

**PRESS CONFERENCE: TUESDAY, 12 MAY 2020**

**PM:** Kia ora koutou katoa. Welcome, everyone. I'll begin by handing over to Dr Bloomfield for a health update, and then I'll share a few updates from the Government this morning.

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Thank you, Prime Minister. Kia ora koutou katoa. Today, we're reporting no new cases of COVID-19. This means New Zealand's confirmed and probable COVID-19 total cases remains at 1,497 and, of these, 1,147 are confirmed. We now have 1,398 people who are reported as having recovered from COVID-19. This is an increase of 12 on yesterday, and 93 percent of our cases are now considered recovered. Today, there are just two people receiving hospital-level care, in Middlemore and North Shore hospitals, and neither is in ICU. There are also no additional deaths to report today, and we still have the 16 significant clusters, four of which are now closed and a number of which have not had any cases between 14 and 28 days, so they are on their way to being closed off as well.

Yesterday, our laboratories processed 2,893 tests, bringing the total number of tests completed to date to 197,084. I actually was on a Zoom call earlier on today with one of our primary health organisations and a number of GPs down in the Southern DHB area to thank them for the work they have been doing. That particular area, they've taken over 10,000 swabs, and the effort that goes in for each clinical person to dress up in PPE to do the swab, to ensure the paperwork is done properly, to get it to the lab, and then the lab staff as well. So every one of those nearly 200,000 swabs, which have been a pillar of our efforts and to support us going into alert level 2, has been work by a number of people, and I just want to, again, acknowledge that work.

In terms of hospital visits under alert level 2, an update on that, and, obviously, our highest priority as we go into alert level 2 is to continue to protect visitors, patients, and staff while, of course, enabling those very important human interactions that are so essential, especially when someone is unwell. On the ground, visits are managed by district health boards, and there will be flexibility on the part of individual clinicians and/or managers of services, but the general principle in our high-risk areas, which include ED, intensive care, and maternity, will be one visitor still and one visit per day, while in other parts of the hospital, still one visitor at a time but more than one person is able to visit during the day. As I say, there will be flexibility on the part of hospital staff in response to individual circumstances as well. I do encourage people to just check also with the hospital around visiting hours, because, obviously, those visits will need to occur during the usual visiting hours, and be mindful when you go of those core public health principles of distancing by two metres, hand hygiene, and, of course, do not visit if you are unwell.

In terms of the section 70 order, I've just issued an update, or I'm issuing an amended order, which will be available later today on the Ministry of Health's website, and this order specifically allows people to enter businesses to prepare for the move to alert level 2 on Thursday.

Finally, today is international day of the nurse, and in 2020 it is part of an international year of the nurse and an international year of the midwife as well, so we are celebrating our nurses now more than ever. It's very clear that having a good, strong, well-trained nursing workforce improves health outcomes for individuals, our whānau, and communities. Every day, nurses have played a critical role as part of our COVID response over the last few months, in addition to the work they do routinely providing fantastic care for New Zealanders. I'm sure all of New Zealand will join me in thanking our nurses today and, indeed, every day. Kia kaha, kia māia, kia manawanui. Thank you, Prime Minister.

**PM:** Kia ora, Ashley. Can I just reiterate the comments made by Dr Bloomfield about our nurses. I have to say, even before COVID-19, I received quite a few letters where

people who have been through our public health system really want to acknowledge the workforce within our system, and I often will get a message saying how kind, how professional, how supportive our nursing workforce and our clinical workforce are within our public health system. I don't often get a chance to pass on that feedback, but today seems like the day to do it. Can I also acknowledge that we have a huge nursing workforce trained in New Zealand working abroad, and who are doing the hard yards through this pandemic as well, and we want to acknowledge all of the Jennies all around the world.

Earlier today, the Government announced the biggest ever increase in funding for district health boards, as well as additional funding to support DHBs to deliver more services, more surgeries, more procedures, radiology scans, and specialist appointments to help clear the COVID-19 backlog. We're investing over \$4 billion more into our health system, because the lesson from COVID is that we need to be prepared and that a strong health response is the best way to protect jobs and, of course, ultimately be in a position to get our economy moving again as well. We never know when the next virus or health emergency is going to come, but when it arrives we know that it pays to have a world-class health system in place to deal with it. In fact, that is a commitment we should be making all the time to New Zealanders.

When we were elected, we did inherit a health system that did have a number of long-term challenges, not the least of which was some years of underfunding—and public health had experienced that acutely—but also issues with infrastructure and facilities. Over our two previous Budgets, we've made a number of investments in health and health capital, and as part of rebuilding together, our Budget steps that investment up even further. Alongside our announcement of increased funding for Pharmac on Sunday, it is clear that our rebuilding together Budget will also ensure that our health system is resourced to get us through and offer even more care and support to New Zealanders.

The strength of our health response means also that we're able to get to level 2 and move our economy into a phase where it's opening up again even quicker. Central to this is helping our small businesses get up and on their feet, and supporting them as they look to operate from Thursday for many. To assist with their recovery, the first tax refunds in our \$3 billion tax package have been paid, with cash flowing into the hands of businesses. To date, 676 businesses have applied for refunds and payments worth more than \$62 million. This package, announced last month, is the largest support package to business via the tax system in modern history.

Today, I can also confirm that the small business cash-flow loan scheme is officially open. In just a couple of weeks, IRD officials built a new system to process applications for loans that will be interest free if repaid in the first year. These will be a source of working capital for businesses, helping with things like fixed costs like rent. The scheme went live last night and is able to receive applications from today. Payments will be made within five days of a loan being approved, so whether you're a sole trader wanting to borrow, for instance, up to \$11,800 interest free, or you employ 50 FTE staff and want to borrow up to \$100,000 interest free, go online to the inland revenue site and you'll find all the details there. And finally, our wage subsidy scheme has now paid out \$10.7 billion to 1.75 million New Zealanders. That ultimately is what it has taken to make sure that we keep those people employed to their place of work so they can be at the ready when their businesses open back up.

Finally, on public transport, with more people returning to work under level 2, I do just want to make a bit of comment on public transport and people getting to and from work. You'll remember when we talked about the alert level 2 framework, I really encouraged employees to have conversations with their employers around whether or not they'll continue working from home or whether they'll be coming into their place of work, and I really want to encourage those conversations to be had, to discuss whether or not there are options around flexible starting and flexible finishing times to perhaps space out necessary commutes. I imagine some workforces will be looking to lock in the productivity gains that were made when people were working from home, and that's one way that they can do

that. I know there's some good guidance that will be issued, but, in summary, plan your trip, keep your distance—and that will be required on public transport—and, of course, track your journey as well. And, as always, if you are sick, stay at home. I would encourage patience across the board, though, particularly in those first few days of level 2. As we have with every level, it will probably take a period of adjustment, particularly as people work out the best time to travel on routes that allow distancing.

Finally, I've seen a bit of commentary overnight and this morning from businesses and people about how they're preparing for the next stage of life, and I'd sum up what I've seen, basically, with Kiwi businesses and Kiwis just getting on with it. Cardrona ski field, for an example, is getting ready for skiers to hit the slopes in late June, and working with the Government on standards to set up zones around areas where groups may come together like near chair lifts, planning for a domestic market, and ensuring that they've got really strong contact tracing in place. A Wellington hairdresser is doubly pleased she can reopen on Thursday and has made it this far without needing to make any of her team redundant because of the wage subsidy. Others have written to me about catching up with their wider families, conscious about those small gatherings and keeping it small, and I have to say that's something I'm looking forward to as well. All right, we're ready to take questions.

**Media:** Under level 2, how do you justify allowing 100 people to go to the movies but not to a funeral?

**PM:** Again, the whole definition is whether or not you're coming together to be with others, and there are circumstances where people just aren't in the same space in order to mix and mingle, and that's the risky behaviour. Look back again on the areas where New Zealand has had trouble with COVID. It's been weddings, it's been bars, it's been social gatherings, and so that's where we've put the limits in place.

**Media:** But people can socially distance at funerals as well, and they've waited until level 2. Some of them have bodies in morgues, waiting until level 2 to be able to properly mourn and grieve, and all the indications you gave last week were that they'd be able to do that, and then yesterday saying it's going to be capped at 10—do you recognise how much of a blow that is to those grieving families?

**PM:** I have always said, through all of this, that the thing that I have found, as a human, the hardest in all of this has been funerals and tangihanga. I've known people who have lost very close family members, and I can't imagine trying to grieve through a global pandemic for a loved one without being able to be together with others. But the one thing I also know is that funerals and tangi are a place where you want to comfort people. It is your natural instinct. That's why we come together. And the idea that we would force people to not be able to comfort one another, to support one another, is equally a very, very hard thing to comprehend.

**Media:** Let people make that decision for themselves.

**PM:** Equally, we're doing the same for every area where these are natural life events. We've made the same hard call for weddings, funerals, any gathering of note. I spoke to someone last week who turned 100 and had no gathering. This is across the board. We know this is causing pain, but we equally have tried to be really consistent, not see a situation where people really question why they can't come together and others can. But this has been very hard.

**Media:** Winston Peters is now saying that you could have a wake after a funeral in a hall with 100 people, as long as they're properly socially distanced. If your Cabinet doesn't even understand the rules, how can you expect the country to?

**PM:** No, you've heard me clearly outline them. This is only intended, we hope, to be a very, very short period that we're asking New Zealanders to, unfortunately, stay with us on what is a very difficult thing to do, but the intention is it will get us there faster to when people can come together again. Again, this is all based on the advice of Health, and you

can imagine I feel a real obligation to make sure that we're listening to that advice, so perhaps this is something I can also ask the director-general to comment on.

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Thank you, Prime Minister. Again, we looked very carefully at the sorts of activities that were higher risk as we go into to alert level 2, with the intention of making sure we are keeping people safe, we are maintaining the gains we have made, and with a clear expectation and obligation on us to provide additional advice to Government in two weeks' time about increasing the numbers up. And that's what is expected and intended.

**Media:** Did you consider making an exemption for tangi and funerals?

**PM:** Yeah, we did think about whether or not there was a way to do things differently, and, again, as I look around, I think we can see that, actually, everyone struggled with this globally, but probably what people have also seen is that there have been outbreaks as a result of funerals around the world too. But yes, we did think about it, and it was just a very, very difficult thing, to find a way where you'd have carved-out exemptions for specific areas that are very similar to other kinds of gatherings, and, ultimately, we want to protect people.

**Media:** What about church services—not necessarily funerals or weddings? Churches are saying that they are willing to enact social distancing. And you can go to a movie [*Inaudible*] but you can't go to a church service [*Inaudible*].

**PM:** And we did have good discussion around that as well. Ultimately, some of the feedback that we had from those even within church community was that, actually, it is a place for fellowship, it is a place for community to come together, and if we were building rules that said ultimately we were trying to stop people on large scales interacting with one another closely, then that is where that fell into that same category. If you think about it very simply, about whether or not you're going into a place where you know other people and are likely to congregate with them, that's really where that line falls, and that's why we've used evenly across the board the rule of 10.

**Media:** The Attorney-General suggested that there was a case for religious gathering even under level 3—

**PM:** Sorry what was that?

**Media:** The Attorney-General suggested there was a case for religious gatherings under level 3 because there's a restriction on religious freedom, kind of, broader issue here. Now we're going to level 2 and there's still this restriction. Are you worried about that?

**PM:** No, no, because as you'll find, they're also equally weighing up the issue of health against that as well. What I would say is, you know, this is something that I personally gave good strong consideration to. You know, this is in my background as well. I was brought up in a family that practised its faith religiously, and so I did think about this a lot, and it's something that has weighed on my mind. But equally, in Australia you see similar guidelines and rules in other parts of the world all for the same reason, because it's all based on evidence.

**Media:** Dr Bloomfield, how many of the compassionate cases to visit the dying have now been approved?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Now, I'm sorry; I haven't got that information with me, but we'll provide that on our website later on or we can get it to you later.

**Media:** And would you describe contact tracing, or our capacity now, as gold standard?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Yes, I would, and I think the latest data—and we're getting more each week from our public health units, and so we're aggregating that over the last two or three weeks—suggests that the key indicator, which is that identifying and isolating close contacts within 48 hours, at least 80 percent of them, we are achieving that. Furthermore, we are continuing to increase our capacity out in our public health units to be

able to do more and more. Currently at 185 cases per day, and we are targeting the number of 500 over the next six weeks.

**Media:** Prime Minister, you said yesterday that you were comfortable with the support being provided to migrants in New Zealand who had been affected by COVID-19. How does that tally with the news that a family of seven was given a handful of tins of beans and spaghetti and a few other small goods and told that they were meant to make that last for about two weeks of lockdown?

**PM:** I am comfortable with the support being provided where that support is being provided as we would expect, and that does not meet my expectations. Twenty-seven million was put into making sure that those services on the ground, who knew where the need was, had the flexibility to provide both food and support for accommodation to house people if they needed that as well. Whilst I can't comment on the specifics, I do understand that locally the team is trying to get in touch with the family in question, because what they've had reported to them doesn't meet their expectations either.

**Media:** We heard from another woman, another migrant, a pregnant woman, who when she asked the local civil defence group for help was told, "We can get a food parcel to you in five working days and that will be all you get—a one-off—because of the demand." Again, not talking about the particulars, but in principle, wouldn't it make more sense to deliver direct cash support like a benefit, as we do for other New Zealanders in difficult situations?

**PM:** Yeah, and, again, that doesn't meet my expectations either. As you've heard me just say, we did support directly on the ground with over \$20 million provided on top of what already was available to those community organisations to beef up what they were able to do as quickly as possible. So not only did we have local civil defence playing that role at a local level, and they delivered thousands and thousands of food parcels and support; we also, of course, had NGOs. We also had Whānau Ora playing an incredible role delivering packs to families as well. So we were really looking to mobilise those support networks that could get food out the fastest or other forms of support, and we gave them the flexibility to do that as well.

**Media:** Prime Minister, why aren't you treating these stranded migrants in the same way that you'd be treating other people in need who happen to be residents—what's the difference?

**PM:** Yeah. Well, of course there's a difference through our Work and Income legal framing, just quite simply—how they are treated when it comes to our benefit system—and that is the reason why someone when they have a visa into New Zealand, or are applying for one, are required to demonstrate that they have the ability to provide themselves with a level of support should they ever need it. Now, of course, these circumstances are extraordinary, and we wouldn't expect that necessarily to hold for a long period where someone is deprived of work or in the situation we've seen with lockdown, which is why we looked to provide local support that wasn't just food but had the flexibility for accommodation in any other essential needs that group may have had.

**Media:** Prime Minister, as we've seen—as you'll be well aware—in other countries, the easing of restrictions has resulted in flare-ups. What are you both most concerned about at level 2? What will be keeping you up at night?

**PM:** Yeah, and flare-ups are a concern—second waves are a concern. You know, I start my day reading the international news, and we've seen coverage, obviously, of Germany. In the past, we've seen the coverage in Singapore; more recent days, a bit of a discussion, perhaps to a lesser degree, but around patterns in South Korea. Of course we worry about that, and that's why we're making sure that we prioritise trying to get people back into work, get their incomes flowing again, but also that we manage the risk, and that has meant some hard decisions but hopefully ones that are balanced and look after as many Kiwis as possible.

**Media:** Just to tourism, the tourist leaders who spoke at the committee this morning were saying they need clarity on the wage subsidy now; they can't wait till Thursday. What assurances can you give them that help is on the way?

**PM:** You will have heard me say yesterday, very clearly, there will be additional support for business particularly affected by the ongoing alert framework and who are struggling to operate at full strength under a COVID environment. I've also pointed to the Budget, but to tourism specifically I'd say not only did a survey from the tourism industry suggest that over 80 percent were accessing the wage subsidy already; we also have looked at specific redeployment support to get their workforce into other opportunities, and you will see a tourism sector package delivered from this Government as well.

**Media:** The other concern they raised was in terms of the language you used talking about our borders. Saying that our borders would be closed for some time yet has scared off a lot of people from booking flights and things like that for next year. Can you offer any other assurance, I guess, to those people of when they may be able to start getting people from overseas?

**PM:** Yeah. I mean, of course I want New Zealanders to be able to move freely as soon as we can safely do that, and I want those from overseas to be able to be in a position to safely come and experience New Zealand's hospitality again, but what we're having to prioritise at the moment is the ability of people domestically, within New Zealand, to work, play, and experience New Zealand as freely as they can, and that does mean, for now, having to keep restrictions at our border. The trade-off would have been lift border restrictions and us all live with restrictions in our day-to-day lives. I acknowledge that is a trade-off, but what I hope we can do for tourism is get domestic tourism moving and also be in a position, as soon as we're able, to at least get the Australian market moving too.

**Media:** Do you regret not letting DIY stores like Bunnings stay open for the wider public during lockdown now that they're closing stores? People will be wanting that sort of material.

**PM:** Well, of course, at level 3, I saw that the likes of Bunnings were opening click and collect shop options. Many of them, of course, have trade windows where they were able to operate in that way. So that was something that they were able to adapt to. Of course, online purchasing as well was able to open up at that level too.

**Media:** Prime Minister, just to clarify, the Sport NZ CEO on MediaWorks, on *AM Show* today, said that the gathering limit of 10 people would apply to contact sports, but the press conference yesterday seemed to imply that it wouldn't. Was he mistaken? Are full-contact sports allowed to happen?

**PM:** Yeah, happy to clarify that. So professional and semi-professional is sorted and will be resuming. More broadly, on just sport generally, what we're looking to do is actually just give certainty generally on the date that it's likely that those community codes are wanting to restart. I understand we should probably be able to do that later today, and that will help people with planning more generally.

**Media:** But if on Thursday night someone wants to go and play a rugby game with 29 other people, that's fine?

**PM:** Again, actually, some of those community codes have indicated to us that they're not ready to open up again. So I do want to make sure—and please, if you'll stick with me here. I would like to let the Minister for sport give that clarity this afternoon around what dates those codes will be opening up.

**Media:** On tangihanga, is it possible for multiple groups to pay their respects as long as there's only 10 people there at any given time?

**PM:** Yeah, so if we have 10 people—sticking with groups of 10—then that would be within the rules. What we don't want is them all then to come together at a conclusion—so a large wake or a large gathering afterwards. But yes, if you do have someone who is lying at

marae and people are coming in in groups, then, yes, that is something that could be managed and would be within the guidelines that have been set.

**Media:** Prime Minister, do you agree with—just your thoughts on the hongī, because Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters had some interesting comments today when speaking about it. He said that cultures need to adapt or die. Do you think it can be sustained in a post-COVID world?

**PM:** Do you know, my view is that I have seen iwi leaders actually determine for themselves how they are going to keep their people safe and what they wish to do with cultural practice in this environment, and I give complete support to that and have complete faith in that process.

**Media:** On a separate issue, China's repudiated New Zealand overnight for supporting Taiwan's membership bid for the WHO. So I guess, I mean, do you consider these warnings like a diplomatic going through of the motions or is it an actual threat to the bilateral relationship, as China claims?

**PM:** I'll just take this as an opportunity to reiterate the position that I did again this morning and particularly New Zealand's relationship. Through a number of years, we've always taken a one China policy, and that continues to be the case. I think what we're referring to here is really our ability to learn from places during COVID-19 and thereafter and their health responses, in the same way that actually the world learnt a lot from China's response. Their use of a lockdown in Wuhan demonstrated the ability to control the spread of the virus in a way that probably saved a large number of lives. Equally, a place like Taiwan has used some particular approaches that have demonstrated also success in their management. So really, for us, it's about being able to gather that knowledge, but it fundamentally does not change our policy with regards to one China.

**Media:** Was it appropriate for the Deputy Prime Minister last week to tell the—

**PM:** Oh, without being called—Jackson.

**Media:** Sorry, Prime Minister. Was it appropriate for Winston Peters last week to tell the Chinese ambassador to listen to her master?

**PM:** To what, sorry?

**Media:** Listen to her master.

**PM:** I would like to see the quote in full before being drawn on comment on that.

**Media:** Back on the wage subsidy, have you waited too long to give a signal of its successor to businesses? Because they've now got four weeks left, and a lot of them are having to give four-week redundancy notice periods.

**PM:** Again, this runs through till beginning June. It was a 12-week payment, and it's only, of course, running out on 9 June for those who took it at the very, very beginning. We actually had a large number who took it much later in that 12-week period, and so were receiving the subsidy for longer than just that beginning. Also, of course, it does help that we have that certainty now for businesses around where we are in the alert framework and their ability to operate again as well, which also was something that they were looking for, for certainty.

**Media:** But a lot of those ones that would have taken it at the beginning is tourism businesses, and they are screaming out for some kind of certainty. They said they needed it last week, not the Budget this week.

**PM:** Yeah, and we've given a clear signal of our intention there, but also the fact that there will be sector-specific support for tourism, and other areas we know have experienced a big hit. But what we also need to do is work alongside tourism as they rebuild for those specific sectors. Domestic, we will continue to work on trans-Tasman, and then a longer-term plan around our re-entry into a global market.

**Media:** Will one of those sector-specific packages be hospitality?

**PM:** Again, of course, we're setting out a path where, hopefully, hospitality can get back up and running. Some of those more generic frameworks for support like the wage subsidy have been important to that sector. But when you think about those that were first to close, actually they are ones who have relied on crowds and audiences. So the likes of the arts, obviously the media, aviation—and you've already seen some support specifically rolled out there.

**Media:** Given we don't know the outcome yet of the review into the COVID-19 outbreak at Waitakere Hospital, was this a cluster waiting to happen, as has been reported by one media outlet today?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** I think they're separate. I would comment on the latter. I don't think it was a cluster waiting to happen. The cluster happened around the aged residential care facility, and part of the care of the residents, because they couldn't staff the facility, was to bring them into Waitakere Hospital. I did speak with the acting chief executive of Waitematā DHB yesterday, and I'm expecting to see the draft report later today, and I know the plan is to make that public this week. As I said yesterday, the important thing here is we learn from each of the instances we have had so that we can then update our approach and policies nationally, which is what we're intending to do here.

**Media:** Dr Bloomfield, can you explain why St Margaret's rest home residents weren't immediately taken to North Shore Hospital?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Yes, because the level of care it was felt they required was appropriate for Waitakere. It was also closer to their whānau in their community.

**Media:** The Electoral Commission this morning—they announced a whole range of measures to try and keep the public safe when it comes to voting on election day—physical distancing, PPE for electoral staff. Have you given any thought to how this will affect your campaign and being on the election trail running up to the election?

**PM:** Actually, only, really, if I'm honest, only in passing. You can imagine why the election feels, in terms of days, weeks, and months, a lifetime away. As probably you'd imagine, in the middle of a global pandemic, it's not the thing that I have yet turned my mind to. What I am hopeful of is that we will be in a position to even have a greater degree of interaction with one another than we are now, and I think that's what we're all working towards. But to be honest, I haven't put my mind to it.

**Media:** Prime Minister, was Winston Peters incorrect today when he said that after a tangi, groups of more than 10 could gather in a hall or they could book in individual bookings at restaurants that could gather? Are the rules quite confusing if Mr Peters himself is getting it wrong?

**PM:** Sorry, did you just ask that of me, or Dr Bloomfield?

**Media:** Yeah, you.

**PM:** Of me. As I've already clarified, the rules around group bookings is, again, that consistency. If you are coming together for any social gathering—any social gathering—it's groups of 10, and we do have to apply that consistency. It would be totally unfair to have any kind of wiggle room when we are asking so much of those, particularly, who wish to grieve in larger groups to give any leniency for any other group in that regard.

**Media:** Why do you think Winston Peters got it wrong?

**PM:** Again, I wasn't here for the stand-up; I don't want to make any assumptions about what he did or didn't say on those guidelines.

**Media:** Dr Bloomfield, yesterday the health ministry said there are two people in hospital with COVID-19. However, we know for a fact that at 1.30 p.m. yesterday, there were five confirmed COVID patients in North Shore Hospital alone. Are you being deliberately misleading to try and make the data look better?



**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Definitely not. In fact, we've been very open with the data to date, and, in fact, one of the things—for example, we've included all our probable cases in our overall total, which many countries don't do, and we've been very inclusive in terms of our deaths. Even when there were negative swabs and there was some potential uncertainty around the cause of death, we've gone with the clinician's view. The issue here is—and it was the same down in Canterbury for the Rosewood rest homers—where people have been put into a hospital setting but are not there because they need hospital-level care but purely because of staffing issues within the facility, then we haven't counted them in our numbers of people requiring hospital-level care.

**Media:** Do you think that the health ministry then needs to change the way it words or categorises COVID patients in hospital for the benefit of the public? It can appear misleading.

**PM:** But if we were to say that we had five people then in hospital care, that assumes that they require that level of care, and perhaps may lead to those assumptions around whether or not someone's—their health status. Most people if they hear hospital care will make an assumption about their health status around COVID, rather than just whether or not they need to be in a particular facility for care.

**Media:** Are you able to clarify, then, in total how many patients are actually in hospital, in total, around the country, regardless of whether they were put in hospital due to staff issues at the previous place of care?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** We can absolutely do that. What I would also point out is that St Margaret's and many aged residential care facilities have hospital-level care as one of the areas that they do. So they do provide a high level of care, but these people are not in hospital. So it's a similar thing there, but we're happy to make that clear on the website.

**Media:** And what's the total number of hospitalisations in the entire course of the journey?

**PM:** Total hospitalisations—I'll let Dr Bloomfield find that number.

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Let me just find the number here. So the total number of hospitalisations to date is—actually, I've got percentages, so that's—oh, sorry, 92—92 cases.

**Media:** Is that just a remarkable number compared to the rest of the world? Is that the best one you've got to sort of sell New Zealand's response, do you think?

**Dr Ashley Bloomfield:** Well, so as a proportion of our total number of cases, it is, perhaps, lower than many other countries. Likewise, we've had very few people requiring intensive care unit level of care, and likewise our number of deaths is very small—less than 2 percent proportionately, and you'll see many other countries that have a higher percentage of their total case numbers or a higher proportion that are deaths. I think what it reflects is the extensiveness of our testing. So we've got a high level of confidence we have picked up a very high proportion of the actual cases we have had, even through the lockdown period.

**PM:** Just the last couple of questions.

**Media:** Prime Minister, you said yesterday that you wouldn't comment on the NZME-Stuff situation because of commercial sensitivities. Is that because the Government itself might be commercially interested in buying Stuff?

**PM:** That is a huge assumption.

**Media:** It must be a wrong one, then.

**PM:** Ha, ha!

**Media:** Just a question from a colleague: Australian radio host Alan Jones has resigned due to ill health. He made some comments last year about you. What is your reaction to that news?

**PM:** When anyone has ill health, I wish them the very best.

**Media:** Skycity have said that anyone entering their casino need to be part of their rewards programme. Their take on that is that they need to be able to contact trace people, but are you concerned that that would encourage gambling, if everyone's required to go into the special reward programme?

**PM:** I wouldn't mind, actually, if you wouldn't mind—I wouldn't mind taking a little look at that, because, you know, one of the reasons, of course, that we are asking businesses to do that are for legitimate health reasons, if people are in close contact with one another in particular. But equally, there may be an overlay here specific to gambling, so I might just go and take a closer look at that. You will have heard us talk in the past about using technological solutions that would actually give customers a bit more control. So you can use things like QR technology, which means that someone might just scan before going into a premise, and then they're the ones holding that data, so if they become positive with COVID, then actually it's through them that we access that information rather than the other way around. So that's why those kinds of solutions are important alternatives.

**Media:** To follow on that, what progress has been made on that national contact tracing app? What's the time frame for it being used?

**PM:** Yeah, and so that's—just to give you an indication, of course, we've always said that we think that there are a range of solutions there, and we've never wanted to be too fixated on just one. Again, one of the things I'm observing in Australia is, again, uptake, but also whether or not it's providing or meeting expectation. We, however, in the meantime, continue to work on those solutions, but they will include alternatives, not just Bluetooth apps that talk to each other.

**Media:** But the QR app, is that time frame—

**PM:** Yeah, so that's one of the options that we have been looking at, is just an app that uses QR code technology, which is common for many existing services. Thanks, everyone.

**conclusion of press conference**