

## PRESS CONFERENCE: THURSDAY, 7 MAY 2020

**PM:** Right, kia ora koutou katoa. We'll start with an update from Dr Bloomfield, after which I'll set out further details on how New Zealand will operate under alert level 2 when it comes time to safely move there. But first, Dr Bloomfield.

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Thank you, Prime Minister. Tēnā koutou katoa. Today, we're reporting one new confirmed case of COVID-19. This person has tested positive and is a household contact of a previously confirmed case linked to the Matamata cluster. The Waikato DHB is publicly calling for anyone in Matamata who is concerned that they may have been exposed to COVID-19, regardless of whether they were directly involved in the St Patrick's Day event that led to this cluster, to immediately seek advice if they want to look at getting tested.

So today's case brings the total of confirmed and probable COVID-19 cases to 1,489, and of these 1,339 are confirmed cases. We now have 1,332 people who are reported as having recovered from the COVID-19 infection, which is 89 percent of all cases. Today, there remain two people in hospital, one in Middlemore and one in Auckland City Hospital. Neither are in ICU. We still have the 16 significant clusters—no increase in those—and I'm pleased to say no further deaths to report today.

Yesterday, our laboratories processed a record 7,323 tests, bringing the total number of tests undertaken to date to 168,023. It's very encouraging to see these testing numbers increase again after the weekend, and this is a reminder to anyone who has symptoms to seek advice about getting tested, and the high numbers also reflect the work our district health boards are doing to ensure that there is good surveillance testing happening in their regions.

Just a word on aged residential care: I talked last week about some work we were doing with the Aged Care Association and nominated clinicians on what we have learnt about and what we can do to further strengthen prevention and management of COVID-19 in this important setting. So a new questionnaire has been developed in collaboration with the district health boards and the Aged Care Association about the role of testing and other screening processes for new residents going into aged care. This has been released—the questionnaire—just last evening, I think, on our website. It is there to see, and a very good piece of collaborative work, and I think incorporating all the learnings from our experience to date and led by clinicians nominated by all parties.

Just an update quickly on our exemptions review: the initial review of 32 of the previous decisions on exemptions has now been completed. You'll recall alongside this I had asked the team to do a review of the criteria for assessing these exceptional requests, and to incorporate the findings of the judgment from last week into that review. So the review process undertaken to date, against the pre-existing criteria, found that all the decisions had been made, both in terms of process and finding, correctly, and so there was no change. However, it has also found, and as it goes through, that some of these would be different if they were assessed against the updated criteria, which incorporate the findings from last week's High Court decision. So there has been media coverage already on the outcome of one of those decisions and a person has left managed isolation to go and visit a dying relative. The ministry team is now completing these reviews rapidly at this point and contacting and working with all those affected. They will be completed by the end of today.

Finally, a word on masks—another subject of interest today. We've just published today an updated review of the evidence on the use of masks in the general setting by the general public, including both the risks and benefits. It's a very good but very readable review. The key finding of the review, which was commissioned by the ministry's Chief Science Advisor, Professor Ian Town, is that the science remains inconclusive; there are both risks and benefits, and there is a range of approaches being taken by many different countries. That's

all laid out in that updated review. So we know there is ongoing interest, and what I've asked is that that review now be referred to our technical advisory group for consideration to see if we should update our current recommendations for the general public. Thank you, Prime Minister.

**PM:** Thank you, Dr Bloomfield. For six weeks now, our lives have been quite different. We've gone from a lockdown into level 3 and the reopening of parts of our economy, as our team of five million has stuck to our strategy of going hard and going early to win the battle against COVID-19. We can be proud of what we have achieved: low numbers of new cases, and two days where we were without any; increases in testing, including actively testing those who might be at risk of COVID-19 as we hunt to find any burning embers of the virus. Amongst the health response, we've seen the ingenuity of Kiwis, who have understood what was needed to operate at level 3 safely and have made it work. Even more pleasing is how well these owners and operators have been supported, with Kiwis being mindful of the people and livelihoods that sit behind a meal, a parcel, a takeaway lunch. Those businesses reopened their doors, and we have begun reopening our economy.

Now we find ourselves in a unique position again. On Monday, Cabinet will consider the next stage of our response. We will do that with the best evidence and advice we can, with all of the data we have from almost one more full cycle of the virus. We need every number from every single day to get the full set of data, and we need, of course, the view of the Director-General of Health. We will make a balanced decision; one that recognises the impact of restrictions and the huge impact of restrictions on people's livelihoods but doesn't risk all of the gains that we have made today. After all, no one wants a second wave—one.

As restrictions have been relaxed in other countries around the world, the virus has had the opportunity to bounce back, and in some places it has. Ultimately, we need to stay in control. So the key for us has always been to understand where we are at in any given time in our battle with COVID and then make sure we are at the right alert level to put us in the best position to continue beating it. Every alert level, therefore, has its own battle, and even when you win one, it doesn't mean that the war is over.

So a quick reminder, again, of the framework we have been using to help us on this journey. As the alert level system makes clear, different levels allow different amounts of contact with one another, depending on how bad the spread of COVID-19 is. At alert level 4, the aim is to eliminate contact with each other, and that is what a full lockdown achieves. At level 3, "restrict", there is still a high risk the virus can get out of control and bounce back, so the goal remains to restrict contact with one another as much as possible. At level 2, the aim is still to reduce close contact with strangers. It acknowledges that the virus is probably still with us; so we do need to behave differently to prevent it taking off again. It is very unlikely that we have hunted down every single case of COVID-19. If stray cases start new chains of transmission, we might not find them for a month, so we all have to stay on guard.

Level 2 has been designed to get as many people back to work as possible and the economy back up and running but in the safest way possible. In a nutshell, the principle behind level 2 is "play it safe". We will only move there if things are under control. But it won't mean the fight is over. If we adopt a safer way of operating as part of our new normal, we can keep it in check and remain on our path of elimination.

So now for the principles of "playing it safe." First, we have our constants: public health measures remain unchanged. If you are even slightly sick, stay home. I know this is against New Zealanders stoic intuition, but I cannot reiterate this enough: if you are sick, please stay at home. If you have symptoms, even if it is just a runny nose, a sore throat, get a test. And, now more than ever, wash your hands often and properly all of the time. Wash all high-touch surfaces regularly, like your keys and door handles, and don't pass other people your phone.

The border remains unchanged. We'll continue to keep our borders closed, except to Kiwis. We will continue to isolate Kiwis who come in from overseas in managed hotels away from others. And our elimination strategy remains in place: test, contact-trace, isolate. This is our COVID business as usual.

There are a few other things we want you to keep the same, and that includes your distance. You'll hear people talk a lot about how far you should stay apart from others. Let me give you the rationale behind that. If you are sick, then you'll sometimes have symptoms that will make you spread your illness—things like coughing. If that's the case, the safest place for you is at home. But if someone doesn't follow those rules, or doesn't know they are sick, and leaves the house, the safest distance between you and that sick person is 2 metres. So that's why we use that guideline.

Now, as we've moved through the alert levels, you will be coming into contact with more people and more places. It's not always easy to keep that much distance between you. So at alert level 2, playing it safe means 2 metres from strangers, but in your workplace or places where you're around people you know or who we can contact trace later, we can live with less, because we can find you and we can find them.

So let's then talk about workplaces at level 2. Businesses can restart for staff and for customers. Services can be provided on customers' premises—for example, in people's homes. And people who haven't been into their office spaces can return, but with good hygiene practices in place. But one thing to remember: COVID is still with us. The fewer people we can have contact-trace in a workplace, if we need to, the better. So while you can go back, it is still worth the conversation with your boss whether you have to be there in person. After all, many businesses may well have experienced the productivity gains of staggered start times, less congestion, and working from home. There's no reason we should lose what we have learnt. Each business can work out its own situation. There is flexibility there. What is non-negotiable, though, are those basic hygiene practices.

That brings me to those places of work where working from home was never an option: domestic cleaners, hairdressers, retail stores, cafes, restaurants, hospitality. At level 2, when we get there, these operations can reopen, but they all must play it safe, and that means doing things differently.

For retail, that means physical distancing in store for both staff and customers. It means good hygiene practices and regular cleaning of surfaces and those things people touch often. Larger retailers and malls will follow the lead of our supermarkets, with measures like limiting the number of people in store to enable enough space for physical distancing.

For hairdressers and beauticians, it means wearing appropriate PPE because of the close proximity you have with your customers throughout the day and because we want to protect you and your client. This is an area where we have given specific advice because it is virtually impossible to do this job without being in very close proximity to your clients and to having a large number of clients in any single day. So this is to mitigate that risk.

For hospitality, be it a cafe, a restaurant, or a bar, playing it safe means using all of the evidence and advice we have to make rules that work. This means that only those businesses that can apply the three S's will be able to operate. They are, firstly, people must be seated. That means you can only have as many people in your venue as you can safely seat, and no one, regardless of venue size, can have more than 100. The reason for this is simple: COVID loves congregations. Crowds of strangers with no physical distancing and no ability to tell who you are standing near is very, very difficult. It is much easier to separate people, keeping them physically distanced, and trace them if we make sure people are seated. This also helps to prevent the spread. Congested bars have already produced a massive cluster in New Zealand and we must avoid another.

The second S: people must be separated. So there must be social distance in venue between people and tables. I acknowledge this may mean for some it is not economical to open, but that is up to each venue.

Three: each table must have a single server. At every venue there must be table service, not people going up to counters, as this minimises contact and helps us to trace if we need to. So the three S's again are: seated, separated, and single server.

Finally, as you can imagine, contact tracing will also be key here. We are working on nationwide technological fix to make it easier for businesses to record who comes into their premises. This is likely to include QR codes, but, in the meantime, manual or basic digital recording will be used, which was being done by venues before we moved up the alert levels. Of course, it matters what happens outside the hospitality venues too, as we have seen in recent weeks. Operators will have a responsibility to manage customer contact outside their venue. If there are lines, for instance, people must be separated. Those who do not comply with these guidelines will be shut down and lose their ability to operate. As you can see, there are significant risks in hospitality, and so there are significant rules to manage those risks. These are all principles we've worked through with the Hospitality Association, including the three S's. We both believe they can be made to work.

That brings me to the issue of gatherings. Our journey in understanding this virus has also led us to reaffirm that at level 2 indoor gatherings are limited to a maximum of 100. I do want to just acknowledge that that is a maximum. Of course, many venues for their fire regulations, will not be able to have many, and many will not be able to physically seat that many. But we have also learnt a lot through this journey, and that means we will also limit outdoor gatherings to 100 people also. Previously, you will recall, it was 500 for outdoors, but I think everyone can see that big events lead to risk, and that risk can mean big clusters. I know this will affect many, but we have to have to keep working on getting things right so that we can get to place where larger events are possible again. In the meantime, we are thinking about the extra support required for sectors that will be on an ongoing basis affected by these limitations. For managed events like weddings, music events, religious services, funerals, these can be held at level 2 when we get there, but with all the same public health guidance and with the 100 person limit. Public venues such as museums and markets can also open again, but, again, the same rules of keeping your distance and good hygiene apply. Success or failure could depend on something as simple as how often you clean the handrails.

This brings me to the issue of bubbles. Firstly, you no longer need to stick to your bubble. You can begin seeing family and friends again, but we do want you to hang onto the same principles that we are using generally in hospitality—issues around space and hygiene and contact tracing. If we have large-scale events held in people's homes, then all of that becomes harder. That is why at alert level 2 we are saying that you can have friends and family over to your home but keep the numbers small so that you can practice all of those measures that were outlined across alert level 2. This is not the time for a large party or function at your home. We will be providing more specific guidance on this in the coming days.

Now I want to come to the issue of moving around New Zealand. At the time of creating the alert level framework our cases numbers were limited. We now know a lot about risk. We know, for instance, that so long as you play it safe when you travel, we can minimise the risks. It's what you do when you get there that is the problem. A trip from Wellington to Napier to see your mum is fine. A trip from Wellington to Napier to go to a big conference with an open bar is not fine. That's why at level 2 we will be allowing people to move around the country again, but to do it safely. Keep your distance on public transport and at airports. Manage your social distancing. Remember the same practices apply wherever you go in the country. And those are practices that already those involved in large-scale transport are putting in place. I know this change will mean a lot to the likes of our tourism industry, and I know a lot of people are keen to support you. In fact, I got an email just last night from a wonderful Kiwi named Judith, who told me that "When we are on the other side of this, I plan to get a haircut, then to take a trip somewhere in New Zealand." A lot of Kiwis share this sentiment, but we need to support our tourism industry safely to avoid us going back to square one.

That brings me to recreation and sport; it's quite different at level 2. At level 2, playgrounds, gyms, pools, and public courts are permitted to reopen, subject to meeting the required public health measures. All water activities can resume. Some community sports will be able to return to play more quickly than others while the necessary health requirements are worked through, so we ask that you give your club a chance to get up and running again and to work through some of those issues. We all want to get back to sport, but we want to take enough time to do it safely and to look after those who are involved in it. Professional sport will be able to resume domestically under level 2, with the necessary public health measures in place. Super Rugby and the netball premiers league have already confirmed their intention to resume a domestic competition at alert level 2, which I know will be cause for great excitement for many. The rules around mass gatherings will still apply, so there won't be any stadium crowds for now, but sport will be played. Again, there is more detail to come on this area, and that will be made publicly available.

And, last but not least, education. Early learning services, schools, and tertiary education facilities can open at level 2. I do want to emphasise that with so few cases in New Zealand, schools and early learning services are safe environments for children, young people, and staff. Additional public health control measures are in place to prevent the spread of the disease and to support contact tracing. Schools and early learning services will engage with parents about children returning at level 2. Distance learning is available for those unable to attend school, for example, those who are self-isolating because of potential contact with COVID. Tertiary education facilities too will maintain the core capability to deliver comprehensive distance learning to students if needed. If an education facility has a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19 in the future, they must close on an individual or group basis for 72 hours to allow contact tracing, and then potentially for a further 14 days, if that is required.

We also agreed that when we make the decision to move levels, schools won't be opening mid-week. Whenever the decision is made, they will then open at the beginning of the following week. The same public health messages continue to apply to schools: keep children at home if they're even slightly sick, and good hygiene such as hand washing are very important. Where possible, physical distancing is a good precaution. We do, however, know it is near possible in an early learning environment and very challenging in schools. So staying home if sick, good hygiene practices, and regular cleaning become even more important here. And all schools and early learning services will collect information about who's there so public health can contact people quickly if needed. We know parents have lots of questions, but please give schools and early learning centres time to plan and contact you. And, again, just a reminder: we're not moving there yet, this is just the framework.

I hope that gives you a good sense of the rationale and principles of level 2: the place where we are still limiting contact with strangers, and where we must play it safe. As you can see, it is a large step from where we are now. So my last message today is a very important one: when it comes the time to move, we want to move with confidence. That means the Ministry of Health and experts giving us the best advice on how to do that. If that advice is to move in a phased way, because level 2 taken all at once has too many risks because, for instance, it includes gatherings of people, I would rather take that advice and move out slowly than be in level 3 longer than we need to. Equally, no one wants to make a decision that leads to us yo-yoing between levels.

Now, again, no decisions have been made yet. The Director-General has not provided us with advice yet on what decision we should take on Monday. We wait for all of the data before we do that. But if reducing risks means taking several steps into level 2, rather than one big one, that may be what happens. But we all need to wait, and make that call when the time comes. And, finally, a reminder to stick to the plan. I know it's Mothers' Day this weekend and the urge to reach out will be strong, but we remain at level 3. And so if your mum is not in your bubble, then reach out over the phone or video, send a wee local present, and make plans to catch up when it's safe to do so. There will no doubt be

additional question beyond the broad overview I've given today, and details are available at the COVID website, including examples for different workplaces. We've tried to provide as much as we can and we've tried to work alongside industry and industry associations to develop guidance. It doesn't mean, necessarily, we'll have every answer. We've given ourselves time though, so if you're a business, in particular, and you need a question answered, please do reach out to MBIE for further information.

Ultimately, level 2 is our safer normal—not a return to business as usual. Treasury modelling did tell us we're better off in the longer term to move down through the alerts progressively, so it does mean getting every stage right. It means both the decision to go there but also what we do when we get there. If we think of ourselves as halfway down Everest, I think it's clear that no one wants to hike back up that peak. The descent is known to be even more dangerous, and so we need to proceed with caution, with the highest degree of confidence, and to look after one another on the way, and I absolutely believe we can do that. We're now happy to take your questions.

**Media:** Prime Minister, so many people will be letting out a sigh of relief in hearing these guidelines. Are you worried that people will now relax compliance?

**PM:** No, because we have moved through stages before and, again, we are still in the early stages of being at alert level 3 in terms of results. The virus has a lag time, so we need to stay the course, but you'll hear, from what we've said today, we're eager to move too, but we want to do it safely, we want to do it carefully, and we want to remain vigilant.

**Media:** If you do phase in level 2, what would be the priorities out of these guidelines that you've revealed today?

**PM:** I don't want to pre-empt any decisions, but what I want to indicate today is, of course, moving into level 2 is a large step. We would rather start that journey than to wait back in level 3 longer than we need to, but it may be that we get advice that the higher risk elements of level 2 may need a little more time. I'm not pre-empting that decision, though, because we are still waiting on the advice that we'll receive from all of the experts, and we'll be sharing that decision on Monday.

**Media:** If we are to move into level 2 on Monday full bore, why not make that decision immediately? Why wait—I think, was it—48 hours that you said you'd wait until we actually made the shift?

**PM:** Two things: that gives us that full two weeks, and we've always given that lead time for people to plan and prepare. It allows people to adjust their working arrangements. It allows them, if they're a business, to prepare for opening. Even then, that's quite a short turn-around for many businesses.

**Media:** A phased approach—essentially, is that a level 2.5; and what restrictions would still be kept and what would be relaxed?

**PM:** And again, I don't want to pre-empt the decision that we are yet to make, but level 2 is a big step. The important thing for us is opening up as much of the economy as we can safely do so without squandering the gains we've made. So if the advice we receive from Health is "Take some cautious steps forward.", then that's advice we want to consider. We don't want to rule out the option of phasing if that's what's needed to get there.

**Media:** Will you look at measures such as mask wearing, for example, on travel? Will that be part of the consideration in terms of what the public might expect that they have to do along with what you've already outlined?

**PM:** I'll let Dr Bloomfield answer that.

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** There certainly will be some recommendations for specific settings around wearing of masks: for example, the Prime Minister mentioned hairdressers and beauticians and talked about PPE—the primary thing being masks there makes good sense. And we're looking again at, based on the evidence, whether we're recommending

people—or certainly not requiring but certainly recommending whether people more generally, the general public, wear masks in certain settings. At this stage, we think our advice stands, but we're asking for our technical advisory group to get to us on that.

**Media:** Would there be any issues of supply if suddenly the public was recommended or urged to use masks? Obviously, that would increase demand significantly.

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** That's one of the things we'd want to look at. And, I guess, we know the value of masks in healthcare settings and in other settings and we want to make sure that they are available and being used appropriately in those settings. And then there will be other specific settings, and we want to make sure that people working in those settings who we're proposing wear masks are also able to access them. Then, if we were going to look at wider wearing, even if that was in certain circumstances, we wouldn't want to be recommending it if we couldn't also be sure that people were able to access—and look, it needn't necessarily be a disposable mask. You've seen other countries talk about cloth masks, even homemade ones, or face coverings; although, as you'll see from the evidence review, the benefit of the cloth mask is lower than a standard surgical mask.

**PM:** Just to add, you will have seen us reference PPE for people working in those fields where it's impossible to remove close proximity and physical contact. And so we have asked the all-of-Government team just to make sure that we provide a bit of advice on accessing PPE for those who are working as beauticians or working as hairdressers.

**Media:** Prime Minister, you talked about breaking your bubble, so for people at home who intend to break their bubble—say they want to have a dinner party or something like that—do you have a restriction on numbers you can have into your home?

**PM:** Yeah, we will be providing further guidance on that in the days that are ahead. But what I would again urge is that, when we make the decision to move to alert level 2, we are still requiring people to play it safe. That means not having large gatherings, cramming people into your home, and dispensing of all of the advice we've had over this period of time. Yes, do catch up with your family, do catch up with your friends, but large gatherings are still a no-no.

**Media:** Does that mean that people can go back to hugs and handshakes, or do they have to keep doing the West Coast wave?

**PM:** Again, that's actually—I might start with Dr Bloomfield and then respond to your West Coast wave.

**Media:** Or East Coast wave, sorry.

**PM:** I thought there might be something I'd missed on the West Coast.

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Well, it may well be on the West Coast now, if it's being used more widely. Look, I think the key principle here is—and the Prime Minister's talked about the 2 metres away from people you don't know—1 metre generally in other settings is good if they're people you know. And also keeping mindful of this overarching principle, which is if you have got a cold, don't go out and, of course, don't give even your family members a hug, really. Keep your germs to yourself. So hongi, I think, is an issue for iwi to work through. We will, of course, be providing guidance and principles. For my part, I'm looking forward to giving some of my more extended family members and friends a careful hug, but for work colleagues and, perhaps, people I'm meeting for the first time, I'll be sticking to, probably, an elbow bump.

**PM:** Yeah. I think keeping it limited at this stage is the advice that we would be giving.

**Media:** Just to be very clear, so are people allowed to travel domestically for tourism specifically?

**PM:** Yes. As you will have heard us outline today, it's not so much the travel, although we want you to do that safely, it's what you do when you get there that also matters. So, of course, if you're engaging in activities with your family and you're maintaining physical

distance when you're out and about, you're mindful of your personal hygiene, then yes. But if you're travelling for a large gathering in someone's home or you intend to meet up with a large group of people, then that's not a safe purpose for travel.

**Media:** Is there different advice for people over 70 or with health conditions in terms of, for example, travel, recreation, any of those different activities?

**PM:** The advice that we're giving—and I'll hand to Dr Ashley to expand on this—there for those who do have higher risks is just, again, for them to think about their own personal safety when they are out and about; so applying all of those precautions really rigorously. So keeping safe distances, personal hygiene—that all really applies, particularly to those groups who do have higher risks.

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** The only thing I would add, of course, is also for others to look after and continue to keep those people safe, because if they do get infected then they're more likely to get a poorer outcome.

**Media:** Prime Minister, there are some pretty nervous parents out there. How confident are you that we're not going to see another Marist College school cluster?

**PM:** We won't be moving into alert level 2 unless we believe it's safe to do so. So I absolutely understand all of the anxiety of a parent. And so the lens that we've been analysing these decisions and, indeed, creating the framework where we would see a reopening of education facilities is only if it is safe to do so.

**Media:** Have you banned dancing—like, how will you police non-congregation of people at social events?

**PM:** Of course, as you can see, the expectation here is limiting contact with strangers, and there are some circumstances where the whole point is to have contact with strangers. So that is a difficult situation for certain parts of hospitality, where that's where their business is built around. So the safest way that we could determine that a business could operate was, actually, if they could fulfil certain criteria. So rather than describing which venues could open, we've described what they need to do if they want to reopen. They have to be able to seat every patron that's there, they have to be able to separate all of those patrons from one another, and they have to be able to serve people at those tables. It does mean that certain venues—nightclubs, and so on—unless they adapt in that way, at alert level 2 they would not be able to operate.

**Media:** How will it be policed? Like, have you actually created like a “fun police” that could actually ensure this stuff doesn't—

**PM:** The alternative, of course, is a hospitality industry that isn't able to operate at alert level 2, and I don't think that's what people would want. So, instead, what we have done is looked at “What is it that we're trying to achieve?” We're trying to achieve reducing contact between strangers. It's very, very difficult for the hospitality environment, so we've come up with some principles to try and achieve that and allow those businesses to reopen, but safely. It does mean for some it won't be workable, but keep in mind the intent is not to be at alert level 2 forever; the goal is to keep moving through. But, while we're there, we do need to be cautious.

**Media:** Could you just clarify: in the 100 person limit—is that for a single room? Or could, for example, a convention centre have 200 people if there was 100 people spaced out in one area and 100 in another.

**PM:** Gatherings. So those groups of people cannot intermingle with each other. You can imagine what it would be like with a conference venue with multiple groups passing through each other, using similar spaces, similar entry and exit places, similar bathroom facilities, how difficult it would be if you had one person with COVID in that environment, to then contact trace those individuals. So that's why those limits are put in place.

**Media:** Prime Minister, can you really allow bars and cafes and restaurants to open when many of them do not have contactless payments? So what is the Government doing to ensure they all take contactless payments?

**PM:** They're not required to take contactless payments at alert level 2. You'll see what we're accommodating, even, of course, in hospitality, you do have interaction with your servers; they're bringing you food, they're bringing you coffee. So there is that level of contact. That's why we're asking for single servers—reducing it down to as few people in that environment as you can—to reduce the chances of having to expose large groups of people to lots of different strangers in one environment.

**Media:** But isn't having these terminals where many, many patrons will share their hands with that terminal and servers to push their buttons in and slide their cards in—isn't that dangerous?

**PM:** And that is why the guidelines are very clear for retail, for hospitality: whether it is an EFTPOS terminal, the door handle you go into a space in, or the door handle you use into a bathroom facility—all of what they call "high-contact surfaces"—must be cleaned regularly. An EFTPOS terminal is not the only issue that we need retail and hospitality to be very aware of. That's the first point. The second point is this demonstrates why that transition needs to be cautious, needs to be well-thought-through, because level 2, if you're going to open up those parts of the economy, does open up more risk.

**Media:** Why don't you act more urgently to regulate the payments sector so that the fear that many hospitality and dairy owners have about fees is removed and they can properly use payWave?

**PM:** As I've just suggested, Bernard, an EFTPOS terminal is one of many high-contact surfaces. Unless you want us to regulate that no business can have a door handle as well, we wouldn't solve that problem. It's all about hygiene practices and we need every facility, whether you're a school, whether you're a retail operator, whether or not you're a restaurant, to be extra mindful of all of the surfaces that people have contact with. Dr Bloomfield might want to talk about that a bit more, though.

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** I think you've covered the key principles there, Prime Minister. So availability of hand gel so people can use them if they are using EFTPOS terminals and the cleaning is just paramount there, and that applies to any setting.

**Media:** Dr Bloomfield, can you please give us an update on the Marist cluster? And, also, is there any evidence that young people are infectious while not showing outward signs?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** What I can update you on is that over 500 people now have been tested so far this week from that Marist community, and thus far just the single positive test that I talked about yesterday. We know that there is increasing evidence about asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic transmission of the virus, and so that's one of the things that, of course, has been trickier for countries in how to manage and respond to this virus. And that applies in the school setting as in any other setting.

So saying, as the Prime Minister said, we are moving towards alert level 2 in exactly the position we wanted to be in. We came out of alert level 4 with low numbers of cases, and increasingly confident about no community transmission or ongoing unidentifiable transmission inside clusters, remembering this is a household contact. And this is the same now. All the cases we've seen this week—and we had the two days with no cases, and yesterday and today—are all linked to existing cases or clusters, which is exactly where we want to be.

**Media:** Is there strong enough evidence about infectious versus asymptomatic to be able to go into, for example, a school setting?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** The evidence continues to emerge. We've got a better understanding now of how the virus transmits. But the key thing here is—whether it's school, workplace, any other setting, including what would be high risk settings like,

arguably, cafes or restaurants, where there are strangers there—we are increasingly close to being in a position to go into alert level 2 because of the low numbers of cases we've had through efforts from the lockdown.

**Media:** Prime Minister, the finance Minister this morning said that he expected deficits to blow out for an extended period and also New Zealand's debt levels to increase over the foreseeable future as well. Could you give us some sort of indication about what those sorts of numbers are going to look like and if that's appropriate?

**PM:** No, I can't give you those indications at this stage, but what I would say is that New Zealand isn't in isolation here. The entire world is going to experience the prolonged economic pain of COVID-19. And I expect you'll see that in other countries' debt levels, and also you'll see it in their economic plans for recovery, as you'll see here in New Zealand. One of the unique positions, though, that we have that puts us in a better place than other parts of the world is we went hard and we went early. That will, therefore, I think, reap benefits for us in terms of opening the economy back up.

**Media:** But is it worth it to take on that much extra debt and to see our deficits blow out?

**PM:** Again, every decision that's made in terms of spending for recovery or for rebuild is made with the very distinct goal of ensuring that we are creating jobs, that we're supporting people through a very challenging economic period in our history. This is a one in 100 year event, and you will see us, though, apply the same rigor to our economic decision making that we always have, to make balanced decisions, to put people first.

**Media:** What will the restrictions on the numbers of people mean in places like ski fields, for example? Will they be able to reopen?

**PM:** In open air, obviously, golf courses, for instance, places where you have a large number of players, it's obviously a different sets of circumstances. When we're talking about those mass gatherings, it's where you've got those congregations of individuals that we really need to be really mindful of the contact that people have with one another.

**Media:** Prime Minister, you've mentioned in the past that when we move down alert levels you expect checkpoints, iwi-led checkpoints, community checkpoints, to close down. Is your expectation that when we get to level 2 all of those checkpoints will be closed immediately, or will you give some discretion to those local communities?

**PM:** The principle here is that we wouldn't be making a decision, and, indeed, we haven't made one yet to move to alert level 2 unless we have the information from the Director-General and the experts to say that it's safe. So the point of those checkpoints, I know, was to look after communities, and we won't be introducing regional travel and an opening up of the economy unless we believe that it's safe and it's time to do so.

**Media:** I have a question for Dr Bloomfield. You said, Dr Bloomfield, hongi will be an issue for iwi and we will provide guidance on that. Could you explain what you mean?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Well, I think the decision lies with individual iwi about hongi, but we'll have our Māori team, led by John Whaanga, provide advice and in discussion and consultation with our Māori advisory group.

**Media:** So the reason, Dr Bloomfield, you said specifically that hongi will be an issue for iwi, is that because hongi, you believe, has added risks for communities?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** No, rather, I think the decision about using hongi, because it's such an important cultural practice, lies with iwi and it's not one that—and we can give guidance about what the expectations are and the risks are at alert level 2, but I think iwi are very able, as they have shown to date, to make decisions around when hongi are appropriate or not.

**Media:** Prime Minister, what will level 2 mean for hospitals in terms of visitor numbers and elective surgeries?

**PM:** I'll leave that to Dr Bloomfield.

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** So elective surgery is already, under alert level 3, winding up to get back to the highest level we can while keeping the environment safe, and acknowledging that there is a backlog of care that needs to be provided to people. As we move to alert level 2, we will have further guidance around visitor policies in hospitals, and it won't be back to situation normal. It will be based on the same principles as every other setting about physical distancing, making sure that there is good hygiene, and so on.

**Media:** A question on the PPE review. Three staff members from North Shore Hospital have told us that they've been discouraged from wearing masks by management, with two sources saying they've been told to remove masks as it may scare the patients, and another saying that they're worried about asking for a mask because they felt they'll be bullied for being overdramatic. Is that appropriate?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Well, of course, bullying's not appropriate in any setting. That sounds like an issue specifically for that district health board to follow up. The PPE review that the Minister directed was specifically about the distribution of PPE from DHBs out to the range of community providers, and I can say—because I reviewed all the material that came in—it provided a reassuring picture and some areas that we will continue to work with DHBs on.

**Media:** But stories like this that we keep hearing don't provide a reassuring picture at all, do they? So there's a flaw in the distribution flow.

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** No, that's not a distribution issue you're talking about; that's about the interactions between individual clinicians and leaders within the healthcare institution about appropriate use of PPE. What I am also very confident about is that DHBs are using the guidance, the national guidance, to make sure that staff have available the PPE to use in accordance with that guidance.

**Media:** Prime Minister, are you confident in the enforcement of level 2's rules, given that they're much more relaxed?

**PM:** Yes, and, as I've said, the Attorney-General is working through some final elements to support the enforcement at level 2.

**Media:** Prime Minister, what would trigger a move backwards from level 2?

**PM:** Outbreaks of cases. You've seen what it's taken to get us down to where we are, but if we did have an outbreak, if we did see those cases ramping up, then we would have to be prepared to move again. No one wants that, which is why it's about being vigilant, making sure that we're balancing the opening of the economy, we're not squandering the gains we've made. But you will see us make a balanced decision. That's what we've done every time so far. Thanks everyone.

**conclusion of press conference**