

ALL OF GOVERNMENT PRESS CONFERENCE: FRIDAY, 24 APRIL 2020

Hon Grant Robertson: Kia ora. Ngā mihi nui kia koutou katoa. Nau mai, haere mai, tēnā hui pāpāho. Greetings everybody. Welcome to the media conference for today. As it's Friday, you have me, and Dr Caroline McElnay, who will now give you some brief remarks.

Dr Caroline McElnay: Thank you. Tēnā koutou katoa. Today, there are five new cases of COVID-19 to report, made up of two new confirmed cases and three new probable cases. That brings the combined total of confirmed and probable cases in New Zealand to 1,456. Of the new cases we are reporting today, one is linked to overseas travel, three are linked to existing clusters, and one is still under investigation, but it's possibly linked to overseas travel.

Sadly, however, we are also reporting the death of a man in his 60s who was a resident at Rosewood Rest Home and Hospital in Christchurch. He is the second resident from the hospital-level wing of Rosewood to pass away. This man had underlying health conditions and was considered to be a probable case of COVID-19 based on his exposure history and clinical symptoms. This man, sadly, is the 10th person from the Rosewood cluster to pass away. This illustrates once again the impact that this disease can have on vulnerable people. Every person we lose to COVID-19 is a tragedy, with family and friends left without their loved one, and our thoughts are with them all at this time.

There are now 1,095 reported cases of COVID-19 which we can confirm have recovered, and that's an increase of 30 from yesterday. Today, there are eight people in hospital, and that total includes one person in the ICU in Middlemore.

We still have 16 significant clusters, but only one new case attributed to one of those clusters. In total, we have 379 people who are recovered from COVID-19 who were considered to be part of a significant cluster, and, just lastly in terms of testing, yesterday we completed another new record of daily tests, at 6,961 tests, bringing us to a total of 108,238. Thank you.

Hon Grant Robertson: Thank you very much, Dr McElnay. First, I want to add my condolences to the family and friends of the person who has passed. Each death from COVID-19 is a person who was loved and whose family are dealing with grief and death in the most trying of circumstances, and our heartfelt thoughts are with them.

As we move towards Anzac weekend, I want to take another opportunity to thank New Zealanders for their extraordinary efforts in helping us position ourselves to be able to control COVID-19. This weekend is a chance to reflect and acknowledge the sacrifices that have been made by those in wartime. It is also a chance to reaffirm our commitment to one another that we will get through this crisis together. Our ongoing vigilance for the remainder of level 4 and for level 3 are critical to successfully finishing the job that we have all collectively started.

Today, I want to talk briefly about the changes we can expect to see in the economy as we move into level 3 next week, and how this shift fits within the Government's wider economic response to the impacts of COVID-19. Our economic plan to respond and recover consists of three waves: the first, fighting the virus and cushioning the blow; the second, positioning for recovery and kick-starting the economy; and the third, resetting and rebuilding our economy.

The first wave has obviously been under way for some time. The best economic response to the virus was always going to be a strong public health response, and that's why our strategy from the start has been to go hard and go early. Getting the virus under control now means we can get our economy back to normal sooner and ahead of many other countries who continue to experience the devastating effects of the virus.

We've put in place a safety net for as many Kiwis as we can. We can see the impact in the numbers that are part of our weekly economic update released today. Applications for the

jobseeker benefit have lifted by 30,000 since 20 March. This is a distressing time for all of those people. We have to bear in mind, though, that this represents less than 1 percent of our total population, and is dwarfed by the 1.6 million people who are being supported by the wage subsidy scheme. These immediate measures mean we were all in a better position to bounce back on the other side of this crisis.

I want to emphasise that from the outset, we have worked alongside businesses in the development of our response, and we will continue to do so as we move through the waves. Rob Fyfe and his fellow business leaders have leveraged their resources and networks to provide critical assistance to our all-of-Government response. Business New Zealand, the Council of Trade Unions, and other sector groups have advocated hard for their members, providing useful insights and advice, and I want to thank them for that. We have worked closely with retail banks and the Reserve Bank to ensure the worst-affected businesses and households are supported. This has been a true New Zealand Inc. effort in fighting a once in a century social and economic crisis, and we will be continuing to draw on the good ideas from people of all walks of life as we move through the further phases of our recovery.

The second phase of our recovery you will see more of next week. This, as we move into level 3, will see more parts of the economy open up: construction, forestry, manufacturing, online retail, restaurants and cafes that can provide contactless pick-up and delivery—all will be able to resume activity with the appropriate safety measures in place. This means around 400,000 more New Zealanders will return to work under these conditions, providing a real boost to them and their communities. This year's Budget will devote much of our resources to positioning for recovery and kick-starting the economy, and I'll have more to say about that on Budget day.

The third wave of our work is ensuring that we have a robust and regenerated economy when we come out the other side of this process. This means looking at some of the long-term issues and challenges we have had, such as productivity, sustainability, and inequality, and positioning ourselves to tackle them with renewed vigour and determination.

To finish today, I just quickly want to talk about two matters of interest that we have made media releases about. Firstly, Minister Sepuloni and I have released information about the audit of the wage subsidy scheme. The scheme has paid out \$10.3 billion to protect jobs and support the incomes of over 1.6 million New Zealanders. We know that the vast majority of New Zealand business owners would access the scheme as we intended it, to protect jobs, support workers' wages, and stay connected during the lockdown. It's great to see these 99 percent of business owners doing right by their workers.

We owe it to those workers and employers to make sure their good work isn't undermined by anyone abusing the scheme. We also have a duty to all New Zealanders to ensure taxpayer money is going where it is intended to support the economy. From the start, applicants to the wage subsidy scheme were told that they would have to repay the subsidy if they provided false or misleading information in their application. They were also told that they may be subject to civil proceedings for the recovery of any amount received that they were not entitled to, and/or prosecuted for offences under the Crimes Act.

Assurance and audit processes put in place by MSD to support this work are being overseen by a team of 104 fraud experts and investigators. The audit process will identify cases that require investigation. So far, MSD has completed 2,435 random and targeted audits, 2,252 of these have been resolved, and an additional review of 183 cases are currently being undertaken. Two hundred and ninety-two allegations have been received about misuse of the scheme. MSD has resolved 88 of those allegations, while the balance are still being worked on.

As at 21 April, 1,281 applicants have voluntarily advised that they wanted to refund all or part of their subsidy. This has led to \$16.2 million of refunds requested, and around \$7 million of that has already been refunded. As at 21 April, our auditing had resulted in 56 applicants being asked to refund either all or part of their subsidy. A total of \$1.25 million

has been requested from these applicants, with \$168,000 already refunded. We will keep you updated on these statistics in the coming weeks.

And, finally, wearing my other hat, Sport New Zealand will this afternoon release detailed guidance on sport and recreation activities that are possible under level 3 from next Tuesday. It remains important to remember under level 3 that the core principles of staying in your bubble, staying local, and only undertaking low-risk activities remain. As we have previously announced, there is a little more flexibility for travel for recreation under level 3, but we ask that this is only undertaken to the extent that it is necessary. Similarly, more recreation activities are now possible, such as some fishing and non-motorised water sports close to land, hunting on private land, and the very limited playing of some sports such as golf and tennis. Full details are available on the Sport New Zealand website.

We do encourage people to stay fit and active during this time, but be responsible: do not put yourself or others at risk, do not congregate, and please do not put the amazing gains that we have all made under level 4 at risk.

Happy to take your questions.

Media: You said \$17 million is being paid voluntarily—it's a lot of money. How much more do you expect will end up being paid back, and what do you make about the country's biggest law firms taking money from the wage subsidy?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, all people who applied for the wage subsidy scheme had to say that they had been affected by COVID-19 to the extent of a 30 percent reduction in their revenue for a month between January and June of this year. All businesses have to stand by those declarations that they have made. We have to remember and put this in context: we've had over 500,000 applications to the scheme; we've put out \$10 billion worth of money. So these are fractional situations, but everyone who has taken money from the wage subsidy scheme needs to know that our audit teams will be looking across the full sweep of applications, and if anyone believes that perhaps their circumstances are not what they thought they were when they applied, they should get in touch with MSD.

Media: Close to 30,000 more people have ended up on the jobseeker benefit in the four weeks since lockdown. Do you think that number would have been considerably higher if it wasn't for the wage subsidy? And when it runs out, do you expect to see an increase there at the end?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, certainly, in order to access the wage subsidy scheme, employers had to continue the employment of their staff, and what we wanted was this 12-week period to be one of breathing space for people to make their plans for the future. We want as many of those people to stay in work as they possibly can. I actually think the figure of 30,000—while it's particularly distressing for the individuals involved, when you look at it as a percentage of the workforce and a percentage of the population, it is low compared to the numbers in the wage subsidy scheme, and we'll continue to work with businesses to support them to keep their employees on board.

Jenna.

Media: Do you accept that when demand for food parcels has more than tripled, that we have a food poverty crisis in this country?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well look, I think what we have is a situation where many New Zealanders have found their outgoings to be ones that they are struggling to meet, and I think for low-income New Zealanders, that's a particular burden. It's one of the reasons why we moved quickly to increase benefits. It's one of the reasons why, from 1 May, you'll see that the winter energy payment is going up. We have in place the services being provided through our emergency management offices to be able to get food out to those people who need them, and I do recognise for some people this is a very tough time, but the supports are in place for them.

Media: Does the Government rely too heavily on charitable organisations to help distribute food parcels—because they say that the demand at this level is unsustainable.

Hon Grant Robertson: Well look, I recognise the excellent work that organisations like the Salvation Army and others do to support the most vulnerable in our community. The Government is also stepping up to that as well, and we had the announcement this week of the additional \$30 million going in to support the provision of food parcels and other welfare support to those people who need it. We will continue to work with those charities and we'll continue to make sure that there's provision of support both through our emergency services but also through the Ministry of Social Development.

Media: The Salvation Army says, though, that welfare payments are going to fall well short of what people need to survive. Is that going to be something that you address, and when?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, you know, we've had a record while we've been in Government of significantly increasing the amount of money that's available to our most vulnerable people. It's one of—some of the things we did at the very start of coming into Government was reverse the tax cuts that had been proposed and put in place further support. We've lifted benefits, and we continue to work to make sure we lift the incomes of our lowest-income people.

Jess.

Media: Minister, have you seen the Shop Local campaign, and is that something you'd back when we go into level 3?

Hon Grant Robertson: Absolutely—I mean, I think this is a really important time for New Zealanders to think about everyone in their community, and we have a lot of small businesses who haven't been able to generate any revenue over the last four weeks. Now is the opportunity for us to all support those businesses in our community. I know that a lot of businesses are working out innovative ways of being able to connect the “click and collect”, the “phone and collect” - type situation. So I'd really encourage New Zealanders—as I always do, in fact—to buy local and support the small businesses in your community.

Media: What difference could that make if we all focus in like that?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, I think being conscious consumers is a really important part of all of our jobs in normal times, and even more so now. You know, if people make a conscious decision to support a local business—a local retailer, their local food suppliers—that will make a big difference to those people when they're coming back out of a period of time when they have found it really difficult.

Media: Moving to alert level 3 means there's going to be, you know, greater volume of activity, more movement—all of that. Crown Law advice that's just come out today says it's going to make it more difficult to issue those lawful notices and to enforce them, so do you think it's been made clear enough to the public in terms of level 3, and what is and isn't required, in order to get that buy-in from the public, bearing in mind that we were two weeks into level 4 and some of that stuff was still being sorted out?

Hon Grant Robertson: Yeah, again, I want to reiterate the point: I think New Zealanders have done extraordinarily well under level 4, and when you look at those statistics like traffic movement and so on, and when we compare ourselves to the rest of the world, we have gone along and been responsible as part of our work under level 4 that each of us has had to do. As we move to level 3—yes—there will be some adjustments, and it may take a little bit of time for everybody to get used to the rules, but I'm really confident. I trust New Zealanders, that they know how important finishing the job is, and that we'll all get used to some of the differences in level 3. One thing to make really clear: level 3 is still a very restrictive environment, and while we're going to see more economic activity, those core principles still remain. Stay in your bubble, stay at home if you can, keep

it local—those things are going to be the real difference that we can make in getting on top of this virus once and for all.

Tova.

Media: Just a question for Dr McElnay: the man who passed away at Rosewood—was he able to have his family with him, and can you clarify exactly what the rules are now for family who have members who are passing away or who are in a critical condition?

Dr Caroline McElnay: OK, I actually don't have that information about this gentleman or whether his family were with him, but we can get that information to you. In terms of visitor policy, that's a piece of work that we're working through as we move into level 3. And for people who are confirmed or probable cases of COVID-19 who are in hospital, they do need to have the express permission of the clinician who's looking after them, and they will have to wear PPE provided by the district health board. So it's not a blanket no; we will be working with families and with the clinical staff to enable that where possible.

Media: Are you satisfied that that's been consistent to date? Because there have been some examples—haven't there—where family have been able to visit and other examples where they haven't. Are you assured that across all DHBs and across all places where there are COVID cases that there's a consistent policy?

Dr Caroline McElnay: I think as we move forward into level 3, it allows us to be a little bit more relaxed, but at the same time to have very tight management for those patients who are COVID-19 - confirmed or probable. But there's also some other specific situations, such as residential care homes, where, because of the vulnerability of that group, there will continue to be quite tight restrictions—very tight restrictions—on visitor access into those communities. We've seen that with the Rosewood cluster and the unfortunate deaths that have occurred there that those are really vulnerable places, so we do need in level 3, as we go forward, and probably in level 2 as well—need to keep a high level of protection. But at the same time, we do want families to be able to be in touch with their loved ones, so we'll be working through the specific details down the track for level 2.

Hon Grant Robertson: We'll just go to Andrea.

Media: From teachers, there's quite a lot of concern about your increased workload in terms of cleaning, sanitation, online learning, and maintaining the bubble as we move to level 3. Can you offer them any reassurances, and can you just outline what extra support is in place for them?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, I know that the Ministry of Education has been working very closely with schools on how they do implement the level 3 conditions. Clearly, it will be different, and needing to manage, for example, online teaching and in-classroom teaching will take a bit of getting used to. I think we all recognise that these are very unique circumstances, and that we all will give a degree of latitude to both teachers and also their students as to how to make sure this works best. Within schools, obviously, they have staff who are responsible for cleaning, and I'm sure principals will be working very closely with those staff—who are so important to all of our wellbeing in this time—to make sure that schools are working as they are intended. I've certainly seen reports of principals in their classrooms measuring out the distance between desks, making sure they're organised where bubbles of children will go. But let's make sure we just give ourselves—all of us—a bit of slack, including teachers and principals, as this starts to happen next week, so that we can make sure we get it right.

Media: In terms of testing—

Hon Grant Robertson: Just a follow-up? Yep.

Media: Yes—lots more questions, sorry! Can you outline what work's been undertaken for level 2 on contact sport—whether that will be allowed to continue with social distancing and sanitation of equipment, will that occur, and what will the guidelines be?

Hon Grant Robertson: So work is under way as to what may be possible for professional support, particularly, at level 2. Sport New Zealand has been working with the major sporting codes on designing a potential way that that could occur. Clearly, it would have to be cognisant of the rules of level 2—for instance, the fact that we won't have large, mass gatherings. So if there is to be professional sport played, it will be largely in empty stadia. But also we have to make sure that if there are bubbles created of teams and the people around their teams, that those bubbles are safe. There's also issues to do with travel to work through as well. So that work is under way right now, and we'll have more to say about it as it develops.

Media: So could we have sport like a Super Rugby bubble and a netball bubble—could those tournaments go ahead this year?

Hon Grant Robertson: I know that both rugby and netball are sports that are working on proposals, but I hasten to add all of this has to be done in a way that upholds our public health guidelines, so that's why that work has to happen. Benedict.

Media: What sort of steps do you expect tennis clubs to be taking in terms of tennis being able to restart?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, I do think it's incredibly important that anybody who ends up playing tennis or playing golf in this situation sticks to those core principles—so that is only in your bubble, do not congregate, do make sure that you only use your own equipment. Clubhouses and so on will not be open, so if it's going to be a situation where you need to book a time, you'll have to be able to do that online, and I think a number of clubs probably won't open as a result of that. But, using those core principles, clubs will be able to provide that facility, but it will be limited and it will not be available on public courses.

Media: In terms of testing, why don't you start testing our most vulnerable populations like those at the care facilities, considering we know the spread of the virus in such facilities can happen so swiftly?

Dr Caroline McElroy: So we have been working with the district health boards to get more information about the level of COVID-19 disease in our community, and so for the last two weeks there's been quite a rapid—a ramping up of the number of tests that have been done. We have suggested that they be targeted in to places where we're seeing cases—or, actually, where we're not seeing cases—just to give us a better picture. But, going forward, what we're developing is a much more targeted testing plan to actually give us a much more representative picture of COVID-19 across New Zealand, and that may include some targeted workplace testing, but it will be part of that structured plan. And so that's the approach that we're taking at the moment.

Media: But specifically for aged-care facilities—I mean, those are our most deadly at the moment—will you test in aged-care facilities?

Dr Caroline McElroy: Well, testing is already happening in aged-care facilities where there are potential suspect cases, and we've been working with the aged - residential care sector to develop policies around how to protect staff and residents there. There can be a danger to just see that testing residents coming into a facility would be the answer, because a test is only an assessment at that one point in time, and there's a number of other policies and procedures that work really well to reduce any risk, such as any new residents actually being in isolation for 14 days before they come in. The danger is if you test negative on arrival, you might still, if you've been exposed, be incubating disease. So it's about having a broad strategy so that we protect the residents, because we really do want to do that. And we're seeing, sadly, the impact of COVID-19 in these communities, but also we do want to protect the staff and visitors. So it's a package that we have to look at, not just one particular aspect.

Hon Grant Robertson: Ben—we'll come to Ben, and then we'll come back over here.

Media: Can I ask: are you keeping data on the nationality of people contracting COVID-19 in New Zealand, and what is it telling you?

Dr Caroline McElnay: Yes, we are keeping data. That is part of our reporting, and we have—some data is available on our website. That is—in the early days, that reflected that we had a high proportion of non-Māori who were infected with COVID-19. In the early days, we saw a lot of people returning or coming into New Zealand from overseas. The data, as it shows, is not—it's not really telling us that we've got a particular problem in our Māori community or our Pacific community. It is driven a lot by the clusters that we're seeing and the people who are affected in those clusters.

Hon Grant Robertson: Ben, were you asking about nationality or ethnicity?

Media: [*Inaudible*]

Hon Grant Robertson: Yeah, so I don't believe, actually, that the data is being broken down by nationality per se. I would suspect the very large bulk of the cases are people with New Zealand passports.

Media: Just on the latest death, 60 seems young. Can you detail the sort of underlying health conditions, and do you know if it is the youngest death we've had so far?

Dr Caroline McElnay: I don't have the precise age of this gentleman, and the death that was reported yesterday was also someone in their 60s. So with this gentleman, what I can tell you is that he did have existing comorbidities. This was a resident of the Rosewood facility, so although he was in his 60s, he did have significant underlying conditions.

Hon Grant Robertson: I also just think that it's important to note that while many of the deaths that we have seen have been people who are older than that, it is true that around the world, COVID-19 has caused the death of people of every age group, and that's why it remains really important for all of us to continue to be vigilant.

Media: Minister, can I ask about the Cook Islands group who are being repatriated back. How collaboratively have we been working with the Cook Islands Government on this?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, I know that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade has been working collaboratively with all Governments where there are repatriation issues, either New Zealanders coming back to New Zealand or those that are here in New Zealand. I don't believe I have the information specifically with me about the Cook Islands group, but I'm happy to come back to you, Jess, on that.

Media: At the moment, the expectations are they do two weeks of quarantine here, in Auckland, and then two weeks back home. I mean, a month of quarantine—is that necessary?

Hon Grant Robertson: Look, I think it's really important—I'm not going to speak specifically about the Cook Islands case because I don't have that information in front of me. But I do think it's really important that we respect each country's rules around quarantine. Particularly when we think about our Pacific neighbours, where in many cases they're trying to limit themselves to no cases, or have had very, very few cases, it's easy to understand why they want to be very, very protective of that. But I'm sure conversations have been going on between MFAT and the Cook Islands Government on that. But, in the end, we do need to respect that other countries will have their own rules in place.

Media: But that's obviously not best practice, because we hadn't been following that ourselves—that we're doing two weeks.

Hon Grant Robertson: Yeah well, exactly—we're doing two weeks, but the Cook Islands is also doing two weeks, and so the issue is that each country will have its own rules and its own systems in place.

Dr Caroline McElnay: Yes, and also I think you have to look at the ability of the health system to respond to cases. In New Zealand, we clearly do have the capacity to do

that. I think that's where it's for every country to determine what is their ability to manage COVID-19 cases in their own country, and so that is probably influencing the Cook Islands.

Media: So do you think that's fair enough to request someone to stay in quarantine for a month—is that what other countries around the world are doing, too?

Dr Caroline McElroy: I think other countries are making different decisions, but, from a health perspective, there is a lot of logic behind it.

Media: Minister, are you considering any particular support for mortgage holders, and how concerned are you that if, or when, unemployment rises—particularly after the wage subsidy runs out—mortgage holders might struggle to pay their mortgages, even with deferrals, and that really puts our system in quite a vulnerable position?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, I mean it's important to note in the first instance that the mortgage deferral scheme was set up as a six-month scheme, and I know that the arrangements that have been made between a lot of mortgage holders and their banks are for things like interest-only payments for an extended period of time. Obviously, we're doing our very best to ensure we limit the number of people who lose their jobs, but clearly in a situation where that does happen, there's going to be a significant shock to people's income. We're continuing to work on what we can do to support both household incomes and business-level incomes to be able to sustain themselves through this period.

Media: Are you considering any type of targeted support at people who are in that position—so at mortgage holders, particularly?

Hon Grant Robertson: I wouldn't say we're particularly looking at mortgage holders, but we are continuing—as we have done all the way through this process—to look at what we can do to support New Zealanders to get through this. I think you've seen that we've been prepared to be flexible and open to different ideas, and we're continuing to work on what that looks like for both businesses and households.

Media: From doctors and dentists—we're hearing consistently from dentists that they're having to fund their own PPE, and then that cost is going to have to be passed on to patients. Is that reasonable?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, I'll leave Dr McElroy to talk about the distribution of PPE, but it is important that all of our front-line health workers have access to it. There is no shortage of PPE in New Zealand, and we've had this discussion many times in this room about the distribution-related issues. But from our perspective as a Government, we believe that we have purchased, and we are continuing to purchase, the amount of PPE that's required. But, Dr McElroy, I don't know if you have anything in particular on dentists.

Dr Caroline McElroy: I don't have any particular information on dentists. We're doing a stocktake of the PPE that's out there, and we'll know the results of that next week.

Hon Grant Robertson: Down the back. *[Interruption]* Just over here, and we'll come to you.

Media: I want to know what your thinking is around how this helicopter money payment, if it goes ahead, would happen—I mean, would you have to issue bonds for it, and would the Reserve Bank buy those bonds, or the primary or secondary market?

Hon Grant Robertson: Look, I think we're getting well of ourselves to be talking about that. What we are looking at is a broad economic response that allows us to deal with the here and now, making sure that we keep people in jobs, supporting firms to keep going, then we move into the phase of our recovery, and we look for ways of continuing to support that, and there will come a time, I'm sure, when we'll need some more stimulus in the economy. There are a range of options available to us as to how we'll do that; we haven't made any decisions on that yet.

Media: We've seen in Northland that the Northland DHB and Māori health providers have ramped up testing in that area. Is the ministry and DHBs confident that you're getting into all

of those sort of smaller, at-risk communities across the country, and have you had any results back from that increased testing in Northland?

Dr Caroline McElnay: We've seen a significant increase in the number of tests that have been done across the country, and that's been the specific advice that we've given to the district health boards. So there are quite a number of communities that have been reached out to—particularly in Northland and Tai Rāwhiti—and we're still receiving the results in from many of those particular outreach programmes. But the test results that we report on a daily basis, that's telling us whether they've actually picked up any positive tests, and none of those additional testing in those communities have identified any positive cases. So that's really good news.

Media: And what about the testing for those that are in quarantine in hotels in Auckland—you know, are you making sure that those people that come in at different stages from overseas aren't mixing with other people in quarantine, and do they get tested before they're being let out?

Dr Caroline McElnay: So as they come in across the border, there's an assessment made for everyone who is coming across the border, checking for symptoms. Anybody who is symptomatic is put into a different group, and that group is taken to a different facility, and testing is done for those individuals. The other individuals are then going to a separate facility—so we're separating those who are in quarantine versus those who are in isolation. Those who are symptomatic and test positive, then we manage them as every other COVID-19 case. They are required to stay for the full 14 days. We're not testing on release, but we have managed that full 14 days in quarantine.

Media: Doesn't that leave you open to sort of cross-contamination, though, if you've got people who aren't symptomatic mixing with other people who aren't symptomatic but they haven't had long enough for the symptoms to show?

Dr Caroline McElnay: No. They're all kept in isolation, so they're all separate—they're not mixing.

Media: Dr McElnay, sorry if I've missed this in the past week. Just in regards to the Rosewood cluster, has it been determined how the virus actually got into the facility?

Dr Caroline McElnay: That's still under investigation, and that's one of the reasons why there's been widespread testing of staff and patients at Rosewood, and one of the reasons why we're also—when we get other cases in that situation, also doing further testing. But that's still under investigation.

Media: Well, what degree of confidence do you have in actually being able to pinpoint the index case?

Dr Caroline McElnay: It can be challenging in some situations to say exactly who the index case is, but with most of our cases, when we've gone back and reviewed the origin of a cluster, we are usually in those cases able to say we know who the person is, say, or we suspect who the index case is. What can be a little bit challenging in the past has been to say how that person acquired their infection. What we're seeing—and this is really important—is looking over the last two weeks, we're not seeing situations where we can't identify how that person acquired their disease. So that's telling us we would have extremely low levels, if any, of community transmission—unknown cases—out there in the community, and we've seen that evidence become much stronger with each day in the last two weeks.

Hon Grant Robertson: We're just going to come down the front, and we'll come back.

Media: The latest ethnicity data we've received show that the positive COVID-19 numbers in the Bay of Plenty, and specifically where there's iwi roadblocks, are really low. Do you believe those iwi roadblocks are actually contributing to keeping those numbers low?

Hon Grant Robertson: I think what we—well, as the Prime Minister said yesterday, we know that people in their communities really care about keeping their communities safe, and, obviously, the New Zealand Police have been talking with people where some iwi members, for example, have been working to do exactly that. Where that works in such a way that everybody understands what's happening and works closely with one another, I'm sure it is going to be a help in what's going on. The really good thing, I think, is that in terms of the level of testing that we're doing, for example, for Māori, we're testing Māori at a very high rate relative to the size of the population, and so that's giving us some real confidence about the data that we've got.

Media: Can I have just one more?

Hon Grant Robertson: One more at the front here.

Media: Just one more—with the RSE workers for Pacific Islanders, is there any support for them whose visas have expired or their businesses can't support them any more?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, certainly, I know that in the early days, the ability of workers to be able to, for instance, transfer from one particular type of work they were doing to another was being facilitated, and, you know, we are at the point in the season where we do need workers to be working on a number of our orchards and kiwifruit vines, so that work was being facilitated at the beginning. In terms of people who are in that situation who are migrant workers who may not be in work now, all of the services that our civil defence and emergency management are providing in those emergency settings are available to those people.

Media: There have today been some renewed calls for Government to increase protections for commercial tenants, including a six-month ban on lease cancellations, debt recovery action by landlords—is that something at all you're considering? If not, what's your message?

Hon Grant Robertson: Yeah, so we already have made some changes to the rules around this to ensure that we can't have forced evictions of peoples up to 30 days, and that, really, was designed in order to create a much more orderly conversation between tenants and landlords. It's very important to remember that a very large number of the leases that operate at the moment in commercial settings have a clause in them that if a tenant isn't able to occupy, there can be and there should be rent remission, and I know that that is happening in a lot of places. We're continuing to look at what other measures we can do to continue to support the relationships between tenants and landlords, but we, once again, urge parties to sit down together and come to a reasonable solution.

Jenna.

Media: How concerned are you about people not getting the healthcare they need, including dental work, during levels 4 and 3?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, I'll let Dr McElnay respond to this as well, but you've heard the consistent message on this stage from both the Prime Minister and Dr Bloomfield that people should be seeking medical care if they need it at this time. It's urgent that people don't allow things to fester; that they don't allow themselves to get really, really unwell. Our medical services are still available, our health services are still available to people, and we strongly encourage them to use them. Dr McElnay, do you have anything to add?

Dr Caroline McElnay: Nothing, really, to add to that. As we move forward into level 3, then we'll start to see more of those health facilities opening up, but we still have to really manage the potential risk from COVID-19.

Media: Do you think that MFAT's doing enough to help Kiwis get home?

Hon Grant Robertson: Look, MFAT staff all around the world have been working incredibly hard, and you'll be aware that various repatriation flights continue to be worked

on and to come back. The latest ones I know are around nine New Zealanders travelling from Bangladesh who were on a flight that was either due in late last night or early this morning, and we continue to work on significant cases right around the world.

Media: Specifically, Thailand's closed its land borders. When will New Zealanders stuck in Cambodia and Laos be able to get home?

Hon Grant Robertson: I'm just looking to see in the notes that I've been given here whether or not there's anything on Cambodia and Laos. I do know that New Zealanders in Thailand—the embassy there is continuing to work closely on what may be possible. So if we've got anything more to report on that, we will.

Media: But people can't get across the borders into Thailand.

Hon Grant Robertson: Look, there were always—and we've said from the beginning—going to be significant issues for the small pockets of New Zealanders who find themselves in places that are both difficult to get into and difficult to get out of. We strongly encourage those people to register with MFAT, and that means that we can start to apply the consular support that is available. But I think you'll understand that given the different circumstances in different countries, we've just got to work this through. You've seen a regular number of repatriation flights, and I know MFAT's working hard on those.

I'll do Jo, and then Jenna.

Media: How realistic is this idea of a trans-Tasman bubble, and what level is the work at? Is it just a conversation that's going on between the Prime Ministers or their officials, or is border enforcement, airports—are they actually having serious conversations about how they would do this?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, look, I think it's very early days, is what I would say. We all know as New Zealanders that one of the things that's allowed us to be in the strong position we are in terms of getting on top of this virus are our border restrictions, and the Prime Minister has been clear that those border restrictions will be with us for some time to come. The good news is that both New Zealand and Australia are doing well in terms of fighting the virus, and so at some time in the future it may be possible, but I don't think people should get ahead of themselves. Those discussions are at an early level.

Media: And would you ever do it at like a state by state level?

Hon Grant Robertson: Look, I think we have to work that through. Clearly, in Australia there are different responses in different states, but it is very important for us that we continue to maintain the integrity of our border. It has been one of the best things we have done in fighting this virus, and I, along with all New Zealanders, want us to get to the point when we can see some movement of people across our borders and start those relationships with Australia again. But it will take some time for us to get there.

Media: Just on the Attorney-General's Cabinet paper released today, how likely is it that a special piece of COVID-19 legislation might be put in place for alert level 2?

Hon Grant Robertson: Oh look, there are issues that are being worked through at the moment by the Attorney-General at each stage of our movement through the framework. You can imagine that Crown Law, who advised the Attorney-General, looked very, very closely at what is required from a legal standpoint for us to be able to undertake the activities we do. Clearly, as we move through the levels, we change from the influence of a pandemic notice and then what happens after that. So that's the work that's under way right now with Crown Law.

Media: Do you have a sense of whether the national state of emergency may still apply into alert level 2, or would the—

Hon Grant Robertson: Oh, I haven't got advice on that at this point in time. But I do know, as I say, that as we move through the alert levels, there will obviously be different forms of regulation that are required, and whether or not there needs to be extensions of

both the pandemic notice and the state of emergency are the very issues that Crown Law that is advising the Attorney-General on.

I'll do Benedict and then Andrea, and then come back.

Media: Do you believe that the job seeker figures that were put out today—do you believe they capture the full number of job losses that have occurred because of coronavirus?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, I'm quite sure that people who have found themselves in the situation where they've lost their job will seek the assistance that's available to them, and so I think it's a sign that there have been a number of job losses, but it's also a sign that, relatively speaking to the working the working age population, it is a smaller number than you're seeing in a lot of other countries.

Media: But people who have partners that still earn and, you know, who haven't lost their jobs might still earn good money—they can't apply, can they?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, it depends on the circumstances of those partners, but also there is other support available such as the accommodation supplement and so on. To a wider point, Benedict, of what you're asking, clearly, we won't understand the full impact of COVID-19 on unemployment or on the economy more generally until some months in the future. What we do know is we've put in place the kind of safety net that's allowed 1.6 million New Zealanders to stay attached to their employer and to get the support they need and stay in a job, and we're going to continue to work on that.

Andrea.

Media: On child poverty, that was obviously a big focus of your Government, are you worried that any of the gains that you made are will now backslide, and are you going to have to adjust and shift those targets that you've set out?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, the targets are in law, so I don't think there will be much changing of them. But the important thing for us is that we don't allow inequality to grow as a result of this crisis, and the Government's focus on child poverty will not waiver. We will have to redouble our efforts, and I mentioned before, when I was talking about the long-term issues that we need to face up to in the economy, one of those is the fact we've persistent inequality in New Zealand. We've made big strides to address that, and we're going to have to continue to support it. I have no doubt, if you look at the history of these kinds of major disruptions to the economy, it is people on the lowest incomes who get affected the most. We're very conscious of that, and we're continuing to work to make sure we can support those people.

Media: So you might miss those targets, then?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, look, it's far too early to even make a judgment on that. We'll just take a couple more.

Media: Minister, is it ever OK to joke about domestic violence?

Hon Grant Robertson: I beg your pardon? Sorry, Jenna, I actually just didn't hear you.

Media: Is it ever OK to joke about domestic violence?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, it's certainly not something that I would do, and I think you might be referring to a brief interchange that I saw online last night from the select committee—is that what you're referring to? Yeah, look, I mean for me, no—I think domestic violence is a scourge in our society. I don't have all of the circumstances that led up to or came after that, but I don't think any New Zealander should take domestic violence lightly.

Ben.

Media: Minister, 10 days ago, you published a number of Treasury scenarios—they were not forecasts; they were scenarios—and a couple of those were baseline things that were plainly not going to happen because it didn't reflect what was actually being done. When will you publish actual forecasts, or your belief or understanding on where the economy is tracking?

Hon Grant Robertson: That will be in the Budget, in three weeks' time.

Media: So no information for [*Inaudible*] four weeks?

Hon Grant Robertson: Well, no, the scenarios are what they are, and you're getting a weekly economic update from the Treasury which provides a host of different information. But in terms of the dedicated forecasts, that will be in the Budget.

Last one.

Media: What are you planning to do to get banks to loosen their lending criteria around these loans that are guaranteed by the Government?

Hon Grant Robertson: Yeah, look, I mean banks have given out somewhere between \$5 billion and \$6 billion worth of extra loans over the last few weeks, which is a very large amount of money. The Government-backed loan guarantee scheme was designed to be able to make sure that particularly small and medium enterprises could get access to the credit that they needed. That scheme is only really just fully under way now, and we're continuing to work with the banks to make sure that that is being promoted and provided and put on offer to the people who need it. And I'd just reiterate something I've said a couple of times, which is that if you were a customer who went to a bank and a few weeks ago perhaps didn't get the answer you were looking for, go back now, because that scheme is fully operational.

I'll just take Jo and then we'll—

Media: Last one for Dr McElnay, actually—sorry.

Hon Grant Robertson I don't want another one, Jo, so that's all right!

Media: Just on contact tracing, are the Government—or Ministry of Health, more so—going to audit the system again before going to level 3 on Tuesday?

Dr Caroline McElnay: We have already this week been doing some audits, updates, outside of the ministry, out at DHB level, and so that will add to the information that we've got about the performance of the system.

Hon Grant Robertson: And you'll be aware too that the Minister of Health has established the oversight committee as well, so that's getting under way. So I think you'll find that the attention of both the Ministry of Health and of the Government will be very closely on contact tracing in coming days and weeks.

Thanks, everyone. Enjoy your weekend.

conclusion of press conference