they just go on the website or what's the—

PM: So this is one of the reasons why, of course, there is quite a bit to prepare around putting every single person who arrives at our border into a hotel. We do need to make sure that we're meeting all of their needs while they're there—their food, of course, keeping in mind they cannot go to grocery stores, they cannot go and find essential services. We have to provide that for them. We also have to make sure that when they are looking to connect back to their home that we're supporting them to do that. We will classify relocation after an international flight as being qualifying for essential access to domestic airlines.

Media: Are you concerned about Airways proposal to withdraw air traffic services from seven regional airports.

PM: Yes. So, obviously part of our arrangements with Air New Zealand is to continue to maintain basic levels of connectivity with our regions and so, of course, we'd be concerned if we're losing a fundamental part of that network. And so I know that's something that Minister Phil Twyford is aware of and is currently working on.

Media: Is that reasonable given that they've claimed millions from the aviation package?

PM: And this is one of the reasons that package existed—was because we valued and know we need to keep those links going. Regardless of the fact that we're in alert level 4, we need to be ready to once again have lesser restrictions. So that's why Minister Twyford is working on that issue now.

Media: What can you tell us about the number of foreign citizens in New Zealand who have now been repatriated and the numbers still waiting to be repatriated and the plan for them going forward?

PM: So we—still, I would say, in the thousands. We've got the number of German flights, we had the Netherlands working on flights, and, for a time, I also believe the UK. I would want to give you something a bit more up to date on that, though, in terms of numbers. But we've had a steady track of repatriations coming out of New Zealand. But they are still significant numbers as I understand—and including some foreign nationals who will need to transit through New Zealand if they are to get out of the Pacific, which also there are a number there.

Media: Is the Government looking at wage support for people who are employed by Government-funded organisations, such as a cleaner in a council who's lost work during this time but isn't able to get the wage subsidy?

PM: And sorry, your classification for why they couldn't get the wage subsidy? Because they're casual workers, or?

Media: Government-funded organisation.

PM: Well, for—so you're using the example of a council cleaner.

Media: Yeah, sorry, this is a question on behalf of someone else.

PM: I wouldn't mind getting a bit more detail on that because, ultimately, you don't get it as a Government-funded organisation because we continue to fund you in order to operate continuously through this period. Others outside of that, generally, are able to access the wage subsidy. So I wouldn't mind looking at the example you've given. I've also been asked about casual staff. There is provision within the wage subsidy—as long as an employer lists casual staff—for them to be able to be included within the wage subsidy as well.

Media: We've heard of Government departments sending rent increase notices and chasing people for debt collection. Is that what you'd call compassionate?

PM: What I will say on the issue you've raised around Kāinga Ora, that was an error. That should never have happened. That was an automated letter that was dispatched. Kāinga Ora now are on the phone, they're making, I understand, roughly two thousand calls to apologise to people who received such letters, because, as I say, it was automated, it should never have happened.

Media: Do you acknowledge how distressing that would have been for—

PM: Absolutely. Absolutely I do. And that is why those individuals are being called personally to have that apology given to them and to make sure that people can have any concerns—that they can talk them through with someone on the phone. It should never have happened.

Media: And what about Government departments chasing people for debt at the moment?

PM: Again, I would find that very surprising. If you give me the names of where that's happening, I'll look to fix it, keeping in mind, though, if anyone is misusing the wage subsidy we will go after that. So there is enforcement action happening at the moment, and there might be areas where it's, for instance, the Government enforcing payments to others. So, of course, people through the courts who have to pay reparations to victims or people who need to pay child support subsidy, it's not money to us. It's money much needed for other people, and so there might be some quirks in there.

Media: Golf courses want an exemption under essential services for greens maintenance because they're worried that the results would be catastrophic and they'll have to shut down and not reopen. Why is it taking so long to get that looked at, and will you grant an exemption?

PM: Because the reason that has taken time is that everything has to be viewed through a public health lens. I have had this raised with me. Officials are working on that issue as we speak.

Media: I've got a message on that from Sir Bob Charles. He says, "By four weeks courses will close and never reopen. We need a small amount of maintenance to be carried out. Please look into this." What do you say to that?

PM: So, what we have done in some areas where it is health and safety in the sense that councils have said they want to keep maintenance because rodents become an issue—and then in those areas where it's just a single person, no contact with others, there

has been the ability for that to be managed, because our principles have always been maintain health and safety at the same time. When it comes to those recreational areas, public health lens needs to be our starting point, and that's what's being worked through now.

Media: On the lockdown, there seems to be a little bit of confusion potentially amongst the public that at the end of the lockdown it's life as usual again. Can you explain why that's the case?

PM When we're in the position to move from alert level 4, it will only be from there to alert level 3, so life will still be different. We do want to ease our restrictions but if we move too quickly, if we loosen up too quickly, we will be back to the beginning. No one wants to be in alert level 4 longer than we need to so that's why we need to be so careful as we exit it.

Media: To follow up on that, what are the criteria for schools reopening under level 3? What schools are allowed to be open and what schools aren't?

PM: And so, again, that's where I would caution. You know, we obviously been preparing for distance learning, not because we think we'll be in alert level 4 for a long time but because there may be different situations for different learning levels—so ECE, primary, and secondary. The Minister of Education is again going over the guidelines that were set before alert level 4 to make sure that we've got them all nice and tight, and when we're talking next week about some of the specifics of level 3, we'll be including education in that.

Media: In your opening remarks you mentioned that if we start to relax in two weeks, then we could be back in the starting block. Have you been given advice that it could only take that short amount of time to—

PM: If we left now? Yes.

Media: Can you also provide more information about the guidelines being released next week. How much detail can businesses expect there? Can they expect to be told who's essential and who's—

PM: Yeah. So what we'll do is work from the principles that we did for alert level 4, and that was keeping interaction with one another to a bare minimum, except for essential services. So we will use principles and then some examples. One of the issues is we have tens of thousands of businesses out there, and so often there will be questions that will come up even when we provide principles and so we want to give enough time to work through some of those. So that's why we'll be releasing some of that detail next week.

Media: Just going back on that two-day notice period, essentially, that you're giving them to be able to ramp back up, they will say that's not enough.

PM: No, just to be clear, that's, essentially, what we're doing now—is saying, everyone, prepare for alert level 3. We'll be providing more detailed guidance on what that will look like next week, and then, two days out from when we're due to come to the end of the four weeks, we'll be letting people know whether we are moving out or not. So that's the timeline we're working to. But if you wish to prepare now—and I'd encourage you to do so—the three basic starting points: make sure you look at whether or not you can work with social distancing; can we contact trace all of the customers, all your employees that you work with; and do you, or will you, need PPE? Those are some simple things that we ask people to already prepare for.

Media: Has Minister Parker received legal advice from Crown Law yet regarding *Ruby Princess*?

PM: I've seen some. There is a bit more work to be done, particularly given this is primarily a Customs issue, but work continues. So only preliminary at this stage.

Media: What have you seen so far?

PM: Nothing that I can share with you at this stage because it is only preliminary advice.

Media: Singapore's app has been criticised for needing a really high level of uptake in order for it to be effective. If you have to have half the population using it and you only track 25 percent of actual contacts—

PM: Yes.

Media: —how do you get that uptake in New Zealand?

PM: Well, ultimately, the decision is that we either have something that everyone is forced to use, or we have something that people voluntarily use, but we try and get as much uptake as possible. There are huge issues with forcing people to use apps that track their movement, as you can imagine, so we are opting for apps that people choose to partake in. But I think if people understand that it's one of the things that will help us stay out of stringent measures like alert level 4, then they might be encouraged to take it up. Ashley, did you want to comment on that as well?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, just to add that, again, the use of any technology, including the apps, will always be an adjunct to our core contact tracing functionality. The other thing that we can do, of course, is enhance our ability to get contact details for people by using a range of social media platforms to find people and communicate with them, and that's something we're adding into our process as well.

PM: Yeah. I think it's really important, when you think about contact tracing is think about, before you went into lockdown, in the six days prior, could you name every single person that you were within 2 metres of? And that is the challenge of contact tracing. It's hugely difficult. At alert level 4, it's much, much easier, because you list—if you're following the rules—your bubble. And so that's why it's so important that we have those public health trained, experienced people who can undertake those really intensive interviews. And then we use finding services, Customs, police, airlines, and social media, because in some cases, they might just have a name, nothing else. So that's why even a basic app that has people enrol, register, update information—because our NHI platform doesn't even sometimes have your most up-to-date phone number—all of that will make a difference.

Media: Can and will Parliament sit under alert level 3?

PM: Again, these are some of the issues that we're working into that finer detail around, because, of course, we've already set up arrangements for Parliament that allow people to be at a distance from each other within the debating chamber. And so you may see variations on a full Parliament, but those are things that we need to work through with the Speaker.

Media: Do you want the Parliament to resume [*Inaudible*]

PM: Well, as you've seen by what we've done, we've always wanted to maintain scrutiny while we are using extraordinary powers. We've done that to date through a select committee but, ultimately, everyone's ambition should be to bring back the usual tools of our democracy when we can safely.

Media: [*Inaudible*] about Psa. The Government's been found to have been negligent in letting Psa come here, but not liable for compensation for kiwifruit growers. Do you think this piece of law needs to be looked at?

PM: One of the things I'm going to be cautious about here is even though you've asked about the law generally, this is a case that's been going since 2010, and my understanding is it could still be subject to appeal, and so it still needs to run its course, and then we'll be in a position to answer some of those questions.

Media: In general terms, does it sit with you, morally, that the Crown can't directly be sued for negligence?

PM: Again, asking me for a moral question when an appeal may still be coming—I need to let that run its course.

Media: Prime Minister, about the quarantine hotels, where will those hotels be?

PM: They're across Auckland, as you would expect. That is where we predominantly are having those international flights coming in.

Media: Will you [*Inaudible*] campervans in Christchurch and Auckland as well?

PM: So we do have campervans available. We've been able to accommodate people successfully within hotels, but we have had the availability of campervans, should we need them, keeping in mind that at the moment we have, you know, 40 yesterday but, on average, in the past wee while we've had up to 190. You asked a question on why we didn't move earlier. We had things like Qatar bringing on extra flights. There is talk of some flights resuming so some transit routes opening up for Kiwis. We have to constantly prepare that those numbers might tick up, and that's why we kept that extra capacity.

Media: What assurances can you give people that, if there are people who've tested positive, or who are COVID-positive, that they're not going to pass that on in quarantine? What assurances can give people that they're not going to get COVID-19 in quarantine?

PM: Yeah. I'll hand over to Dr Bloomfield, because public health are managing the quarantines.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: So in that quarantine situation where someone is symptomatic and is being tested, or they have known infection because they were tested when they arrived, then that's a very strict isolation, and any staff or people interacting with them are using PPE. The person is not allowed outside their room. Where it's that managed self-isolation, and what we are looking at is the extent of testing we might use for people coming in, and/or testing before people are released. That's one of the things we are looking at but, again, we have experience now in being able to do this, with the evacuees we brought out of Wuhan. And simple, religiously applied hand washing, use of masks, if necessary, and physical distancing will stop infections being spread.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, on the *Ruby Princess*, you've said previously that four of the cases there were tour guides, interpreters, or drivers; Newsroom's just asking: were all four of those in the Hawke's Bay, or were some from other ports that also hosted the cruise ships?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: They were all Hawke's Bay, so they were local in the Hawke's Bay, and that's where we've seen the local spread is only in the Hawke's Bay.

Media: And just on the clusters that are on the Ministry of Health website, the names of the clusters on the website are quite high level, but in the press conference you described them as Marist School, etc. Why is there a dissimilarity there? Why do you give more detail here and not on the website?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: I think up until the last day or two there was that detail on the website, and for some reason it was downgraded or made more general, so we're reinstating it back to what it was.

PM: We just want to incentivise you being here for these precious moments! All right, we'll just take the last couple, thank you.

Media: Will the use of an app for, given how important contact tracing is—will that need to be in place and voluntary uptake taken before we can move out of the level—

PM: No, no, not necessarily. In fact, obviously, as I've said, this is something that's in train. It will enhance what we're doing, but given the imperfections in every country's app system that I've looked at, it will never be a panacea; it will never solve everything. That's why, as Dr Bloomfield said, today we are auditing our contact tracing to make sure that we are doing everything that we can now to make sure that that is gold standard, and an app will only supplement that.

Media: Ayesha Verrall's talked about the need to be able to trace 7,000 people—contacts—for 1,000 cases. Will we need to be able to do that before we can come out [inaudible]

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Ah, we would if we had a thousand cases, but as you can see, our case numbers are dropping; that's why we went into alert level 4. We've got very good capacity there. In fact, we're not using all of that capacity now, because the case numbers are dropping, and of course our intention is to get the case numbers down as low as possible, if not to zero, and then be able to stamp out any cases and any outbreaks that do perhaps pop up.

Media: On those clusters, Dr Bloomfield, are you going to give us more detail about, for example, the Auckland workplace that I think has 25?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: We will provide detail about, for example, the school or an event where it's pertinent, but in some instances we will withhold the name and location of the workplace if we think it's going to create privacy issues. That's the only reason.

Media: It's a significant cluster—there's a large number of people affected by this—

PM: And people who are affected get a phone call from the Ministry of Health, and so if they're affected, they know.

Media: Are you happy with our stocks of PPE, and, if so, why are Waikato Hospital staff saying they still don't have enough?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yes, I'm very happy with our stocks of PPE, and every DHB, including hospitals, has plenty of PPE. If there are individual staff members where they feel there is an issue, then they are and do raise it through their unions, and that's why we worked closely with unions to ensure that staff are confident not just in the supply but also in the availability and use.

Media: Is all of the pandemic stock in good condition that can be sent out, or has some of it deteriorated?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Some of it has deteriorated, as we've found, and there was a story that 10 percent of the N95 masks at Hutt Hospital—the elastics were found to have deteriorated, and they are being replaced, but that doesn't mean there wasn't PPE available because it was only 10 percent of the stock there.

PM: OK, last—

Media: Is it just at Hutt Hospital or is that more widespread—sorry?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: There had been some other hospitals that we'd found earlier, but of course, then we have plenty—we had the 18 million in our pandemic stock to replace it.

PM: Last question.

Media: How much is the Government expecting managed quarantine to cost, and are we paying full rate for those rooms?

PM: Oh, as you would expect, we are seeking to make sure that we maximise savings for taxpayers at a time when, of course, demand on hotels is very low. So while we're under way with negotiating some of those contracts, I'm not going to give a per room rate, but I can assure you we'll be seeking best value for money for New Zealanders.

Media: [Inaudible] cost to the Government?

PM: Again, it's purely speculative, because there's such huge fluctuations in the numbers coming in every day, but I'm sure you'll be able to make some estimates based on the numbers that we have, keeping in mind also there's the cost of provision of food. Very last.

Media: Thank you, Prime Minister. I have a question from a southern newsroom. The Bluff cluster—was it linked to international travel, and the cases were confirmed prior to lockdown, but the Ministry of Health was really slow to report this cluster. What was the hold-up on that?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: So two questions there. In response to the first one: yes, the indexed case was associated with international travel, and then, secondly, it takes some time before the case numbers get up to a level where you know you've got a cluster. And then, once they do reach that level, then, of course, we start investigating it as a cluster and then reporting on it as a cluster. So on that one, actually, there was quite rapid action. And also people came from around the country. So actually, associated with that event there was a small cluster in Wellington, there's a larger cluster of about 25 in the Waikato, so they're all associated with that original event.

And if I can just take a quick minute just to give you that accurate figure of the total lab tests to date: 51,165. And, secondly, we now have data on the laboratory testing by district health board and by ethnicity, and that includes both the rates and also the positivity rate, and we will be putting that on our website too this afternoon.

PM: OK. On that note, thanks everyone. Have a good weekend.

conclusion of press conference