

PM AND ALL OF GOVERNMENT PRESS CONFERENCE: THURSDAY, 23 APRIL

Hon Kris Fafoi: Right, good afternoon, everyone. Today, I'm announcing the first of two media sector support packages to help media affected by COVID-19. Today's support package is a first step to provide immediate and urgent help for the media sector. It's well known that New Zealand's media sector has been facing challenges well before COVID-19, but the disruption from COVID has compounded the difficulties, with significant losses of advertising. Without Government intervention, we risk losing the skills and range of perspectives which provide important independent news and information that New Zealanders rely on, especially at times like these, so we've developed an immediate support package in consultation with the media sector.

The first package focuses on initiatives that can provide immediate or near-term assistance. It's aimed at helping media in print, online, and broadcast channels at national, regional, and local community levels. The initiatives in the first package are reducing the costs payable by media organisations for transmission and New Zealand On Air - funded content by funding 100 percent of Kordia and other television and FM transmission fees for six months, 100 percent of the AM transmission fees for six months, an 80 percent reduction in media organisations' New Zealand On Air contribution fees for the 2020-21 financial year. The Government will also be purchasing central government news media subscriptions in advance for the 2020-21 financial year, and encouraging Government-funded agencies to increase their uptake of news media subscriptions. There's also the delegated authority for me and the Minister of Finance to approve targeted assistance on the advice of officials to ensure the support fits the different needs of the various media organisations that request it.

And we also state a commitment to build on the Local Democracy Reporting project which has been trialled in the regions around the country over the past 12 months, funding journalists to focus on reporting about publicly appointed elected officials or organisations such as local councils, committee boards, and DHBs. We see the further development of this work as part of a second longer-term strategy which will provide further support to retain journalists; regional and national news and current affairs coverage, including local news; maintain media plurality; and make sure regulation is suitable. Further announcements on the longer-term strategies will be made in due course.

We will work with media entities to make sure that whatever access they have to both these short-term measures and longer-term assistance is on the basis of their needs and future viability. The direct cost of this package is \$50 million. Māori Television, Te Māngai Pāho, and the National Pacific Radio Trust have also been involved in helping shape the initiatives in this package. As they're primarily Crown funded, they are not impacted to the same extent as commercially funded media. However, they could see benefits in the waiving of transmission costs, and Māori Television could see savings from New Zealand On Air contributions.

Officials are finalising the details of how media can access the support package. The intent is to make this as swift as possible. This morning, I spoke to a number of media chief executives to give them a heads up on this package. They were thankful but, like me, understand that this package alone will not ensure the sustainability of the sector. We will need to continue to work with them to design the second phase and, importantly, move swiftly if conditions change.

Finally, I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of the media in keeping New Zealanders up to date with the news and important information during this time of crisis. It has certainly been appreciated by the public. I'm happy to take any questions.

Media: Where's the commitment that the Government will prioritise advertising on local media rather than on Google and Facebook?

Hon Kris Fafoi: That is certainly going to be part, Tova, of the second tranche of work that we're looking at. This first package is aimed at immediate cash-flow assistance for

media companies, so that is why that's made up of the transmission fees, and some of those direct conversations we'll have with media organisations. Certainly, those conversations are being had about the second tranche of work, and already our Treasury has been in touch with our counterparts across the Tasman to work in tandem with them.

Media: Can you make a commitment that that will be coming, because that was one of the things that, across the board, media bosses were—

Hon Kris Fafoi: I can make a commitment that that's certainly going to be one of the important discussions as part of the second package.

Media: And the \$11.1 million discretionary fund, will State broadcasters be able to access that as well?

Hon Kris Fafoi: Yes, they will, because I think most of the conversations around that will be about bringing forward Government advertising spending. Only one entity could do that in a large way. The issue with that is that, in our conversations directly with the media companies, they are all in different positions and we wanted to make sure that, while we might be able to assist with cash flow, we also wanted to make sure that there was prudent spending of taxpayer money.

Media: Have you had any indication from media bosses about how many jobs this will save?

Hon Kris Fafoi: No, I haven't. They were very short phone calls this morning that I had. I want to stress that this is the first package, and this alone will not be able to cure all the problems that the media sector has. I think some of the long-term solutions will certainly be part of the discussions and, of course, some of the commitment that the Government will make towards the second package.

Media: Minister, there doesn't appear to be a lot in here for print, but particularly Stuff. Are they on their own, or do you expect them to make—

Hon Kris Fafoi: No, they're not. As I say, I have spoken to a number of chief executives. I will be having bespoke conversations with those entities about how they might be able to access some of that more flexible funding. And, again, it depends on the nature of the entity, as are those discussions that they'll be having with officials to figure out how that can be of assistance to them.

Media: Would you not agree, though, that the package is very weighted in favour of broadcasting? And can you explain how it's going to help print and digital?

Hon Kris Fafoi: Well, I think that's because of the nature of the cost and immediacy that we want. It's expensive for transmission costs for the likes of broadcasters, and it is immediate relief that we're trying to get through. The flexibility that we have within that \$11.1 million of funding will allow us to have some of those bespoke conversations with specific entities to make sure that, if we can assist them with initiatives like bringing Government advertising forward, we might be able to advance that.

Media: So do you not believe, then, that there's a need for urgency to help out print and digital entities?

Hon Kris Fafoi: There's an urgency to help out everyone. The nature of the funding envelope is weighted purely because of the nature of the cost of some of the media platforms. In this case, being transmission, it's six months' worth of television, FM, and AM frequency fees, which, off the top of my head, is roughly \$20 million. That's the cost of transmission fees.

Media: Hundreds of our print colleagues have lost their jobs already during the COVID crisis. So where is the additional support, the triaging for the print industry?

Hon Kris Fafoi: So, as I said, this is a first package of two media support packages. There are some fundamental issues about the structure and nature of the media sector, which were present before COVID, that we want to make sure are addressed when we take

a look at the second support package. This isn't about making sure we prop up failing businesses; it's about making sure that we can support the important function of journalism in New Zealand. And I think that's what we need to make sure that we are focusing on, in terms of the second package as well.

Media: Is that a suggestion that the Government would get behind the Stuff/ME merger, for example?

Hon Kris Fafoi: I'm not going to go into any of those hypotheticals at the moment. We've had discussions with nearly—with every media entity. I want to tell you they're working very hard behind the scenes to try and make this work, but those discussions have been commercially sensitive. So a lot of the answers of the type that I'll be giving today might not necessarily be helpful, but if we need to take policy action, I'm going to have to keep a lot of the information that has been given to me—commercially sensitive—to myself.

Media: That online advertising, though—it would provide immediate relief, which is what you're saying. So why isn't it in this first package? Why are we having to wait for the second package?

Hon Kris Fafoi: Because it takes time to effect those changes. We're having discussions with some of those platforms very soon. That is not something that can be turned around fast. We were getting pressure to make sure we did something in the short term to have an immediate adrenalin hit for the sector. This is what this is, while we make sure we continue to work on the second package, which will look at issues like competition and like issues around online advertising.

Media: Are you willing to let some of those large legacy media companies fail and lose hundreds of jobs?

Hon Kris Fafoi: Look, at the end of the day, some of those decisions aren't in our hands. We've spoken to some of the owners of media entities but not all, and so some of those decisions won't necessarily be made by us, but some of the principles that are driving actions in the short and the long term are media plurality, making sure that we support the function of journalism, and making sure we can retain as many jobs as we possibly can.

Media: So you accept that some of the [*Inaudible*] will fail?

Hon Kris Fafoi: I'm not going to be talking about that openly, Thomas, because some of that might draw on information that I have been given on a commercially sensitive basis.

Media: What is the state of TVNZ's finances right now?

Hon Kris Fafoi: I'm not going to go into that—again, because that's commercially sensitive information.

Media: Stuff is the largest employer of journalists in the country and also has the largest number of local newsrooms, yet it receives the least from this package. Can you explain your thinking on that?

Hon Kris Fafoi: I guess, again, a lot of that comes down, if you're going to put it in the context of the overall envelope, Andrea—is transmission costs are high. There's also a conversation that I've had with all the chief executives today that there is the ability through that \$11.1 million appropriation within the \$50 million to have bespoke conversations with every entity about what support might look like for them. So I can't give you exactly what the support out of that might look like for Stuff, but I'm aware of the nature of it and the importance of it in the media environment, and we're continuing to have discussions with them.

Media: Did you look at the Australian model, where they're requiring entities like Facebook to share revenue with the media companies?

Hon Kris Fafoi: Yes, we are going to be looking at that, and that discussion is going to be part of the second package. And as I said at the outset, Treasury officials have been

in contact with their relevant counterparts across the Tasman to make sure that we can work with them.

Media: Are you drawing a line saying there will be no bail-outs for media companies, even if they are on the brink of collapse?

Hon Kris Fafoi: Our principles are making sure that we support media plurality, making sure that we support the function of journalism, and making sure that we support as many jobs as possible. As well as this media support package, most media entities, if they are able to, have accessed initiatives like the wage subsidy, etc. So we're trying to do as much as we can in the short term to give us some time to have some of the wider discussions that were plaguing the media sector before COVID happened, and I think if we're all honest with each other, some of those discussions need to be had. [*Interruption*]

Media: Sorry, can I just finish that line of questioning. Following on from Thomas' questioning, you are willing to let media organisations fail?

Hon Kris Fafoi: We'll deal with everything on a case-by-case basis as it comes to us, but our principles are making sure we support plurality, jobs, and the function of journalism. We could stay here for hours and throw out every hypothetical about what might happen; a lot of those hypotheticals I won't answer because they are hypotheticals and I would be answering on the basis of commercially sensitive information that has been given to me. I have to work in good faith with some of the chief executives of this company in order for us to make sure we've got a long-term and sustainable media.

Media: Thank you. In terms of subscriptions, I note that \$1.3 million has been allocated for the 2020-2021 financial year. Just by way of context, how much was spent in the 2019-2020 year?

Hon Kris Fafoi: I'm not sure about that, Jenèe; I'll have to come back with that information.

Media: So is that \$1.3 an increase, or is it, basically, just the same as what's already been [*Inaudible*]?

Hon Kris Fafoi: I don't know the base figure—I would hope it's an increase. But the feedback that we had from operators of smaller subscription services was that the Government wasn't pulling its weight to make sure—Government departments weren't pulling its weight to make sure that it paid for its fair share of usage of their media.

Media: Minister, you touched on it briefly, but could you detail the impact this will have on Māori media?

Hon Kris Fafoi: Yeah, look, in a technical sense, obviously, they have audio transmission costs as well, and may to some degree have New Zealand On Air costs that they would have when they get funded for New Zealand On Air. Just like every other media entity, they will be able to access that relief, as well as some of the work that Minister Mahuta was doing with the Māori media sector shift before COVID. Being part of the conversations that are had around the second package around the look of a long-term, sustainable model for media—Māori media will, obviously, have to be pretty central to that.

Media: The subscription fund—is that ring-fenced for actual subscriptions, or, you know, all of New Zealand media now? I think print media—sorry, and digital media—operate some sort of subscription—sorry, donation model. Will you be allowing that to be used for donations as well?

Hon Kris Fafoi: My understanding is it's more for the smaller type of subscription services.

Media: And the \$11 million fund—what is that for? Is that a media boss picks up the phone and says, "We're in trouble."?

Hon Kris Fafoi: Yeah, look, as I say, every conversation that we have with media entities has a certain similarity to it, but they're all in different financial positions. Initiatives

like bringing forward Government advertising spend could come out of that, and certainly that was the tone of some of the conversations I had with some of the managers and chief executives that I've had today. Again, we want to make sure that we're being able to assist cash flow for some of those entities if that's the position they're in, but also, around viability of an entity, we need to make sure that that money is spent prudently. So they will have to speak with Treasury and the Ministry of Culture and Heritage officials to make sure that we get that right.

Media: How long do you think it will last for? Pretty fast, looking at how much—

Hon Kris Fafoi: It depends on what the particular needs are. You know, again, we've designed this package in consultation with media companies, and some have given us an idea of how much Government spending on advertising they've had in the previous 12 months. And that's helped us get to some figures to have available for this, again, first and short-term support package.

Media: How likely is it, do you think, that going forward in the next couple of years we're going to see a smaller media market in New Zealand?

Hon Kris Fafoi: I'm not sure if you can guarantee smaller, but I think you can guarantee—

Media: Less companies?

Hon Kris Fafoi: No, I think we can guarantee it's different. That all depends on how particular media companies might want to change their business models. But, again, I think there's a natural level of function of journalism that our Government wants to see to make sure we've got local journalism, national journalism, investigative journalism that most companies that are in the media now, to be fair to say, are struggling to provide. So if there's some way that we can do that through beefing up what is the local democracy reporting model at the moment—and, as I said, it's very early stages; it's only a 12-month pilot run last year, but bringing that to a head and seriously investing in that is one of the things that we're looking to commit to as part of the second media support package.

Media: Can you give any further examples of bespoke solutions aside from the Government [*Inaudible*]?

Hon Kris Fafoi: Oh, look, there are plenty. Again, I might be giving away some details that particular companies might be in, but I've chosen that one because that came through as a [*Inaudible*] through almost all companies that have had Government spending.

Media: Minister, there's an enduring perception that the Government's quite happy to bolster TVNZ and RNZ and let the rest of the sector take its chances. What's your response to that?

Hon Kris Fafoi: I think it's wrong. Certainly, pre-COVID we had a look at the challenges that the media sector had and we saw it as our responsibility to make sure that public broadcasting continued to be strong, given the challenges that the competitive market, or the open market, was having. COVID has obviously changed that because the advertising revenue challenges that most commercial media players had pre-COVID are obviously a lot sharper as we go through COVID. That is why we are here now with a \$50 million package in the short term to give the media sector an adrenalin hit to make sure that we have the time and the ability to have to have the wider conversations with the sector as a whole to see how we can make the media sector more sustainable.

Media: Can you please explain why you're cutting and subsidising RNZ's transmission fees, when, effectively, the Government's paying those anyway, aren't they, via RNZ?

Hon Kris Fafoi: Yes—to a degree—I'm not sure how much that is within the overall package of transmission fees, but there is a degree of money go-round there, but they are, again, another transmission company that might pay fees to Kordia or themselves. So I'm sure Treasury will sort that out.

Media: What's the point in that when RNZ hasn't lost any funding during COVID?

Hon Kris Fafoi: Well, it's not about, necessarily, losing the funding; the parameters of that is if you pay a transmission fee, you don't have to pay for it for the next six months.

Media: [*Inaudible*] the Government's paying it, anyway, for RNZ.

Hon Kris Fafoi: And I'm sure Treasury will sort that out. My understanding is that it's a minimal amount of money.

Media: The advertising spend isn't necessarily new money; it's just bringing it forward—it's more of a cash-flow measure rather than a bolstering measure.

Hon Kris Fafoi: Yes. That's correct.

Media: Is there any sense that you might want to, you know, boost the level of advertising—

Hon Kris Fafoi: That was one of the things that was talked about in some of the consultation that MCH did with media companies in the lead-up to this package. And I think it's one of the issues that we'll look at for the second tranche.

Media: What was the mood of those media execs this morning?

Hon Kris Fafoi: It's a challenge. And, you know, we spoke to them possibly about a week and a half, two weeks, ago, as we were putting the package together, and for some, things had moved on significantly. I think, as I say, while they welcome the package, they know that there's more work to do to make sure that they can have a sustainable future. And I think, as, you know, no one is not susceptible to the challenges, as in every sector, but, you know, they're trying their hardest to make sure that they can keep their businesses sustainable and people in jobs.

Media: Is the RNZ/TVNZ merger still part of your thinking as part of that second tranche?

Hon Kris Fafoi: Let's say that's on ice. We've asked PricewaterhouseCoopers who are doing the business case for that to continue that work. They're going to deliver it in July, I understand. While it's on ice, it doesn't necessarily mean it's dead; I just think there are wider issues for us to contend with at the moment with the wider sector. But, again, I think making sure that we have a strong public media is extremely important. But that decision, which was at the forefront of our minds pre-COVID is not necessarily right in front of us right now.

Media: Can you please tell us how much more the Government has spent over the last year on advertising on the likes of Google and Facebook and social media versus local media, and how much that's increased, perhaps, over a five-year period?

Hon Kris Fafoi: The advice that I've given is that the Government has spent—and it might not be total but I think it's pretty close—is about \$110 million for the year '18-'19, I believe, is the figures that I've been given. And about 30 percent of that was to online platforms. The rest of it was television, radio, print, [*Inaudible*], etc. Again, we're digging into those numbers as we get into the second tranche, because we need to answer the question about how much of an affect precisely is Google and Facebook having not just with Government advertising spend, but across the board, to make sure that we're informed when we look at the issues such as what the Australians are doing at the moment.

Media: When will we expect that second tranche, though? As you say, for media companies, this is moving really quickly at the moment—

Hon Kris Fafoi: Yeah, I can't give you an exact date on that, but we are aware of the urgency.

Media: Weeks or months? Budget?

Hon Kris Fafoi: I would say weeks—please don't hold me to that. But, again, we're aware of the urgency.

Media: So is that roughly \$33 million a year goes to Google and Facebook and advertisers—

Hon Kris Fafoi: Of 110? I think it was about 110. So I think it was about 30 percent, or something like that. I can get you the figures, but, again, I don't think it was precise, but I think it's pretty much in the ball park for Government advertising spend.

Media: So you're spending more than half on advertising on Google and Facebook than you are on the media support package?

Hon Kris Fafoi: Pardon?

Media: You're spending more than half the amount on advertising on Google and Facebook media than you are on the media support package.

Hon Kris Fafoi: And I would stress that this is the first tranche of two media support packages.

Media: And with the second tranche—will the budget be roughly the same, or will there be more, or is it more of a kind of a structural thing?

Hon Kris Fafoi: I would like to be more ambitious. I think, you know, we see this as an adrenalin shot for short-term support, and, you know, while we are yet to have the conversation with the powers that be, I think if we're dealing with structural issues with the media, then I think we have to think seriously about—if we look at upgrading the local democracy reporting scheme—being serious about it.

Media: Minister, what's been the cost of the new information thing on Facebook that pops up at the top that the Government has done—sort of official COVID information?

Hon Kris Fafoi: I don't know the answer to that question; I can get that for you.

Media: This media package was expected last week. What happened—why the delay?

Hon Kris Fafoi: I wouldn't necessarily call it a delay; I think I said in the select committee last Wednesday that it'd take about a week. We got it through our committee yesterday, and I'm here on Thursday announcing it.

Media: Outside of the \$11.1 million which hasn't been signed yet, how much money is specifically going to go to Stuff, which is the country's largest employer of journalists?

Hon Kris Fafoi: Well, we can't answer that yet. Again, those bespoke conversations have to be had with that particular entity, and other entities, to give both Treasury officials and the Minister of Finance and me some assurance that it's appropriate.

Media: Is there an option to extend the amount of time that those transmission fees would be cut?

Hon Kris Fafoi: Yeah, there is. So we've said six months. As I said to chief executives this morning, my crystal ball isn't that flash, but we'll keep an eye on the situation for, you know, the next three, four, or five months about that particular initiative when the time comes.

Media: Could that form part of a more long-term measure to keep the industry going?

Hon Kris Fafoi: I think at this stage the Minister of Finance might not necessarily be happy if I committed to that, but it's certainly something that we're OK to look at in, you know, four or five months' time.

Media: Could I ask you a personal question—I know you've been a Minister for a while and an MP for a long time, but you were also a journalist once—how bizarre is this, or how hard has it been for you to hear about the concerns of the industry and [*Inaudible*] this support package?

Hon Kris Fafoi: They say once a journalist, always a journalist. And I might get myself in trouble with my current colleagues about that. But I fundamentally believe in the function of journalism in New Zealand. We might not like getting harassed, standing here, all the

time, but it's an important part of the democratic process, and we see that and we understand that and we need to be held to account. And, to a degree, we think there has been a bit of market failure in the last couple of years, which is why we saw it fit to bolster public media. COVID came along and has changed a lot of things. But, you know, I'm not going to talk about jobs, but I think the function of journalism in this country is extremely important. We're a small country, and even though, I think, we might think we're doing a great job, being asked questions about what we're doing is extremely important.

Media: You probably wouldn't call questioning harassing, though.

Hon Kris Faafoi: It depends on which side of the podium you're on. Thanks everyone.

PM: Kia ora koutou katoa. It's day 29 of COVID-19 alert level 4. We'll start, as per usual, with Dr Bloomfield.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Thank you, Prime Minister. Tēnā koutou katoa. So today we have two new confirmed cases and one new probable case of COVID-19 to report. However, there is actually no change in the total number of COVID-19 cases in New Zealand, which remains at 1,451—the same as yesterday. Let me briefly explain. There were three cases we reported yesterday who were confirmed cases off the *Greg Mortimer* ship, where people had been repatriated from Uruguay. However, we understand that their original testing was done in Uruguay, and we are checking with the authorities there as to whether they have already reported them to the WHO, to make sure that the World Health Organization totals are accurate. So, to report—again, just to reiterate—two new confirmed and one new probable case.

Our laboratories processed a record 6,480 tests yesterday, so if you look at the new confirmed cases, less than 0.05 percent were positive, and we've now processed 101,277 tests for COVID-19. All the cases we're reporting today are linked to existing cases. Sadly, today, I have two further deaths to report as a result of COVID-19 infection. A patient has died who has been very unwell in intensive care in Dunedin Hospital with COVID-19 since 7 April. She was in her 60s and had an underlying health condition. While her family have not been able to visit her over the past few weeks, arrangements were made for them to be with her last night as she passed away.

The second death is a resident at Rosewood Rest Home in Christchurch. This man, in his 70s, passed away in the hospital-level wing of that unit last night. He was not part of the group that had been transferred to Burwood Hospital. The man had an underlying condition, and while he had tested negative for COVID-19, he was considered a probable case based on his exposure and symptoms. And, as I have said before, these probable cases are treated as if they are positive, and managed in the same way, and we are including them in all our statistics—including our mortality statistics.

Our sympathies go out to the families of both of these people, and, once again, we are reminded of the serious threat that this infection poses to individuals and our communities.

Today, there are eight people in hospital with COVID-19, and one person is in ICU in Middlemore Hospital. There are still the same 16 significant clusters, and four additional cases have now been linked to those clusters.

Some brief comments on health services under level 3, in advance of heading into that alert level. So hospitals remain open for emergency and acute care, of course, and I encourage all people to seek acute care for whatever their condition, through either Healthline or their GP or at the hospital. Some elective services, including surgery and radiology, will be provided under alert level 3, and more detail will follow on that.

In aged residential care, only family visits for palliative and compassionate care reasons will be considered, and that will be on a case-by-case basis. General practices of course will be open, as they have been through alert level 4, and they will be continuing to conduct virtual consultations as much as possible. If you have symptoms of COVID-19 or respiratory symptoms, please seek help through Healthline or by calling ahead to your regular doctor. Community pharmacies remain open, dental services may provide urgent face-to-face

appointments under alert level 3 but not routine dental care. Community midwives will continue to do the fantastic work they do with pregnant women out in the community, using virtual means where possible but also face to face. There will be an allowance for some face-to-face services for physiotherapy, podiatry, and optometry, and so on, where urgent care is required, but they will continue to provide services as much as possible virtually. And, finally, community mental health service appointments will continue to be done by virtual means, or by phone where possible; face-to-face appointments if necessary.

And you'll have seen the Minister of Health just announce that he's asked me to do a quick stocktake around all our district health boards on the processes they are using to distribute PPE to our providers based in the community, so we can get an idea of what PPE is going out, how quickly they are responding to orders, and how any concerns are dealt with. Thank you, Prime Minister.

PM: Thank you, Dr Bloomfield. Later today, the Director of Civil Defence and Emergency Management, Sarah Stuart-Black, will give an update on what our civil defence groups across the country have been doing to support vulnerable New Zealanders. She'll also be joined by Police Commissioner Andy Coster for a briefing.

The work that's been done by our civil defence group may be going unnoticed to the vast majority of New Zealanders while everyone is in their bubbles, but it is work that keeps people who would otherwise be without fed, warm, and well. We have been working hard to ensure that we're meeting need where it exists, which is why yesterday we put another \$30 million into our civil defence groups—so they can keep providing food parcels, household goods, and accommodation where it's required—and that follows the immediate assistance you'll remember some time ago of \$27 million put in to support that work.

And so, on the ground, 16 local civil defence groups are doing what they do best. They're coordinating across all Government agencies, organisations including NGOs, iwi, and community-based groups. While COVID-19 may seem like a different kind of emergency to what we've dealt with in recent years, like floods and fires, the role of civil defence is very much the same: ensuring communities, individuals, families, and whānau have the support they need. There is an 0800 number for every group that people can call if they are out of supplies or struggling to get basic food. They've been providing emergency accommodation, a stop-gap service before they are referred to MBIE's temporary accommodation service.

This is business as usual for them, but they also now have powers activated by the state of national emergency in support of the COVID-19 response, as you're all well aware. So far, that's been used for things like closing roads to prevent vehicle access to back country to stop activities that might result in rescue activity. In Taranaki, they have moved on freedom campers. In Canterbury, they have requisitioned a car park for use as a community-based assessment centre. Coordination is a role not to be underestimated. It's what helps get what is required to those who need it most, and I do want to pass on my thanks to the amazing work that's being done by those civil defence groups in our local areas.

A short word on hunting. While food parcels keep families fed, we know that in many parts of New Zealand, hunting is also a part of providing for many people's families and whānau. You would have seen that decisions have now been made for this activity in alert level 3. Hunting can go ahead under alert level 3, so long as you stay in your region, so long as you stay in your bubble, and we're asking that people please don't put themselves at risk of needing rescue. So that means don't use quad bikes, off-road motorbikes, or any motorised vehicles for the purposes of hunting.

DOC land is closed for tramping and other activities, and also for hunting, at level 3. On private land, you'll, of course, need landowners' permission. Hunting is an important part of life for many New Zealanders. In many places around the country, it fills freezers for the months ahead. It also rids farmland of pests. These restrictions allow for it to happen safely and in a way that minimises the risk of losing the great progress that we've made and also

is in keeping with the principles that we've set out for alert level 3 around travel, around bubbles, and around activity.

We've also had discussions with Fish & Game about the duck hunting season. As many of you will know, the season is gazetted in advance and was due to begin on 2 May. Cabinet was concerned that under the level 3 guidelines for hunting, some people would be excluded from the season, perhaps in part because they lived at too great a distance to where they may need to be. There was also concern that if it started soon and people weren't able to take part, it would end up being a shorter season for some people. For that reason, the duck hunting season will go ahead in the second weekend after New Zealand moves to alert level 2. The season, once it gets under way, will be extended to make up for the delay. I know this will be disappointing for many, But we recognise that opening weekend is quite a social event for many people, and we still must reduce down contact at level 3 as much as possible. This decision means all those who usually take part in duck hunting will be able to, just on a slightly different time frame than otherwise. I also want to be clear that hunting will be able to resume normally at level 2 once we get there. Just, today is not that day.

On Saturday, Anzac Day, I will be one of many New Zealanders who will take part in an initiative called "Stand At Dawn". The RSA has encouraged all of us to commemorate our service personnel by standing at the end of our driveways or near our letterboxes at 6 a.m.—to stand at dawn. I know how hard it will be this year, our first Anzac Day in history where services have been cancelled due to COVID-19, but that doesn't mean we can't show our support as a collective. As dawn breaks, we can stand at the end of those driveways, and together and silent, and pay tribute to those we should never forget. We can still take time to pause, reflect, and pay our respects to the people who have given so much to us. This year, we are calling for all Kiwis worldwide to stand at their letterbox, their front door, their balcony, or their essential place of work at 6 a.m. on 25 April. The official dawn service broadcast will be on RNZ National radio at 6 a.m. and will include an address by the Minister of Defence and Minister for Veterans, Ron Mark. If anyone wants to find out more details, I encourage you to visit standatdawn.com.

And so, in the spirit of recognising those who have been a part of our COVID-19 response, today I want to thank the New Zealand Defence Force past, present, and future, for all that you do to keep peace, to keep us safe, to help us recover from natural disasters, to help our Pacific neighbours, to reflect our strength of spirit across the world, and more recently for your work on COVID-19. Some 60 expert planners and logistics personnel have helped with central government operations, such as health and police centres, as well as regional emergency operations centres. More than 600 have helped to manage isolation facilities and distribute care packages to those in need. This comes alongside usual work such as search and rescue, and disaster relief. I'd like to make special mention of the crews from 5 Squadron and 40 Squadron of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, who have also been flying relief flights in support of our Pacific neighbours in Vanuatu, Fiji, and Tonga, who have been hard hit by tropical cyclone Harold. We, as always, are grateful for your service. Thank you.

I'm now happy to take your questions.

Media: How many people have recovered?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: The number of people who have recovered has increased by 29, and it is now 1,065.

Media: Have you been in touch with that family connected to the Dunedin fatality? They were on radio this morning saying that they'd been given false hope from these press conferences by saying that the person was stable.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yes. So I haven't personally, but I know the medical officer of health has and we, through our comms team, cleared the statement I have made today with the family. So, yes, prior to yesterday, the information I had was that the person who has subsequently died was in critical condition, and yesterday it said "stable", which reflected the fact there had been no change. But I am very sorry because I think, from that story, that

did create some anxiety and concern for the family. So I'm sorry that that happened, and I am certainly happy to be in touch with them personally if they would like to.

PM: We've also talked about, in future, maybe distinctions that talk about people being in ICU without necessarily the breakdown of their status within ICU, because, in this case, perhaps the health terminology will mean different things to different people. No one wants to create any kind of extra additional distress for families, as obviously has been caused in this case.

Media: Can you clarify the case-by-case basis on which family members will be able to visit their loved ones in hospital?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Sorry, do you mean under current—

Media: Under level 3.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Under level 3, yes, there is some new guidance going up on our website around this, and so that will be at the discretion of the senior clinician if a person does have COVID-19, and there will be provision if the clinician feels it's safe—there will be provision for a family member to visit, and PPE will be provided and its use will be instructed so that will keep the family member safe.

Media: So there are no changes under level 4? Is that right?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Sorry?

Media: There are no changes in that regard?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: No changes under level 4. That's an intention under level 3.

Media: You were speaking before about under level 3, if someone is in palliative care or end-of-life care, allowing visitors. The website says that visitors from the extended bubble with no suspicion of COVID-19 will be allowed one at a time, but that doesn't specify that that's just for palliative care.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: You mean—that was in aged residential care facilities that I was talking about? The arrangement in aged residential care is still no visiting, except in the circumstances of where it's a palliative situation, and then compassionate visiting will be organised through the facility manager.

Media: What about in hospitals—people will be able to visit?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: The visiting policy is different in hospitals. For people without COVID-19, anyway, there is an ability under alert level 3 for individual family members to visit.

Media: On that Burwood group, are you able to give us an update of how many remain either confirmed or probable cases and what their conditions are?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: I don't have that information but I will seek out that information and we can make that available.

PM: Certainly, it is the case, isn't it, Dr Bloomfield, that there are, obviously, a number around Rosewood who have been identified as having contracted COVID-19, and, you know, devastatingly, of course, you're seeing then the impact of that on a vulnerable community. And so when we saw those initial deaths, it's, obviously, indicative of the fact that when it reaches those vulnerable communities, it is devastating. But there were a number who were positive.

Media: Is it still the case, though, that, I guess—we spoke a couple of weeks back with you and you said it is possible that we'll see more deaths. Is it still quite a—or have we passed the worst of it with this group of people, or is it still a really big concern?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, if you think about the unit in which the infection happened and the people who were transferred to Burwood, these are people with quite advanced underlying conditions anyway, and so we have seen further deaths, as I alluded

to might happen, and there may well be others. As with the death today, even when there isn't a positive test, as there was in this case, we are being inclusive to make sure we are capturing any death that could be COVID-19 - related. But this is the group that is the most vulnerable and tends to have the worst outcomes from this infection.

Media: How common is it that we get these negative tests? We haven't, kind of, heard about that too much before.

PM: We talked a little bit in the beginning about it.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yes, I think right from the start we've talked about the fact, and that's one of the reasons that we are thoughtful about when we're using testing, because a negative test in—for example, you know, sometimes we've seen cases that are still classified as probable even though they may have had repeated negative swabs. And that doesn't reflect a problem with the testing; it, I think, underscores our inclusive approach for making sure we are capturing and treating any probable cases as if they were a case, and acting accordingly.

Media: Prime Minister, you mentioned yesterday that provided that they collaborate with police and operate appropriately, that these largely iwi-based checkpoints—that you're OK with them. When we move to level 3, will you still be comfortable with these checkpoints operating?

PM: Yeah, to the degree that they are working with civil defence and police, because, keeping in mind, it is only the police and civil defence who are lawfully able to stop people. And so I'm comfortable with the message I've received from the police that they're working well with communities on the ground where some of these checkpoints have existed to make sure that they are operating within the law and with the best interests of the community at heart.

Media: And to you, Dr Bloomfield, people have approached us—people in the Māori community have approached us—asking why there isn't data on ethnicity testing by region. Why is that?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: We just haven't done the analysis, but we can provide that. We've provided an updated analysis in the last few days by ethnicity and by region, and we can go further and do the breakdown by region—acknowledging that in some of the regions, the numbers are relatively small, so there will be maybe small numbers in some of those groups. But yes, we're happy to do that.

Media: So, continuing on with that then, and publishing those and making those publicly available—that is in the works, then, and if so, when might that happen?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: It can be done, because when we publish those laboratory data, we are linking them to the NHI number. Now, we don't get a 100 percent match, but we get a 96 percent match, and then the NHI carries information about age, ethnicity, and so on. And the ethnicity is prioritised, so it has Māori prioritised. So we can do that. I'll talk to the team when I get back there today.

Media: Prime Minister, should New Zealanders be able to get a refund from Air New Zealand rather than just credit for cancelled flights—particularly those who are now in hardship?

PM: That's not something I've had raised with me, so a bit difficult for me to make a statement off the cuff. I'm sure Air New Zealand have been doing some work around, you know, what is fair under these current circumstances. If you wouldn't mind, I wouldn't mind taking a look at the issue before just giving you a response.

Media: Do you think it would be fair for Air New Zealand to tell people they're not entitled to a refund or a credit because their flight is still departing?

PM: Sorry, is it reasonable for them to say that they've—I mean, look, it's obvious to people that many of the flights in question are not still departing.

Media: But if they are still departing—Air New Zealand has in some cases said no refund, no credit, they could be still going.

PM: Yeah, again, I would want to just go and look at some of the circumstances under which this is being applied. We are asking people, though, to be fair and reasonable under the circumstances. I know that there will be many people who will have trips booked that just aren't possible to undertake now. So if you would allow me just go and have a look at some of the policies that have been released on that front.

Media: We're getting reports of elderly people who are spending unnecessarily long amounts of time in hospital because hospitals won't test for asymptomatic patients but the rest homes won't allow them to return until they've had the test. So can you clear that up and give some clarity on what the situation is?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yes, and I spoke to this at some length yesterday. So we've had, and are having, ongoing discussions with the Aged Care Association. What we agree on and what happens is any older person who's going into residential care, or is returning because they've been in hospital, who is symptomatic—and there's a low threshold for testing—is tested, and anyone who is positive does not go back until they have recovered and have clinically been determined to have recovered. But every resident going in or returning goes into 14 days of self-isolation and is tested if they develop symptoms. And the whole point of that 14-day period is that if they did have COVID-19 and had been exposed—I should say, if there is any history of exposure, they are also tested, symptomatic or not. However, the advice of a range of professionals, including, you may have seen yesterday, the New Zealand Microbiology Network, is that routine testing is not helpful because it is a point in time in asymptomatic people. And this goes to the point I made earlier on that, actually, even when we think someone is a probable case with a clear history of exposure, the test can still be negative, so we do not think routine testing is indicated.

Media: Germany is making face masks compulsory in public, and Auckland Transport's asking passengers, under level 3, to wear them on buses and trains. Where is the consideration at for whether New Zealand will see these sorts of measures under alert level 3 and 2?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: So, at this point, we are not recommending people use face masks routinely. We don't think it is an important part of our overall measures. The most important parts are the physical distancing and hygiene and other safety measures, and, of course, maintaining the bubbles—that's the really critical thing. This morning, actually, quite early, myself and colleagues were on a call with our British counterparts to share experiences, and this was one of the issues raised. Like us, they are carefully watching the evidence, and, as their chief medical officer has said, you can find very high-level specialists on both sides of the argument. So, again, I think if people want to wear a mask, they should—they should know how to use it—but we don't think at this point there is any indication for routine use of masks in public.

PM: What I do just want to urge is that it is no substitute for social distancing, so when it comes to public transport, we will still ask people to try and keep their distance, keep seats free, sit further back from other people if they're able—all of those basic measures we're asking people to maintain all the way through these alert levels.

Media: On the masks, isn't it wise that we err on the side of caution while evidence is still being evaluated?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: At this point, again, we don't think that that's the important thing; the important thing is where we have emphasised our key messages—and those have served us well to date and will continue to. If people want to use a mask, they can, but they should know how to use it, recalling again that there are disadvantages of using masks as well as possible advantages.

PM: Dr Bloomfield, would you mind expanding on the correct use and disadvantages of use as well?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, the correct use depends on the type of mask, but it is very important that you put it on and keep your hands away from your nose and mouth, and they usually hook behind the ears. The challenge then, and as we have all found, is we tend to unconsciously put our hands up to our face, and often if you're not used to wearing a mask—for example, you don't spend day after day in an operating theatre—the tendency is to then keep putting your hands to your face. And when the mask is wet, including as we have seen recently down in Burwood—when the mask is wet, then it can transmit viruses, including COVID-19. So the key point here is meticulous hand hygiene and, of course, most importantly, not going out if you're unwell.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, some private hospitals have raised concerns that they're not being reimbursed for staying open at full capacity during level 4 lockdown. They've cancelled electives, obviously, and lost a lot of income. Is there progress being made to reimburse them for that, or will they be out of pocket?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yes, there are. Prime Minister, did you want to talk to that, because I know Cabinet has looked at—we certainly have been having active discussions with private hospitals, because we were keen to see that that capacity, should it have been needed during this period, if our number of cases had gone up, and so we've been in active discussion, and we have asked each district health board to get in place an arrangement with their private hospitals in their areas.

Media: So they won't be [*Inaudible*], essentially?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: That will be a discussion, yes.

PM: One thing I should just—as a general principle for our health professionals and those who are working within the health sector, and this includes in primary healthcare, is that we haven't made moves to reimburse lost revenue, because there are businesses around the country who have lost revenue during the response to COVID-19. What Cabinet has been very careful around is making sure where people have incurred COVID-related costs—and that's been something that we've responded to for our GPs, for instance, with the fact that they may be doing consultations online or over the phone and haven't been able to collect fees for that, or where they've been undertaking testing, we wanted to make sure there was nothing that stopped them from undertaking testing, for instance, for a returning non-resident or the like. That's where we've been wanting to make sure we're covering those costs, but there are many who have lost revenue during this period and it's not just in the health sector.

Media: Prime Minister, the Australian Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, is pushing for the World Health Organization or another executive body to have inspection powers to be able to enter countries and trace the source of outbreaks. Have you had any recent discussions with your Australian counterpart? Has he raised this idea with you?

PM: No, that's not something we've specifically discussed.

Media: Would you be open to this idea or to hear more about it?

PM: You will have heard me share yesterday just the general principle that, of course, I think the entire globe will wish to learn from the experience that we're all in the middle of right now—and we, of course, in New Zealand would be very open to that. There are things that all of us, of course, want to make sure that we've learnt, and particularly from best practice. But also that includes the speed at the beginning of outbreaks and also determining source. So I think we're open to that but that, again, isn't something we've been particularly at the forefront of.

Media: Prime Minister, the Kōhanga Reo National Trust has advised all kōhanga reo to be closed during the level 3 lockdown. Do you support that?

PM: Actually, I've seen kōhanga reo but also some from within the ECE provision who are making decisions based on what they see as the best interests for their personal workforce and their community, and we trust them to make those decisions. Of course, our overarching message is still if you can work and learn from home, you should work and learn from home—and that also includes our children and young people. What we're wanting to make sure, though, that there is provision for those who are unable to do that but that that can be done safely within ECEs.

Media: [*Inaudible*] aware the Government has ruled out using [*Inaudible*] technology, and what type of technology they were offering?

PM: My understanding is there is no current work under way in that regard and no plans to.

Media: What percentage of children are you expecting back at school next week?

PM: Look, at the moment we don't have anything definitive to give us a sense of numbers. I've only heard anecdotal feedback from the likes of some high schools and primary schools but very small numbers. But from what I've heard, the numbers that are registering for return are relatively small. But that is anecdotal.

Media: Given the health Minister has now ordered a rapid audit of DHBs' PPE distribution and the Auditor-General is investigating, are you still willing to state, as you've done before, that we have really good distribution systems?

PM: We've said we've had good provision and good stocks. We've always been wanting to make sure that we have distribution performing at the level we expect right now. One of the areas where we think that there has been a need to improve has been from within DHBs sent out into those community health providers. That's particularly where the Minister of Health is focused with this audit.

Media: Some economists are saying that helicopter payments, one-off cash payments, to Kiwis would help stimulate the economy. Is that something the Government is seriously looking at?

PM: Look, what we've been very careful around is just acknowledging that we're at a point in the process where we are working through the range of options for making sure that we're continuing to help our economy to recover, and, of course, the first, best example of that has been the speed of the wage subsidy programme. The Minister of Finance has also been very quick to point out that we've got to make sure that what we do works. There are certain points in a recovery where payments like that aren't necessarily successful or create the stimulus you want. But we haven't ruled things in or out at this stage; we are focused, though, on doing what will help our economy recover the fastest.

Media: [*Inaudible*]?

PM: Again, we haven't ruled anything in or out, but we are focused on what is going to have the biggest effect in terms of supporting people's livelihoods and getting our economy recovering.

Media: Just to follow up, your commentary, then, sort of pointed out, perhaps, some of the problems with a universal payment. Are you saying that you don't think it is necessarily the most effective way to stimulate the economy?

PM: No, no. At this point, I'm actually not saying anything specific at all, because we are wanting to work through all of the options that are available when it comes to stimulating the economy and ensuring our economy can recover quickly. You would absolutely understand, though, why something like helicopter payments at level 4 aren't especially successful.

Media: Will you continue these daily press briefings when we go into level 3, and what will be the plan going into level 2?

PM: I expect that we will change up the schedule a bit at level 3, in part because, of course, the House will be returning, and before everyone—well, not everyone; before some additional New Zealanders started tuning into press conferences daily, you'll, of course, recall that I had one with you before Parliament or the House sat on sitting days. So I imagine we'll return to a bit of a routine—

Media: And do you think these daily press conferences have been helpful for New Zealanders that have been isolated at home?

PM: That's probably for New Zealanders to answer rather than me.

Media: Your broadcasting and communications Minister said that he wanted to be ambitious with the second tranche of the media support—

PM: That he wanted—sorry?

Media: To be ambitious with the second tranche of the media support package. Do you expect that the second tranche will dwarf the first?

PM: Oh, well, I do think that we shouldn't diminish or trivialise a \$50 million investment in supporting broadcasting and the media, print journalism—things that people have been relying on but have been hit hard by COVID-19. This first package, though—and acknowledging that your industry is only the third, really, to experience direct investment through COVID-19—this is very much focused on something we can do immediately to provide immediate support. What we need to do beyond that is actually work on some longer-term options.

Media: Have there been any confirmed cases of COVID-19 related to the 250 seasonal workers?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: No, not at this point. However, what we are doing in Te Puke is one of our cases there has an association with—well, it doesn't interact directly, but is involved with one of the hostels here for kiwifruit workers, and we felt it was important to actually test all of them, and I've just spoken this morning with the medical officer of health up there, and that testing is happening apace and will be completed by early afternoon.

Media: Why have they not been held in isolation until those tests come back?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, there's nothing to suggest there's any problem there, and, of course, they are, in a sense, in a big bubble, and that has been maintained through alert level 4. We're taking a precautionary approach here in testing them all. So I'll let you know the results of that testing when we have it, which will probably be, at least some of it, tomorrow.

Media: Our contact tracing teams—will they be able to handle a move to level 2 when our bubbles get much bigger?

PM: Yes.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Absolutely.

PM: You'll see that we've boosted their capacity so that they can make 5,000 calls a day, and then we've gone even further to ensure they've got surge capacity—up to 10,000 calls a day—to help support contact tracing. That's in addition to the cases that our local health teams are already able to manage. So surge capacity is there and it's ready, and we'll continue to invest in our public health units to make sure that we get that gold standard we want.

Media: Is the principle behind Radio New Zealand getting funding there just the Oprah principle—you know, "You get a prize, you get a prize, you get a prize."—

PM: No, it's not.

Media: Is there any intention as to provide, perhaps, some more financial support for those businesses who are not able to open under level 3?

PM: As the Minister of Finance has said, that we have been constantly reviewing what's happening for specific businesses, the impacts of specific alert levels. So the wage subsidy, the tax changes have been particularly focused on those businesses who may have struggled with some of the short-term but immediate impacts on their cash flow. Now we're looking beyond and looking at what specific sectors and businesses may continue to be impacted at level 3 in ways that others are not. So that's part of just our ongoing COVID review to make sure that we are responding as quickly as we can to some of the need we see. I have no announcements to make on that today, but it is a constant piece of work that we do.

Media: There's been a suggestion at the Epidemic Response Committee that one way of stimulating the construction industry would be allowing overseas billionaires to purchase land here and inject \$5 million, \$10 million into construction. Do you see any merit to that?

PM: Do you know that philosophy has existed in New Zealand for a number of years, and it's never been one that I've subscribed to or believe actually achieves what people claim it does.

Media: Do you have any update on recent community transmission cases? How long has it been since we had a new one? You said there were two yesterday and they weren't recent onset cases. Has it been a long length of time since we had any new ones, and what does that say about how close we are to elimination?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: So my team's gone back through every case since 1 April to narrow down the ones where it's not entirely clear where the source was. We were down to seven yesterday, and of those, even though they were classified as community transmission, it was quite clear where the person had been infected or the route back to infection, which was pre-lockdown. So we're down to just a couple where it's not necessarily clear, and those we may never know. But the important thing is—and one of those is actually the Te Puke one. So that's why we are doing that wide testing around it, just to make sure, first of all, that there's not COVID-19 that the person has caught it from from the wider group, but also to make sure that it's not been transferred on. There's no reason to believe it is. And, in fact, the close contacts of that person have all tested negative, but we're just being doubly sure. So we're in a very good position.

Media: But you can't say how long it's been since we've had a new one?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: I can't say exactly, but we'll find out that information and we'll make it available.

Media: Is it, essentially, just, like, two known chains of transmission that we haven't broken that we know about?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: I think what this goes down to—and, again, some of these cases, even of the others in that seven, we don't know what the exact link back was to. Of course, all our cases in New Zealand at some point have been imported. So if we were able to go back through manual means, we could find out where they came from. But one of the other things we're doing is we are asking ESR to do the genome sequence on some of these to find out what other cases they are linked to and if they look exactly like the genome, for example, of the virus when it was in Iran or if it had come out of Europe or out of China, because there are very subtle differences. So we're using ESR's genotyping—sorry, genome sequencing capacity—to also provide insights.

PM: So at the moment, sometimes—actually, just a small handful, really, in recent times, and even then you can get a hint of what may have happened, even if it's difficult to pinpoint precisely what has happened.

Media: Just a question for Dr Bloomfield—

PM: Nice use of eye contact to direct the question.

Media: Yeah, I finally realised who's who. Dr Bloomfield, just in regards to improving the capacity of contact tracing—the capacity and timeliness—on Sunday, I think it was, you

said you were confident that within a week we'd reach what you described as the gold standard. Is that target still going to be met by this weekend?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Look, we're well on track—and the team, I'm expecting a further report from by the end of today. There are two key things happening this week. One is our ministry team is working apace with getting the information system up and even further developed, but I've also got folk out visiting several of the public health units to do a, I guess, needs analysis about what additional capacity they need, because, actually, the first recommendation in Dr Ayesha Verrall's report was that the public health units need to be boosted. So we're out there, and the funding's been made available, and we want to make sure that they get the skills and people they need. Of course, we won't be able to pop them in within a couple of days, but it means that over the coming weeks, we'll be able to increase capacity out in our public health units as well.

Media: So just to be clear, the gold standard is 80 percent—tracing 80 percent of close contacts within three days?

PM: The KPIs of the Verrall report.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yeah, that's one of the key indicators, so that's what we're aiming to get to. It will continue to evolve and develop, but by the end of this week, we're going to have a platform there to be able to do the sort of contact tracing we need to do.

Media: GPs are telling us that anyone living in a crowded home or with a pre-existing health condition can be tested at community testing centres. Is that the case?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: So the community-based assessment centres are for people who have symptoms, and either they turn up themselves or are referred by a general practice or by Healthline. There's no need for people to go in if they are asymptomatic just to get a test—for example, because of their living conditions. So saying, there is some widespread testing happening across a range of workforces and settings by our DHBs this week, and out in rural communities, and you've seen that reflected in the 6,400 tests that have been done, because, actually, the number of people with respiratory symptoms at the moment is, you know, almost record low, because we haven't been transmitting these infections to each other.

Media: We're down to just three COVID-19 cases. Did the modelling that the Government have suggest that we're never going to get back up to double digits again—basically, we're here at single digits for the foreseeable?

PM: There's no such thing as never, because it all comes down to our behaviour from here, and that's where that team of 5 million is so important. We do need to keep in mind all of the public health principles that we've been using and practising to date: washing your hands, keeping your distance, staying at home if you're sick, getting a test if you're symptomatic. Those will need to be with us for a long time. So there is no such thing as never.

Media: Is part of the gold standard of contact tracing an end-to-end system where we can see the time line of when a case first had symptoms, when they were tested, when the result came back, and when the contacts were traced?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: So it's definitely an end-to-end system, and that's what we are setting up, with a national view of that. We're still working through the exact indicators, because—just for example, one of the ones you talked about was understanding exactly when the onset of symptoms was, and this can be quite tricky because often people will present several days or even a week down the track, and they can't remember their exact onset of symptoms. So there are three key things we're wanting to do: first of all, get New Zealanders to get tested as soon as they get symptoms, or seek advice about testing; secondly, get the test turnaround from swab to result as short as possible, and we know from our laboratory data that that's getting very good; and the third bit—and this is the critical bit—is identify and contact any close contacts within the three days and get them into self-isolation, and tested if they need to be tested. So that's the sort of end-to-end

process—and then make sure that they are staying in self-isolation. So that's the system we are setting up and want to be able to monitor and report on.

PM: One of the things that's really insightful from some of the reports we've been having, even in recent days: you can see that we may have a positive test, and then our teams from the PHUs are going in to try and identify where the origin of that case was and may then find that, actually, it was someone else in the household who was first symptomatic, and that might've been some time ago. And so even when we're producing—we might then test them or list them as a probable case. That data, then, won't be a fair representation of the speed of our contact tracing, because that person never presented and was only identified through the work that those PHUs are doing. So I think it's just important to keep some of that in mind. It's not necessarily always a linear process. Sometimes, we're going back and identifying other cases as part of that investigatory work. But the fact that we can come down and tell you within a couple of hours of the cases that we've had that day—what we know of where they've come from—tells you that our PHUs are working very, very quickly.

Media: Isn't the visibility across that system, from infection to contact—to have that in one system and having that visible is critical to ring-fencing that whole chain of transmission—

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: That's where we want to be, but as the Prime Minister said, actually, our public health units are very effective at doing this. This is their core business. And so this will help us have a national view, and particularly, as we have had, where we've got clusters where there are people across the country, that's very important. But our public health units are very good at finding people and then getting them isolated and ring-fencing, and they do this very effectively. And that's been a good part of why we have been able, also, to be in the position we're in now.

Media: How prepared are you for a second wave of COVID-19 in New Zealand, like what's happened overseas?

PM: We're doing everything we can to prevent New Zealand experiencing the second wave that we have seen in other countries, and that's why we're moving slowly, cautiously, confidently down through our alert level system. At the same time, we're very prepared, we're taking nothing for granted, but I'm confident, with the path that we've carved ourselves, we should prevent New Zealand having that experience.

Media: Apologies if this has already been asked, but how many of those probable cases have returned negative tests?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Of all the probable cases? Well—

Media: [*Inaudible*] proportion, yeah.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yeah, well, by definition, a probable case is one that does return a negative test but the sense is, given the clinical picture and the epidemiological link, that this is a probable case and it is treated and managed as if it was a case.

Media: So none of those probable cases have not been tested, and we're just assuming they—

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: No, some of them are not tested—for example, where it might be a child and the symptoms were some time ago. The challenge of doing a nasal swab—it's not that pleasant—and also the likelihood of getting a positive test is low, but, to be inclusive, we're including them in our probable cases.

PM: We did have, for instance, an example of one of the patients in one of the aged-care facilities whose family didn't wish for them to be tested but we still considered probable, so there will be cases like that. We'll wrap up soon, so Ben and then I'll come back over here.

Media: Governments of the world are, obviously, encountering this huge incoming fiscal burden—you know, how to pay for all of the stimulus packages—and New Zealand is no exception. Speaking to people in the Pacific in developing countries, as I've done the last couple of weeks reporting on tropical cyclone Harold, lots of fears that foreign-aid budgets will be cut as a result of developed countries having less money—can you confirm whether this will be ring-fenced in terms of next Budget—

PM: I'm not going to get ahead of the Budget, which will, obviously, be released not too far away, but what I would say is that New Zealand has always been mindful of our responsibility to particularly our Pacific Island neighbours, in times of hardship and in good times, and it's no different for us now. What I would keep in mind is, actually, some of the aid projects that we would usually be engaged with haven't been as easy to continue to roll out—it's required entry into our Pacific neighbours, within their borders, which has been limited—so it does mean that we may be seeing some of the reorientation of support into areas of need where we can actually facilitate the investment of aid and development funding.

Media: So funding levels should roughly be the same?

PM: Again, I'm not going to get ahead of the Budget process, but you know from New Zealand's values that when there is need, New Zealand does its bit.

Media: Prime Minister, this is a non-COVID question. Where are negotiations at over Ihumātao—have they completely ground to a halt during this COVID response, or have there being ongoing talks that the Government's been part of?

PM: We certainly haven't gone backwards, and you'll remember that, actually, we were making very good progress before COVID-19 hit, and none of that progress has been lost. But as you can imagine, there hasn't been the ability to bring any finality or closure to that at this time, just because, really, that face-to-face contact and our ability to facilitate some of those negotiations has been limited. OK, thanks everyone.

conclusion of press conference