

## ALL OF GOVERNMENT PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 30 MARCH 2020

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Well, kia ora koutou katoa. Welcome to today's media briefing. I'm Dr Ashley Bloomfield, and I've got Commissioner Mike Bush here with me today. So today there are 76 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 in New Zealand. One of our formerly probable cases has now been confirmed as having COVID-19 and is therefore one of those new 76 confirmed cases. There have been no other probable cases reported today, and so you will see that the number of probable cases has actually dropped by one to 37. There have been no additional COVID-19 deaths, and 63 people have recovered from COVID-19. So, in summary, the combined total of confirmed and probable cases in New Zealand today is 589—75 more than yesterday.

Today, we have 12 people in hospital with COVID-19 infection, and it is good news that three of these people are expected to be discharged soon. There are people currently in Gisborne Hospital, Waikato Hospital, Whangarei Hospital, Dunedin Hospital, Auckland hospital, Nelson Hospital, Wairau Hospital and Blenheim, Taranaki Base Hospital—each of those hospitals has one person—and Wellington hospital, which has four. Two of the current inpatients are in intensive care, and, for privacy reasons, we won't be providing other details on these patients.

Our laboratories around the country continue to process and report test results quickly, and over the last seven days, the average daily test number is 1,728. And just a reminder: anyone who has been tested is expected to be in strict self-isolation until they have that test result back.

We are still seeing a strong link to overseas travel as well as links to confirmed cases, and I just have some information that I've just received: on the 455 cases where we have sufficient information presently, 57 percent of those have a direct link to overseas travel, 26 percent are close contacts of existing cases, 15 percent have both overseas travel and/or close contacts, and just 2 percent are currently community transmission—that's around 10 cases that we know are definitely community transmission.

I'd like to shift to talk a little bit about flu vaccination. Flu vaccination is going to be a very important part of our overall approach to COVID-19 because if we vaccinate people, then we can reduce pressure on our hospital system, particularly through winter. It's very important that the people who are eligible for free flu vaccination are prioritised for vaccination—so that is people over 65, people with pre-existing medical conditions, pregnant women, and children with a history of a respiratory illness, as well as our front-line health and other front-line workers.

For people who are not in those groups who might usually get a flu vaccination each year, please wait. We are prioritising our resources to vaccinate those high-priority groups. We want to keep our front-line workers well so that they can support our COVID-19 response. We want our people who are most likely to get complications from influenza if they get it, and therefore end up in hospital, to be vaccinated first. You should not be seeking a vaccination or expect to be called for a vaccination if you're not in one of those groups until at least mid-April. This is an important part of our overall response.

There is plenty of vaccine. We have 400,000 more vaccines this year than we had last year—that's a 30 percent increase—and already 800,000 have been distributed. There are stories of some practices who have run short, and so we are working right across the country to redistribute the existing vaccine that is already in the system so that all practices who need it are able to vaccinate those high-priority groups.

And a final word on our surveillance for COVID-19: there is an existing online—in fact, it's an email that you get each week called FluTracker. It asks about whether you've had symptoms of a fever or cough in the last week. We have now extended the questions on

that FluTracker to include whether or not you've had a swab or a test for COVID-19, and I would encourage everybody to help contribute to our tracking of COVID-19 by registering online on the FluTracker survey. The website will be in our media release, but just quickly: [www.info.flutracking.net](http://www.info.flutracking.net). This is a practical way that we can all contribute to the monitoring of influenza-like symptoms and specifically to COVID-19 across New Zealand.

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Mike, I'll hand it over to you.

**Mike Bush:** Kia ora Ash. Kia ora koutou, whānau. Three things I'd like to cover off today: The first one is in relation—a general briefing on compliance; secondly, is the impact on policing nationally; and the third thing is to talk about how we're going with the returning New Zealanders.

First off, in terms of how New Zealanders are complying with us, the vast majority of Kiwis, of people inside New Zealand, are complying brilliantly. And I want to acknowledge and thank them for doing that. They know that to stay home saves lives. At the same time, those people who are complying are very passionate to ensure that others comply. To that end, as you know, we stood up an online facility—105.police.govt.nz—at 1 o'clock yesterday. Since that was stood up, we've had 4,200 reports of people believing others weren't complying. Again, it shows how determined Kiwis are to ensure that everyone complies with us. We crashed that system, we've put it back up again, it's working. But again, I just want to say that everyone needs to comply in this realm. We have, for example, tourists who think it's OK to drive around the country in their campervans. It's not OK. Stay absolutely put. Stay in place.

We have, over the last few days, had cause to arrest three people, for persistent breaches. Now, two of those people were taken into police custody but later released without charge; one person remains in police custody—mainly because they had other outstanding matters in front of them. But again, we will be out there ensuring people do comply, because—we can't say it enough—staying home saves lives.

I also want to talk about how things are impacting on policing in general. A few days ago, we talked about the anticipated rise in family violence, family harm offences. Initially, we did see a small rise, but it's pleasing to see that in the last few days that's been reversed, and we've had a very slight reduction in family violence, family harm reports. I think that goes to the fact that people really do want to respect each other inside the home, and know how challenging this will be for everyone. But of course, we've got to stay the course on that. We've seen a massive decline in public place violence, as you would expect. We've seen a significant decline in the number of people being arrested and placed into police custody generally—all positive things which enable us to redeploy into those other priority areas, which include ensuring that people comply with the COVID-19 restrictions.

I can report that we have two of our own staff that have tested positive for COVID-19. They are at home taking every precaution, obviously. They are not hospitalised, and we're putting every piece of support we can around them. I'd also like to report—Ashley you'll be interested in this—you may know that last week we graduated the Ashley Bloomfield recruit wing—59 staff. Today, all 59 of them have deployed, and are out there on the streets of New Zealand doing everything they can to keep New Zealand safe. Well done on that, Ash.

Finally, I'd like to talk about the number of returning New Zealanders. Over the last three days, we've had 4,547 Kiwis return. As you know, we have a process in place—an end-to-end process—to assess them, and then ensure that they are compliant.

**Mike Bush:** Ninety-four of those people were symptomatic and are in quarantine; 1,200 of those persons did not have a satisfactory self-isolation plan, so they are in managed self-isolation; about 3,200 did have a plan, and they are self-isolating but are—we are sure—complying with that, although we will ensure that we have a process to visit those people or to ensure that they are complying with those restrictions. So that's all I have to update at the moment, other than to say and acknowledge those essential workers that are

out there keeping the country going, keeping the country safe, they're doing a wonderful job and they should be acknowledged for that. Kia ora.

**Media:** Can you give us some more details about the three people that were arrested? What were they doing? Were they just out and about when they shouldn't have been?

**Mike Bush:** Yeah, they were out and about. They'd come to our notice before. As per our four-step plan, they'd been previously warned about their behaviour, they decided that they wouldn't oblige, so we obliged for them. Two of them were taken into custody. They stayed there for a short time and then they were released without prosecution.

**Media:** What about those two police who have tested positive. How many of the police force are now in self-isolation because of those two cases?

**Mike Bush:** They're quite different cases. The first case I have some detail around. That was contacted via a police role, so there were a number of people that they had been in contact with, so we're doing contact tracing and self-isolation in terms of that. I can't give you too much detail in terms of the second case, other than to say that we have several hundred police officers across the country self-isolating as a precaution and in response to that and other things.

**Media:** The fact that they contracted COVID-19, does that suggest that police don't have adequate PPE gear when they're dealing with the public?

**Mike Bush:** This was quite early on, but we are building our stocks of PPE, we're taking a normal risk-based approach to that. But, at the same time, it's important that we get sufficient PPE to them, and that's been a work in progress over the last week.

**Media:** Even though you say most people are complying, just looking around areas like Oriental Parade yesterday, there were hundreds if not thousands of people still out there—probably all within the rules, just exercising and doing what they're allowed in their local area. But is there a more firm instruction you can give people around congregating? So if you see someone down there, should you actually just go home if there are too many people in the space?

**Mike Bush:** Yeah no, it's a very good point. I, too, drove past Oriental Parade last night, and it did surprise me how many people were out and about. Yes, it's within the rules, but I observed a number of people that weren't keeping their social distance. Obviously some were still in their bubble, but it was obvious to me that some weren't, and the social distancing was not being adhered to. I think it's something we really need to consider, and I'll take this opportunity to appeal to people again: you must stay local. That doesn't mean wandering off for 5 or 6 miles. It's stay in your neighbourhood, stay close to home, and really keep that social distancing. I think if people aren't complying, we're going to have to revisit this.

**Media:** So shouldn't your force actually be doing more to disperse those groups of people if they congregate like that?

**Mike Bush:** Yes, absolutely. So that's what we're considering. As you know, the sun came out in Wellington at about 4 p.m., and everyone took advantage of that. I really counsel against that. And again, if you're out there and you're seeing a lot of other people out there, you must keep your distance. But stay local, stay close to home. Thank you for raising that.

**Media:** What action have police taken as a direct result of those 4,200 or so reports to the 105 website?

**Mike Bush:** Yeah, so a lot of them are general. What I can tell you is about a thousand of them relate to business and the rest relate to people. So, for example, some of those reports are quite general: "There are people congregating at Mairangi beach that shouldn't be." So we'll deploy into that as a tasking. Some of them aren't specific enough, so some of the reports are: "So and so's at the beach.", or "There are people at the

beach.”—we don’t know which beach. But we’ll prioritise those and we will task our staff accordingly.

**Media:** You mentioned yourself that there were tourists driving around in campervans, and we’ve seen a party of backpackers down in Queenstown. Are there any sort of specific punishments, or anything that you could do for people on tourist visas who may not be adhering to the rules?

**Mike Bush:** Yeah, that is a matter we could look at with Immigration as to whether or not, but I think that—I think we’re better to give advice and actually get out there and intervene and educate those people in the first instance, but people who are tourists must know that they cannot drive around the country from destination to destination. I’ve had it recounted to me a few days ago someone travelling from Tauranga for work purposes. You know, they couldn’t move on the Desert Road for campervans—that’s got to stop. We will be out there; we will be educating in the first instance, but I appeal to those tourists: stay where you are—that’s the rules.

**Media:** What will happen to them? Are we looking at a fine? Are they being forced into quarantine?

**Mike Bush:** Well, you know, if there are persistent, repeated breaches, yeah, we’ll take action against them—absolutely—as we did with the three people I have talked about.

**Media:** Can you give us some detail on these checkpoints that are being set up—how many are there, what are you sort of looking for?

**Mike Bush:** Checkpoints at this point aren’t part of our deployment model. We see them occurring and we will give consideration to whether or not they are necessary, but at the moment we’re more mobile in terms of our interventions.

**Media:** What would you need to see before you start setting them up?

**Mike Bush:** I think there’s—so we’re working with a lot of local communities, as you would have seen through your media. A lot of people want to set up checkpoints and keep people out of their places, out of their areas, out of their towns. We want to work with them to make sure that’s absolutely lawful.

**Media:** Director, can I just ask: is there community transmission in Matamata?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** We know there’s a cluster in Matamata and we know that there was an index case that was associated with overseas travel. What’s not clear is the extent to which there might be community transmission. So we’re doing a full investigation of that cluster at the moment.

**Media:** How many people have tested positive within that cluster?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** As of yesterday, there were nine, and they were expecting another few—so somewhere between 11 and 13. But we’ll have the updated numbers on our website for that cluster after this briefing.

**Media:** Can you give us any more details about that—was it linked to a specific business, or how did that work?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Well, I think there’s been social media postings linking it to a specific establishment, and associated with a Saint Patrick’s Day celebration.

**Media:** The Southern DHB last week said it was still seeking 257 contacts from the World Hereford Conference. How many contacts are yet to be traced from confirmed cases, and what does that mean in terms of a potential backlog—you know, are we going back weeks now in terms of trying to trace down, track down, all those potential contacts?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** So what I can say is that there’s a much greater capacity now to do that contact tracing, and it’s always a work in progress. For example, sometimes it takes six or seven phone calls to see if somebody can be contacted. If they can’t be, then we work with other organisations, including the police, potentially, to go and visit that

address. So it depends on the number of contacts associated with each case. Right now, we've got around a hundred people now working in our national contact centre, and that number is increasing daily. But so far, we have every contact that we have been notified, at least up until the last two days, has been followed up with at least one phone call.

**Media:** Following the first death on the West Coast yesterday, are hospitals changing the way that they treat anyone with flu-like symptoms?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Yes, so the case on the West Coast was someone who presented where COVID-19 wasn't part of what we'd call the differential diagnosis when they came in. So there were good precautions taken for if that person had had influenza. Now, we have suggested to district health boards—and, in fact, there is a common approach to this—is anyone coming into ED who has what we would call a lower respiratory tract infection—so cough, fever—whether that's pneumonia or bronchitis, is being treated as if they are COVID-19 until proven otherwise, and therefore the appropriate measures taken in terms of personal protection.

**Media:** On that personal protection, there was an update to the website yesterday on who is eligible, but there are still people like pharmacists and carers who have come to us saying they don't feel safe and they feel like they might pass it on. What's your advice to those people?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Well, PPE is one part of keeping safe in terms of keeping yourself safe from infection and, of course, preventing passing on an infection. In the latter case, anyone who has symptoms shouldn't be at work or out of the house if they're—you know, they shouldn't be going out to the shop or doing anything. In the former instance, you can see in supermarkets and a whole range of places that they have put in distancing measures to make sure that that social distancing is maintained. Masks can have a role, and one thing we are doing is making sure that all our front-line workforces who we wouldn't usually be providing masks to do have some masks, and that will include pharmacies, midwives, and others.

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** So we're making a particular effort to ensure they have masks, should they need to wear them. And hand washing, of course, is still a major part of keeping oneself safe.

**Media:** What about home support workers—will you provide them masks? Because they're really worried that they're heading into a lot of elderly people's homes—and the risk of transmissions if they were to come into contact with it.

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Yes, I think that's a really vulnerable group, the people who they're looking after. So the advice does cover—that is on our website—home and community support workers and the sorts of situations where they do or don't need to use protective equipment. I'm also aware that, as you've said, some people feel that wearing a mask is going to help protect them, and it will also protect people they're looking after, so we're going to make a particular effort to ensure that our home and community support care workers have got, through their organisations, access to masks if they need to use them and they've got them.

**Media:** What about—we've been contacted by people that have donated blood, and they're concerned that the people that have taken the blood aren't wearing enough protective equipment. What would be your advice to the blood service?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Well, those are health workers, and they'll be guided by the advice that's there. Not everyone in contact with someone in a healthcare setting needs to wear personal protective equipment. The majority of care will be of people—will be in situations where people haven't got a respiratory illness or any symptoms and don't have any risk of having it, and so they will just take the normal precautions that they would when they were taking blood or in any other setting where it was required.

**Media:** The PPE guidelines for home care workers that were put online last week, they're no longer accessible; they've been taken down off the Ministry of Health website. Do you know why that is? Was there an issue with what was in there, or—

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Not that I'm aware of. I didn't know they'd been taken down. I've got a hard copy. I think they're very good, so I'll check that when I get back, just to make sure they are available.

**Media:** What planning are you putting in place for widespread coronavirus in the police force? Do these two positive tests make you feel nervous?

**Mike Bush:** Yeah, we're always very concerned about our staff. Ever since we kicked this off, we've been working, like every other Government agency and essential workforce is, around building a contingency so we have a contingency plan in place. We're even looking as far and wide as, you know, what's happening inside the NYPD, and taking learnings from other organisations. But I can assure you that Deputy Chief Executive of People is leading our contingency planning around our own workforce.

**Media:** Speaking of New York—

**Media:** Just on—

**Mike Bush:** Can I go over here, because we haven't been over there.

**Media:** There's been concern about Gloriavale residents not adhering to the restrictions. What are the police doing to ensure that Gloriavale residents are complying with those self-isolation rules?

**Mike Bush:** Yeah. I can't give you the absolute detail. I'm aware that it's been in the media today, and our local police are examining how they approach that. Can I get back to you on that for further detail?

**Media:** On New York—so are either of those two cases that you've identified within the police force, were either of them linked to a trip to New York, and are there any other police officers who are being tested as a result?

**Mike Bush:** No, the first one, the one I have more detail on, was local in terms of what that officer was doing as part of her role.

**Media:** And the other case?

**Mike Bush:** I can't give you the detail, but I do not believe so. But allow me to confirm.

**Media:** Are you testing to ensure there's not a cluster there, or are you testing other—

**Mike Bush:** Yeah, no, they're quite separate—yep, very separate.

**Media:** Just on the several hundred police officers who are self-isolating, how many of them have been tested?

**Mike Bush:** I can't give you that information. It's more precautionary, and I don't believe any of them are symptomatic.

**Media:** Can you be any more specific than "several hundred"? Can you give us any numbers, or—

**Mike Bush:** Yes, I think I can. Look, please don't quote me—I think it's 380, but the reason I'm not being specific is because I don't have that right in front of me.

**Media:** Commissioner, do you believe that supermarkets are breaking the law at the moment with regard to price gouging?

**Mike Bush:** I think you'd need to be more specific, and I do know that others will talk to that point today.

**Media:** Have you seen the reports of a kayaker having to be rescued off the Coromandel, and what's the advice for anyone who wants to—

**Mike Bush:** Yes, I have seen that report, and, again, it's not in line with the advice, or the compliance advice, that we've given. So it's a really good example of the fact that if you're going to do this, you're putting others in jeopardy and causing others to come to your rescue. So we more than strongly advise against that kind of behaviour.

**Media:** Does that apply to paddleboarders as well?

**Mike Bush:** Yes.

**Media:** The backpacker party in Queenstown—what details can you give us about that and how you dealt with it?

**Mike Bush:** Yes, our staff responded to that. You know, because it's in the reporting, that they decided that was their own self-isolation bubble. That's very poor advice. They've been strongly advised to break into much smaller groups, and under my definition that's a mass gathering, and they should cease.

**Media:** Does the business that sort of facilitates the opportunities for people to breach self-isolation—could they face punishment as well?

**Mike Bush:** I believe so, absolutely. Yep—yes; short answer is yes.

**Media:** There are reports that the woman on the West Coast was not given a ventilator, and that she had no connection to international travel or anything else. What information do you have about those two details?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** So I'm just going to make a general comment about the use of ventilators. The West Coast hospital—the Grey Base Hospital—can ventilate people, if needs be. But generally, in any illness, the decision on whether to ventilate someone or not is a clinical and family decision, and that will be the case as we go through this COVID-19 experience. There's nothing unusual about that, so not every person who gets COVID-19 who may then be on a palliative pathway will be ventilated. All our hospitals have the capacity to ventilate people if they need to be ventilated.

**Media:** And the fact that there is no sort of obvious connection to international travel or anything there, is this another community outbreak cluster, or—

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** When I last saw and sought information, there were a couple of leads being followed up around a link to international travel still.

**Media:** How are staff that are in isolation—are they all still symptom-free?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** That's my understanding, but if I find out any different, I'll let you know.

**Media:** Is any advice being developed for the likes of home care workers to develop work bubbles so so many people aren't going into so many homes—especially rostering?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Yes, actually, I know that home and community support providers are looking at this so that they have a small number of caregivers looking after the same people. Of course you can imagine if people require seven-day-a-week care, then they need to rotate and have rosters. That is for the staff, but that is absolutely an approach that I know is being used, and I think it's a very good approach.

**Media:** What about hospitals? What are they doing beyond cancelling elective surgeries, restricting visitors—what measures are they taking or could they take to stop any undetected spread?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Well, I know that they've got measures at the front door to make sure that anyone coming in through the ED is being screened, first of all, to see if they're symptomatic, and if they're coming in for a respiratory-type illness they go down a different pathway. Of course a key part of this is to make sure that anyone coming into the

hospital—whether they're staff or visitors or couriers, and so on—are not symptomatic. We need to really keep our healthcare facilities COVID-19 - free, if we're going to protect them to be able to do the work they need to do.

**Mike Bush:** Shall we take the last question down here, Ash?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Sounds good.

**Media:** Is it fair to say that tourists are responsible for the majority of lockdown breaches?

**Mike Bush:** Ah, no, no. But, again, I strongly advise tourists that they're not to move around the country. They're to stay in one location.

**Media:** Is there one particular group in society that's sort of being the least compliant?

**Mike Bush:** We haven't done any analytics on that yet—maybe—but, no, we don't have the answer to that. Kia ora.

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Good. Thank you very much.

**conclusion of press conference**