

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 11 MAY 2020

PM: Good afternoon, everyone, and kia ora koutou katoa. I want to start today by acknowledging the sacrifices New Zealanders have made over the 6½ weeks we have been in alert levels 4 and 3 in order to beat COVID-19. Be it those who lost loved ones and were unable to say goodbye and mourn properly. Be it the children who wrote to me about missing birthdays, and there were many of them, or the many who cancelled weddings or didn't mark anniversaries. Be it the jobs that have been lost in the businesses that owners spent years building up only to watch it and their workforce suffer terribly. But for all of that, Kiwis from all walks of life were resolute and determined—determined that this was a war that we could eventually win, but only if we acted together. So we formed a team, and as a team we created a wall of protection for one another.

Over the weekend I read a letter from a mother who spoke about what that team effort has meant to her. Her young son has compromised immunity and as a result is on constant medication. When COVID arrived in the form of a global pandemic she was terrified, but she was writing to me out of sheer relief. There may be no cure, no vaccine, for COVID yet, but there was each and every one of you—every single Kiwi who made the decision to stay home, to make sacrifices, and you did that for her boy.

You did something for someone's mother, for someone's father, for someone's child. You created a wall that meant the virus couldn't reach those that it could easily take, and for that there are many people who are grateful to you, their team of 5 million.

Case numbers remain low, and in the last week we've had two days in a row of no cases. By the end of level 4 our R value—the number of people each case goes on to infect—was 0.4. Under level 3 it has remained low. Experts tell us that if the R value stays below 1, we will eventually achieve our goal of elimination.

As of today we have only 90 New Zealanders recorded as having the virus, of whom only two are in hospital. None of that has been through luck, but rather through hard work. While we have been battling this virus we've also built up our health system to specifically act as a defence. We can now undertake up to 12,000 tests a day—3.5 percent of the entire population has been tested, and our testing rates are amongst the highest in the world per capita, ahead of countries like Australia, the UK, Germany, Singapore, and South Korea. A lot of work has gone into building up our contact tracing capability. Dr Ayesha Verrall's report has been instrumental in this regard, and the majority of the recommendations have been implemented.

We can now contact trace 185 cases a day and have capacity to contact 10,000 people a day through a new national call centre, established since the beginning of the outbreak. Identifying new cases of the virus quickly through testing and rapid contact tracing can be 90 percent as effective as a vaccine in stopping the spread of the virus. But I cannot emphasise enough that speed is of the essence. The clock starts as soon as someone feels sick. If you have COVID, we need every minute to find the people you have been in contact with and isolate them before they are in contact with someone else. In short, if you get a sniffle or a sore throat or a cough, get advice and get a test quickly. Please don't be a stoic Kiwi.

If you do your bit, we all must keep doing ours. That means continuing our strong border controls, hand hygiene, and physical distancing, which have and will continue to be our primary wall of defence against COVID. They are tools that have worked.

But we all know there is more to do. We may have won a few battles but we have not won the war. We are still recording cases most days. New information about the virus indicates it could be spread prior to a person becoming symptomatic, meaning it can be passed on by

seemingly healthy people. The scientists who have advised us so well today say there is still a chance of silence spread in the future and, therefore, cases taking off again.

So today I am announcing that Cabinet agrees we are ready to move into level 2, to open up the economy but to do it as safely as possible. So let me set out how we will do that. On Thursday this week retail, malls, cafes, restaurants, cinemas, and other public spaces, including playgrounds and gyms, can reopen. All will be required to have physical distancing and strict hygiene measures in place. You can begin to move around New Zealand, but space yourself out, especially if you are using public transport. And, of course, health services will restart.

On Monday, 18 May, all children and young people will be able to return to school and early learning. This staging is to give parents, teachers, and education facilities time to plan. And finally, on Thursday, 21 May, bars will be able to open with all the requirements set out last week, including that seating must be provided, there must be space between tables, and there mustn't be multiple waiters and waitresses serving a single table.

We have left bars till last because they do pose the most risk, as we can see from South Korea, that recently opened up their bars only to close them again after one person created an outbreak of 40 people and caused 1,500 tests. While we have put in place measures and expectations to make all hospitality as safe as possible, these few extra days really do give us a chance to lock in the data from level 3 and feel more secure that we're ready for this move.

Overall, though, the upshot is that in 10 days' time we will have reopened most businesses in New Zealand, and sooner than many other countries around the world. But that fits with our plan, and our plan was go hard, go early, so we can get our economy moving again sooner and so we can get the economic benefit of getting our health response right. And so far, we have.

But there does have to be a new normal, and that normal means that we will be breaking out of our bubbles; we will be around more people. But we can do that and get more activity going if we balance that with keeping our distance and keeping our social gatherings small for now. Our strength so far has been our willingness to learn about this virus and change the way that we behave to beat it, and we've learnt a lot, especially from our clusters. If you follow their origin, you'll know that they are slice of Kiwi life. They have started at wedding receptions, stag dos, a conference in Queenstown that included drinks and socialising, a bar in Matamata. There is a theme: when we come together to socialise in large numbers with one another, there is risk.

The best insurance policy we have for that risk is to reduce the size of our socialising for now, and that is what the Director-General of Health has recommended that we do for now. Parties, big social events, or anything designed to be for mixing and mingling won't be allowed to happen for groups that are larger than 10. Gatherings at home need to be capped at 10. Church and religious events, weddings, funerals, stag dos—all limited to 10 for now. And if you're wanting to head to a restaurant or a bar, they won't be able to take group bookings for larger than 10. This, alongside social distancing, is our insurance policy.

Why 10? Simple. If something goes wrong with a group of 10, that is much easier to contain, much easier to contact trace, much less likely that if something goes wrong, the whole country will have to experience more restrictions. That doesn't mean that you won't see larger gatherings of people around you. People, for instance, will be at the movies, but they'll all be spaced out. They'll be watching sports, but they will be spaced out. People might go to a show, but they will be spaced out. You'll see bars and restaurants open, but they, again, will be required to have people seated and spaced out. We have done what we can to prioritise opening up businesses but just alter the way that we work within them for the next wee while. This strikes a balance between getting the economy moving but also making sure we have got the next stage right.

I know that many New Zealanders are looking forward to catching up with friends and family, and from this Thursday you can. But for now, as I've said, it just needs to be small. This is a transition out of our bubbles, where you can see people you haven't seen in a while; you just can't do it all at once. I should add, though, a particular note, because I have been asked this a few times: if you have a family that is larger than 10, we're not suggesting you throw anyone out of the house. We are being pragmatic. We just don't want you to have a large gathering yet.

This is also one of the reasons that we have decided to allow travel again, as we signalled last week, because it isn't so much the movement around the country that is an issue; it's actually what people do when they get there that matters. So go and see your mum, just don't turn it into a massive family reunion while you're at it. Instead, maybe see your mum, visit a local tourism site, or support a local business.

I do want to acknowledge we will be looking at these restrictions—these remaining restrictions—again in just two weeks' time. And if our numbers continue to look good, the number of people you can socialise with and hold events with will grow, and I do want to signal that. If our numbers are still looking good, we will begin to grow those numbers.

Last Thursday, when announcing what level 2 looks like, I said the key rule is to play it safe—that we all need to take individual responsibility for our actions and continue to behave like the virus is still amongst us, especially when in public and around people that you don't know. At level 4 and level 3, we had success because staying home meant we broke the chain of transmission. We simply weren't in contact with one another to spread the virus. At level 2, we are now out and about again. Just about all parts of the economy are opening up again. What we have balanced in these decisions is how we can do that—get those restaurants open, malls open, shops open—but how we can keep them open. That's why we're asking you all to be incredibly careful as we get back to a new, safer normal. None of us can assume COVID isn't with us.

So with that in mind, a reminder of the golden rules of level 2: keep your distance from other people when you're out in public, including on transport. If you're sick, stay home—don't go to work or school; don't socialise. This should be a really low bar. If you have symptoms of cold or flu, call your doctor or Healthline immediately and get tested. Wash your hands, wash your hands, wash your hands, and do it properly. Don't get together socially or mix and mingle with more than 10 people at once, and keep a track of where you've been and who you've seen.

Your efforts, New Zealand, have got us to this place, ahead of most of the world, and without the carnage that COVID has inflicted in many other places, but there are risks ahead, so please be vigilant at level 2. Irresponsible behaviour will take us backwards.

Getting to this position early has saved jobs and businesses, but there is a long road ahead to full recovery, and things will continue to be very, very tough before they get better. We are looking to provide more support for the businesses most affected, and to do that soon. This week the Government will release our Budget—our plan to respond to the economic toll the virus has caused. It will be, however, one of many steps that we take in our efforts to rebuild together. In fact, that is what the Budget is called: "Rebuilding Together".

At its heart is the simple idea that our team of 5 million has united to beat the virus and must keep doing so, and now, together, we can also unite to build our economy, and that there is an opportunity to build back even better, addressing issues like inequality or run-down infrastructure and challenges to our environment. The finance Minister will have much, much more to say on that on Thursday.

So for now, we are in level 3 for just two more days. From Thursday, when you wake up, play it safe. Remember that wall of defence we built together as a team now rests with every one of us. So when you're out and about, acknowledge your fellow team mates, enjoy being out more and seeing others, keep it small, keep your distance, and be kind.

The director-general and I are both happy to take questions.

Media: Prime Minister, how do you differentiate between a restaurant and a bar, and do you recognise that this will be a massive kick in the guts to struggling bar owners?

PM: Actually, we've worked with the hospitality association, because you're right to point out that is an issue that may have caused problems with definition. So quite simply, we're using the guidance that's set out through the Easter Sunday / Anzac legislation. It, essentially, means if the primary purpose is for dining, you can open; if the primary purpose is for drinking, then there's that delay. That does mean pubs who provide meals and so on will be able to open. It is a really pragmatic way to strike that balance between getting those businesses open as soon as we can but also balancing the risk that still exists. We don't want to be South Korea—open our bars only to close them again.

Media: There are a lot of people watching this who will feel like we've got a whole lot more freedom now. How will you police that 10 or fewer people in the homes? Because this is literally going into people's homes.

PM: Yeah, and look, in the same way we have—really, in level 3 and level 4, we've had the same expectation that people not have large gatherings in their home, and we continue to have that expectation. This is where we are really saying there's a lot of personal responsibility. Think about the role that you're playing in your community and for New Zealand. No one wants to go backwards, and so that's up to all of us. There will, however, still be the ability to enforce. If a large group of students or others—I don't want to just prey upon students here—but a large group of people get together for a party, there will be the ability to enforce this.

Media: Can you give us a few more details on staggering, because you've talked about two weeks, you'll reassess. Will, then, you maybe look to add another 10, or will that progress more quickly?

PM: Yeah, I would anticipate that it would progress more quickly. I do want to leave that flexibility to the director-general, but he's already been considering that staging already, but I see there's been larger than that in. But, ultimately, it will depend on our numbers. Director-General?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yes, thanks Prime Minister, and kia ora koutou katoa. So if you look at Australia, they've gone for, actually, longer periods, but they've gone, sort of, 10 to 20 to 50 to 100. As the Prime Minister said, I think we'll be looking to open up more quickly if possible, but it will very much depend on what we're seeing in a couple of weeks' time, and then two weeks beyond that as well—understanding the end point that Cabinet's already agreed is an upper limit of 100.

Media: And no direction on masks. So is that something you've decided against, for example, for public transport as a mandatory requirement?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: So we're not requiring masks on public transport. The updated evidence review, you've seen, and there is updated advice around PPE, including mask use for health workers, for some workers in very specific settings outside of health, and also for the general public. For the general public, what I can say is we're neither recommending nor requiring masks; however, if you do choose to use a mask, that's fine, and just make sure you know how to use it safely so that you reduce the risk to yourself and others.

Media: Even though evidence from other jurisdictions—you know, they're using masks as a matter of course. That's not something the New Zealand Government thinks is, on the evidence, required—or is it supply? Are there any other issues dictating that?

PM: Evidence.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: It's not a supply issue; it's an evidence issue. And what I would say is the evidence is very much in the balance, and that's why you will find various learned commentators reaching different positions on this very issue. That doesn't mean that's our

final position, and we will keep watching, but at the moment we're not requiring or recommending that the general public use masks.

PM: A surgical mask—it will be surprising to many to learn a surgical mask, for instance, should be changed up to three times an hour, and, of course, when you're changing it, you need to be very careful that you're not making any contact with the mask and, ultimately, that you're not allowing it to become damp through the entire period you're wearing it. So making sure that it's worn properly I think is one of the reasons the evidence really can often fall on either side when you're asking those outside of the health profession to wear them.

Media: Just to be clear, the limit of 10—does that take into account people inside that bubble already? So if the household has eight people, two more people—

PM: So, ultimately, to keep it nice and simple, we're saying don't let your gatherings be larger than 10. If someone wants to catch up with a play date for their kids, then often it might be easier just to take them out, meet up with a friend in the park. We are trying to keep this nice and simple, which is why we've said let's limit those social gatherings to 10.

Media: What did you make of NZME today giving the Government, basically, a deadline of the end of May to create new legislation to allow NZME and Stuff to merge?

PM: Interesting, given it's a commercially sensitive issue and not one that I'm going to comment on.

Media: Prime Minister, even after laying out last week what level 2 would look like, there was perhaps a wilful misapprehension on the part of some people that we had actually moved to level 2. When we shift down, when we shift through the levels, does it become harder to police?

PM: Look, well, one of the things I'm very clear on is that as we give over more freedom, as we open things up further—and we are—then obviously there is a degree to which we are asking people to take responsibility for themselves out in that environment. We continue, though, to make really balanced decisions. We want the economy to be opened up, we want people back in work, but to do that safely we're asking people just to change their behaviour when they're out and about, and that is what we're relying on here. But I have faith in New Zealanders.

Media: Talking to people today, a lot of people are quite nervous about being back out in public en masse and around other people. Do you share that reticence?

PM: I think that's why—we've actually taken that into account. Ultimately, what we're trying to do is for any environment where there is risk, we've set guidelines to mitigate that risk. So for areas of hospitality, we've worked with them to make those environments safe for people to go into, because, ultimately, it won't be great for their business if they can't attract people into a safe space. So that's what we've done. We're opening the economy safely and then asking people just to follow the rules and the guidelines.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, do you think those people are right to be nervous?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Oh, I understand why people are nervous. And one of the things that's been interesting is as we've moved down the levels, it has felt to people like there are loads of people out there and they must be not complying with what the parameters are in that level, but, actually, that's not my observation. Yes, it comes as a surprise because you suddenly see so many people around or so many more cars on the road, but, actually, the vast majority of people I'm seeing are clearly aware of what is expected of them and are putting in a lot of effort, and businesses are putting in a lot of effort, to help maintain the physical distancing and the expectations on them, and I have a strong sense that we will see that as we move to alert level 2.

Media: Prime Minister, just on this maximum number of 10. Correct me if I'm wrong. Is what you're saying that you couldn't have like a wedding or a birthday or something that

would be more than 10 people, but you could take a group of up to 100 people to a restaurant and do something similar?

PM: Fair question. So that's where we've been really clear: the 10 is utterly consistent. If you want to go out to a restaurant or bar, they can't take a group booking of more than 10 either. You can't book out an entire restaurant for your entire party—it can only be 10.

Media: But you could have multiple bookings of tables for a group of people that wanted to have a party?

PM: No, you cannot. No. Ultimately, it is just if you are socialising with a group of your friends, you have to keep it to 10. The restaurant, however, can be open, catering for other patrons that are not part of your group, because, ultimately, people don't go to restaurants to continue to socialise with strangers. They're there with the group they've gone with, and that group needs to be limited at 10.

Media: Following up on that, for people planning weddings, for example—so when should they start getting their diaries out again?

PM: So what we're doing, obviously, at alert level 2 is increasing over time, if we continue to see those numbers hold, the number of people that can socialise with one another. But for now I imagine most people want certainty, and the best way to have certainty is just to hold off that planning for a while.

Media: [*Inaudible*]

PM: Oh, we've said the same. Again, drawing distinctions between church services—where people do come for fellowship, they do come for community, and they do come to socialise with one another. And so that is why we've kept it consistent: 10. But it is for now. We're saying two weeks, we'll review again and look to increase, and that is consistent with what the likes of Australia and other places are doing. We did really give hard consideration to this, particularly because we have been so moved by the struggle for families with funerals and tangi, but people come together for funerals and tangi to physically comfort one another, and so this is an area where we are hoping to be able to move soon, but for now we've opted for the safety of 10 and the consistency of 10.

Media: Because people would argue, with, like, a Sunday church service, though—not a funeral or a tangi—that you could have the same social distancing that you have at the movies.

PM: Yes. I've actually had people from different community groups argue with me that they consider that it should be treated in the same way—that they do come together for fellowship, for community, to socialise with one another, and people who haven't seen each other properly for seven weeks, that's a very natural inclination. So we've tried to be consistent there with the way we've rolled it out. I understand it's tough, but I'm hoping it won't be for long.

Media: Is Thursday the day for businesses that might require PPE, like hairdressers and beauticians, and could you also just clarify what's happening with sport?

PM: Yes, it is. All of that is 11.59 p.m. on Wednesday, as we've used that deadline for everything. So, essentially, it's everything that we've outlined in level 2, with the exceptions that I just set out in my statement, which is, obviously, those bars or those who tend to focus as their primary purpose on providing alcohol—that's from the 21st.

Some of the details on sport—obviously, we're continuing to work through with community sport in particular, but that's guidance that's being developed at the moment.

Media: Just on one point you just touched on—pubs that provide meals. You've said that they will be able to open from Thursday—

PM: Well, if they currently open under those guidelines.

Media: But will they be able to serve alcohol?

PM: Yes. Yep, so in the same way that we operate under—those who are familiar with Easter trading, Anzac trading. They can provide alcohol.

Media: So a group of friends can visit a pub under the guise of getting a meal but have some drinks?

PM: So the Hospitality Association knows well the way these provisions work, and that's why we chose them. They're a way that we could start to stagger those businesses who are primarily focused on food, and then leave a little bit later some of that higher risk, which is those that tend to be primarily focused on alcohol. It's something that the hospitality industry is very familiar with, those provisions, and so it makes it easier for them to implement them.

Media: Prime Minister, did you endorse a gag order placed by your office on your Ministers last Friday, after the release of documents, and why doesn't your office trust your Ministers?

PM: Well, I wouldn't characterise it as that, keeping in mind, of course, that the discussion we're having here is over the release of over 300 documents. The whole purpose, of course, was to provide them transparently and then be available to answer questions on them, as I am, as Dr Clark has been, and I believe Minister Shaw has also been in the public domain since Friday on those documents. The one thing I will say is I absolutely hear the feedback people have given around signalling earlier when they're coming. I know I gave some references to them being released soon, without specific dates. So we'll look to do that in the future, and we'll also look to make sure that they're released in the morning, whatever the given day of the week is, because I know that that's caused a bit of angst for people as well.

Media: Do you think it hits your reputation as a transparent Government?

PM: Well, I don't know that anyone would accuse me of not having been available, given how available I seek to make myself, and nor would I believe that to be the case either. But I will say it's not the language I would've used in an email, but you'd expect that I don't craft all of the emails sent out by people who work in my team.

Media: In crowded schools, physical distancing won't always be possible. How should schools mitigate that?

PM: Yeah, and, look, that's something from the very beginning we have acknowledged, and not had an expectation that schools and children won't be able to be children. So what we've done is work alongside the education sector to make sure that there are practices in place, hygiene practices, that help support a safe environment. Ultimately, we wouldn't move to be having children going back to school if we didn't believe it was safe, and I absolutely appreciate that. I think about this from my perspective and want to make sure that we can give that assurance to other parents too.

Media: And what about over-70s, vulnerable people, rest home visits, hospital visits—

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: So there's updated advice for people over 70 or vulnerable people, and it will be—particularly around employment for those people—a conversation with their employer to look at ways that any risk can be reduced for them. But it is a decision between them and their employer. We certainly would encourage those people to be going out and doing things, and doing so safely. As I said last week, actually, it's beholden to all of us to actually keep those people safe via ensuring we are complying with physical distancing and other behaviours.

Media: And rest home visits?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Rest home visits, yes, that's—the visiting policy for hospitals and rest homes is being updated. It will be up to individual rest homes. But you'll also be aware that these are clearly high-risk environments, and we do need to keep the residents

in there safe, so any visiting will have very strict boundaries around it still, even in alert level 2.

Media: What's the situation with the discussions around finding an agreement between landlords and tenants, or a code of conduct? Because there's some people saying that New Zealand First is blocking attempts by the Government in Cabinet to come to a solution.

PM: No. No, it is still an issue that we are working through, but as you would expect, one of the things that we're mindful of, of course, is that the code of conduct in Australia and, equally, what we would want to reflect here in New Zealand as well, is a way that we can fairly share the burden of COVID. Whilst we predominantly think of—and this will predominantly be the case—it being those who are the tenants who are in the most vulnerable situation, there will be some scenarios where those who are the tenants actually may have a stronger fiscal position than, for instance, the commercial landholder. So what we need to do is make sure that we're covering off those circumstances. Equally, the Australian code of conduct hadn't yet been embedded into law when it was announced. We, of course, are looking to work up the proposal and the legislative framework at the same time. So it's just taking a little bit of time to work those issues through.

Media: Just to follow up on New Zealand First, is New Zealand First blocking the Government from using section 64 of the Social Security Act to provide benefits to migrants who are stranded here?

PM: No. No, all of the issues that we work through, we work through on a consensus basis. We all agree that we have people the likes of whom in Queenstown are currently in a very difficult situation, which is why as a Government we agreed tens of millions of dollars in support to allow emergency support for both accommodation and food to be provided to those individuals.

Media: But are you considering using that part of the Act to give benefits to migrants?

PM: As I've said a few times, at the moment, we've found a way to provide the same support that would otherwise go to those groups without having to make legal changes to our social development regulations, and that includes actually being able to cover the costs of even accommodation.

Media: Can I ask for clarification on two areas. One, sports clubs: presumably golf, hunting, whatever, you can play the sport but you can't have the social gathering element afterwards. And also, secondly—

PM: Not more than 10.

Media: No more than 10—so you can go out, you can play, you can do your thing, but don't have the social after?

PM: Yep.

Media: And, just in terms of boarding schools, obviously, many more than 10 people living—

PM: And, again, we expect all of those things have been worked through directly with the Ministry of Education and with those who are in boarding environments, tertiary institutions, and the like. They've been working hard very specifically on the requirements of how they can make those facilities work safely for themselves and their students. There are some who are already still in boarding housing, for instance, and have been through lockdown level 4 and level 3.

Media: But are you saying that there would need to be a physical distancing element? Because dorms, for example—what, half could come back but the other half couldn't?

PM: Well, what I'm saying is that we're specifically working through that guidance, and without me having looked at the immediate detail that has been negotiated between the

schools, the ministry, and the Ministry of Health, I wouldn't want to speak in too much detail on that.

Media: You said appropriate PPE will need to be worn at hairdressers and beauticians. What does that mean exactly?

PM: Dr Bloomfield?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yes, so the advice we've given is particularly around masks, and our updated advice will be on our website, and also about our recommendations around where that can be accessed if there's any trouble with getting access to masks.

PM: Did you have anything further on that?

Media: Not on that, but on the bars and restaurants, what kind of penalties will there be for breaking those rules? Because if you break Easter trading rules, for example, you can face loss of licence for the premises. Is that the case under these restrictions?

PM: We're using closure here. You'll be closed. And we'll keep that consistent, because we'd want the consistent application for the way that we're dealing with whether or not you're keeping people separated, and so on. So far, it's been closure. What I'd need to check is just whether or not that will be any different in the first week, given we're applying a different set of legislation.

Media: What are your reflections on the fact that New Zealand is opening up its economy sooner than Australia, given that when we were in the level 4 lockdown, some people pointed to Australia's more relaxed rules to suggest that New Zealand's restrictions were over the top?

PM: Our focus has always been on our own response—doing what is best for New Zealand's health and New Zealand's economy. We went hard and we went early. We got control of the virus, and now we're in a position where we can safely step out of those controls and open our economy back up. It doesn't mean that we don't have a new, safer way of operating, though; we do, and we're expecting everyone to apply those tools as our first line of defence: keep your distance, keep up the hygiene, keep your gathering small. That, though, means we can get business back, and so I think that is a small price to pay to keep people in jobs and to keep our economy ticking over.

Media: What do you make of the situation in the Manurewa electorate in which Louisa Wall has threatened to sue the party?

PM: Ultimately, we have processes that are for the party. That includes the process they have of running selections, local electorates running their own selection processes. Generally, they don't tend to interest the rest of New Zealand but usually are confined to the Labour Party and the local electorate. So those processes need to run their course. I'm not attempting to intervene in that.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, Waitakere—when is the urgent PPE review due? And is there any indication it'll show failure? And also, after the outbreak, staff were stood down, tested, and work bubbles introduced. Have any other work bubbles been introduced in other DHBs?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, thanks. So the review was actually of the whole situation that happened there, and one of the reasons that the CE asked for that review to be done was because there had been very good use of PPE, and so they were trying to look and understand what had happened there—whether it was some environmental contamination. My understanding is that review was due to be completed at the end of last week. I haven't seen the outcome and report from that yet, but I will look at that with interest, because each of these reviews is undertaken to help improve not just our understanding but what we need to change to make sure these situations are not repeated. I'm not certain if other DHBs have introduced the bubble-type arrangement, but what I am certain is that once that review is completed, the recommendations will be circulated to all district health boards and we will update our national advice on the basis of what their findings are.

Media: Are DHBs going to test nurses and staff before they return to work?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yes, we are recommending that happens routinely. In fact, two of the confirmed cases today were a result of that testing, and, interestingly, both nurses were non-symptomatic and hadn't had any symptoms; they had been in isolation. So we had already moved to a policy of routinely testing staff before they returned to work in healthcare or aged residential care settings. I think that reinforces the importance of doing that. What we're not sure is whether that means they are infectious, particularly if they are not symptomatic. But I think this is something that everyone around the world is still trying to understand better. They will obviously remain stood down and then be retested.

Media: Can you talk about what might trigger a return back to level 3 and whether that might be applied regionally?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, I'll talk to the first bit, and I think the Prime Minister may want to comment as well. We will be looking, a bit like we have with the steps down, at not just numbers of cases but where they are happening, and, of course, our ability to get any cases and any outbreaks that might be occurring under control very quickly. And part of those controls may include some regional measures that are different for regions to help get what I call that ring-fence around an outbreak. So that may mean that there are measures in place in some locations or regions that are, in a sense, more restrictive than maybe around the rest of the country, until we're confident we've got an outbreak under control.

Media: Prime Minister, did Nine executives tell your Government that Stuff would shut at the end of May, if some kind of deal with NZME wasn't reached? I know you're going to say "commercial sensitivity", but are you prepared to let Stuff fall over?

PM: Oh, again, I think there's a lot of assumptions built into that question. Again, there's commercial sensitivity here, and there may well be more than one group that's involved in this scenario. So it's not for me to enter into any dialogue on that any further.

Media: Prime Minister, the address at the NZX this morning, though—that was deliberately addressed to you and the Government. That was an address to you. So how do you feel about the NZX being used in that way, to try and force your hand?

PM: Look, again, I think I've already given my response on that.

Media: With the 10-person limit, do you think that's going to have an effect on tourism operators, or is that—

PM: No, I don't believe it should. I mean, ultimately, what's most important to them is the ability for people to be able to travel regionally. And what we've balanced here is, look, let's open up that regional travel, but let's apply the ongoing restrictions to the thing that actually creates risk, and that's what people are doing together. So that, for instance, does enable a family, for instance, to take a small break away to some other part of the country and to engage in some tourism activity. The only thing it's stopping is them being involved in a large party while they are there. So, no, I don't think it should stop that. Keeping in mind, though, of course, this is what we're doing for the next two weeks. We will continue—all going to plan—to see that opening up.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, just a question about our corrections facilities. How many cases are you aware of in our prisons at the moment? We've heard that an Auckland women's inmate and a corrections officer have tested positive to COVID-19.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: So there are no cases inside our corrections facilities, and I've been working very closely with my counterpart at corrections since very early in this, and, actually, we moved very quickly, because we could see what was happening overseas, to ensure that anyone either working or inside a corrections facility was kept safe. One of our confirmed cases is someone who works for corrections, but not in direct contact with prisoners inside the facility, and it was from some time ago. So that person was already in

isolation and it was transmission inside the family. So I think we've done very well, actually, and corrections have done very well to keep people inside their facilities safe.

Media: So how will visiting rights be affected at level 2? Will it be similar to rest homes, where it's up to the corrections facility to decide on that?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, I spoke again to my counterpart at corrections just a few days ago about this, and I know his intention is to enable, as quickly as possible, prisoners who have access to visiting rights—that, you know, are their rights, but to do so in a safe way. And so I think you should look to see—and they will, I'm sure, publish what their national position will be on visiting arrangements under alert level 2.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, are you comfortable where things have landed in terms of level 2, because while you've got the, sort of, safe control around strangers in restaurants and bars and things, you've also got sports clubs and 30 guys on a rugby field playing together. So how do you balance that and where do you land on, sort of, how safe it is?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, you're right. It is a balance. We're coming into alert level 2 in a very good position because of our hard-won gains that we have made under alert levels 4 and 3. So our advice was clear that we're confident we're in a position to move to alert level 2. The parameters have been put around it—in particular, the group size of 10 I think will help where we had advised that, and that has been taken up. And, in fact, there was only one point of difference from our advice and where Cabinet landed, and that was just we had recommended keeping bars closed for a further two weeks, and Cabinet has settled on one week.

PM: Yeah. And it'll just help to give a little bit of context to that. Our view is that if we see any spike in cases—if we see any data that demonstrates to us that there is any risk—then, of course, we have an ability to act on that. But, equally, at the same time, we have put in place measures that we believe will mitigate some of the risks that were raised by Dr Bloomfield. And so we feel we've landed in a place that balances out all of those issues, ultimately.

Media: At level 2, is it prime ministerial business as usual? Will you continue to move around the country, or resume moving around the country, and will you move back to Auckland?

PM: Yeah. I actually—just for the pure logistics of the post-Budget period—haven't got any plans to move immediately, but my intention is to act in the exact same way that I have encouraged other New Zealanders to. That's what I've done all the way through, and that's what I'll do at alert level 2. So that means that I'll be applying the same restrictions, but I'll also be looking to move around a bit more as well.

Media: What are you looking forward to about level 2? Are you looking forward to a prime ministerial beer or a haircut or a workout?

PM: Oh, I'm actually really looking forward to giving my sister a hug. I haven't seen her in a couple of months because I haven't been home. So that'll be nice.

Media: Why did you decide not to take the advice to close bars for an extra two weeks?

PM: Sorry, what was that?

Media: Why did you not take the advice of the director-general to keep bars closed for a further two weeks?

PM: Yeah, we agreed that, actually, we are in a position to move into alert level 2 and we should do that in the safest way possible. So we struck a balance between opening up but actually putting in a delay of a week, because it is one of the more riskier things that we'll be doing. But we do have considerable safeguards. We're requiring everyone to be seated, we're requiring everyone to be separated, and we're requiring that there's not more than one waiter or waitress serving a table. And, actually, Dr Bloomfield believes that those who [*Inaudible*] as well, that would considerably reduce the risk.

Media: And you've called level 2 our safe and normal. How long do you think we are going to be in that safe and normal before we can go back to proper normal?

PM: Well, at the moment, obviously, we've said after two weeks we'll look again at the number of people that are able to gather together socially. And as long as we're making progress, we'll keep opening up, but we'll always base all our decisions on evidence. At the moment, though, what we've been guided by is how do we open up the economy but in the safest way possible, and, actually, where the restrictions now are primarily forming is on us and our social lives, but that does lessen the impact that we would otherwise feel on business.

Media: [*Inaudible*] Given that you have asked bars to do, effectively, the same as what restaurants have to do, with the seating and single server, why are they being discriminated against?

PM: Again, we still have to take into account primarily why people visit them. We are asking people to change their behaviour entirely when they go, though. But you will have heard that, actually, Health had a different suggestion, which is push it out even further. Ultimately, we believe we reached a pragmatic decision, one that balanced off the issue you've raised—that we have put in controls to try and make it safer, with the suggestion of a further delay—and we struck down the middle with just an extra one week. That does give us time to lock in that extra data of alert level 3, which is one of the things that I have heard—the call from some epidemiologists saying, look, let's just make sure we've got all the data and we are moving safely.

Media: Quite a few bars, that will mean closure—that will be too long for them.

PM: I've also signalled—and I will say it again—that we will be looking to provide more support to business, and that will be something we'll be announcing soon. But that, of course, is reflective of the fact that there will be some businesses who will take a while to gear up, even when we start to move into alert level 2.

Media: Prime Minister, what's the Government's view on whether the Commerce Act should be changed or whether the Commerce Commission should be directed or advised to allow a merger of NZME and Stuff?

PM: Again, I worry that I can't speculate on that question without getting dangerously close to some of the detail of the particular context in which it's being asked, Bernard. So, again, I do need to just recall that this is a commercially sensitive negotiation and issue, and I need to let it play out between the parties involved. I'm just going to take a few more. Who hasn't had many? I'll come over—Thomas.

Media: Just a follow-on from Jenna's question. When the review is on the table, it sounds like increasing the numbers of people at mass gatherings is on the table, but today, obviously, a wholesale move to level 2 is on the table. So is that an indication that we are probably going to spend longer in level 2 than we have been spending in levels 4 and 3? Is this a longer period that we should get used to?

PM: Not necessarily. It all depends on what happens with our case numbers. The goal has always been as safely as possible to move back to some form of normality as soon as possible. So we haven't put a final number on level 2, but if we are able to sustain low and no cases, then that will mean that we are further and further towards our goal—our ongoing goal—of elimination and that we'll be able to further open up. There will be some things that will be with us regardless, and I do need to point out that even if we have low and no numbers, we will still be looking at border restrictions and we will still, of course, be encouraging everyone to practise those hygiene measures that will keep all of us safe.

Media: So the message is, you know, if this goes to plan, if it works, then level 1 could be on the table in a few weeks' time as well?

PM: I don't want to put a number on it. The message is keep it up and we can keep moving. If we slacken up, then we might move in the wrong direction. OK, I'll take the last two questions.

Media: Can an election take place at alert level 2?

PM: Yes.

Media: New Zealand's asymptomatic cases [*Inaudible*] have been a far lower proportion than we've seen overseas. Here, around 2 or 3 percent of our cases have been asymptomatic, whereas overseas it's been as high as 43 or 50 percent. Why do you think that is?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: So just to clarify—

PM: Do you mean asymptomatic or community?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Do you mean community?

Media: Asymptomatic cases, yeah.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: So I don't think we've put a figure on it; however, what has become apparent in our testing recently, recording—we've actually done over 65,000 tests since we moved into alert level 3, and a lot of those have been in asymptomatic people. We've only found a small handful of those that are positive, and all either related to existing clusters or we could track them back to overseas travel. They've been quite late presentations; again, it's not clear what the positive test means in terms of whether they're infective. But I think our understanding of asymptomatic infection, and therefore the possibility of transmission, is still emerging, and this is one of the very reasons why we need to keep a high level of vigilance in alert level 2. One of the good things is we have had a long period under 4 and 3 for those asymptomatic—if they are there—infections to present, and we've done the wide community testing, and we haven't found pockets of it out there that we weren't expecting. So that's reassuring, but, again, maintaining the vigilance.

PM: OK. Thank you very much, everyone.

conclusion of press conference