

PM PRESS CONFERENCE: WEDNESDAY, 12 AUGUST 2020

PM: Kia ora koutou and good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining us again for our 4 o'clock update. We are now four hours into level 3 lockdown in Auckland and level 2 restrictions in the rest of New Zealand as we roll out our plan to quickly stamp out the re-emergence of COVID outside of our managed isolation facilities. Our plan of mass testing, rapid contact tracing, and, of course, our restrictions to stop the train of transmission has been in full swing in Auckland today. I will begin, as I did this morning, by handing over to Dr Bloomfield to provide an update on what more we've learnt about cases, the action that has been taken on those cases, and the contact tracing around them. I'll then come back and give an update on other matters such as mask distribution, telehealth services, support for businesses that may be in urgent need of support in the near future, and then we'll conclude and take questions. Dr Bloomfield.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Thank you, Prime Minister. Kia ora koutou katoa. So just to start off with, there is one additional new case of COVID-19 to report in a managed isolation facility today. So that's in addition to the four confirmed cases that we reported last evening in the Auckland community and that were announced yesterday. There are also an additional four probable cases who are people with symptoms linked to the four community-based cases we talked about last night and earlier this morning. All of these probable cases are awaiting test results. We will make available the test results as soon as we have them, but they are all being treated as probable cases and therefore are in full isolation, and full contact tracing has been initiated for those cases.

The case that is in a managed isolation facility is a woman in her 50s who arrived in New Zealand on 7 August from Islamabad via Dubai. She has been in managed isolation since, and her positive test result was returned when she had a test at around day three of her stay. She is now in the Auckland quarantine facility.

So our total number of confirmed cases is now 1,225. Five of the previously reported cases have recovered, so the number of active cases remains at 22—none of whom require hospital-level care. Yesterday our labs processed 4,225 tests. That brings the total number of tests completed to date over the half a million mark, and the total is 502,705.

I'd just like to provide an update on the Rotorua situation, which I mentioned this morning. We now have a little more information I'd like to share, and we will have more information that we will make available on our website and through media updates as the day progresses. Based on the information we do have, we are confident that the visit to Rotorua of the four family members—two of whom have subsequently returned a positive test—has not resulted in anyone who is classified as a close contact. However, we are taking a very precautionary approach, as you know, and the family, in the time they were in Rotorua, which was between 8 and 11 August, visited a number of locations, including eateries. I don't have the specific information on those as yet, but, as soon as we do and have notified those businesses and have the times and dates that they were there, we will publicise that.

What I can tell you is that we can confirm three locations. The first is that the family stayed at the Wai Ora Lakeside hotel from 8 to 11 August, and two of the visits they undertook were to the Skyline gondola and lodge, which was on 9 August, from 4 till 6 p.m., and the heritage farm and 3D art gallery on 10 August, between 3 and 4 p.m. So as we find out more detail about other locations that they visited, we will make that available, and we will also send out an alert via the NZ COVID Tracer app so people who were at those locations at the time and on the date that we talked about and who scanned in with the app—which I hope people did—will be made aware as well through that means.

In the meantime, from a health perspective, we remain confident that alert level 2 is the right level for Rotorua, and the advice doesn't change. Anyone who was in those locations at that period should be aware of symptoms, whether they are from Rotorua or were visiting

from out of town. Testing in our managed isolation and quarantine facilities is progressing, alongside our community testing. And, as the Prime Minister mentioned this morning, between Auckland and our facilities in Rotorua and in Christchurch and in Wellington, there are between 6,000 and 7,000 people to test, and testing was under way from this morning at all those sites. And we know that DHBs have a plan in place to ensure that all people who fall into that category are tested over coming days. Auckland is clearly the majority of those people and where we will be concentrating the effort.

An update on contact tracing: as of around midday, just over 200 close contacts have been identified, and over 100 of those have already been phoned and spoken with. Most of those contacts are from two workplaces, and those people had been told last evening or this morning to remain at home—the workplaces are closed—and to stay at home until they were contacted and given further instructions.

What I would like to do at this point in time, though, is just to back that up with an action that I can take under the Health Act. And because I think there is a serious and significant risk to the public with the spread of COVID-19 in communities in Auckland, as a national medical officer of health, I'm taking the significant and serious step of making an oral direction under section 70 of the Health Act 1956.

So I require the following people to do two things: that is to isolate at their usual home and to not go out to work, and remain isolated until they are contacted by our national contact tracing service and they receive further direction. And that direction applies to the following people, if you could listen carefully: any employees or contractors of two employers. One is Americold in the Mount Wellington suburb in Auckland, and the other is the company Finance Now, and that is the Dominion Road branch in Auckland.

I would also say that the direction applies to the following, and that is any visitors to those workplaces—any visitors to those workplaces in the last 14 days—and any people who ordinarily live with those employees or contractors or visitors. Now, recall that both these workplaces are in Auckland, and Auckland in toto is now under an alert level 3 arrangement. So people will be staying at home anyway—everybody, unless they are going out to work or to access an essential business like a pharmacy or a supermarket.

If any of those people who I'm currently directing to remain at home require advice to assess financial assistance while in isolation as directed, please call Work and Income on the following number: 0800 559 009. And I will put this direction also on the covid19.govt.nz website. Prime Minister, I think I'll hand back to you there.

PM: Thank you, Dr Bloomfield. Just to recap, you can see that we continue to ramp up our efforts to get on top of this re-emergence, and are taking the steps of ensuring that we're not using just one way, but up to three ways to try and reach individuals who we are asking to follow the director-general's orders issued today. So firstly, those workplaces have themselves contacted their employers. We have contact tracing under way, and you will have heard that we've got roughly 200 contacts, good progress being made, and roughly 160 people working in that contact centre, so you can see that the ratio of calls they are having to make is low, so they're working through them very quickly. But the third step we're taking is to use a public platform to notify people directly as well. So those are the steps we're taking to make sure we get those individuals into isolation as quickly as possible.

The COVID Cabinet committee met at 1 p.m. today, chaired by myself, and included the Deputy Prime Minister. All other Ministers inside Cabinet were invited to attend as well. We were updated on the cases that we are actioning and other work that we are undertaking as we roll out our resurgence plan. Ministers will convene again tomorrow, and it was also agreed that a full Cabinet meeting will make decisions on Friday on next steps. Our aim will be to make sure that those decisions are in time to inform people of any changes well in advance of the Friday midnight setting we have for our level 3 and level 2 restrictions at present.

At noon today, a new COVID-19 public health response order came into effect. The order provides the legal basis to require people to stay at home unless they are working in places where it is safe to do so to ensure physical distancing and the conditions under which businesses can operate. Nothing in the order there, in that regard, is new relative to what we all experienced at level 3 previously. They're all in keeping with those previous requirements, with just two exceptions, and I want to spend a bit of time just talking about those two exceptions that are new from what we experienced the last time we were in level 3. So this is particularly important.

First, the order makes it mandatory for any business or service to display a QR code for the COVID Tracer app prominently at all entry points, allowing everyone to sign in via the tracing app. So what is mandatory is the display of that QR code. We have allowed one week in order for business to be compliant. We understand that some businesses have not yet downloaded the QR code. We ask them to do that as soon as possible, but before it will be enforced, there is a week's grace there to allow that to happen. Many businesses, as you will note, have done that already, because you'll see them on display.

The ability to contact trace quickly is one of the key tools we have to find new cases and get them in isolation to avoid future lockdowns, so always using the app is a big investment in keeping our businesses and economy open. It will protect you and it will protect the people around you. Last night, over 100,000 people downloaded the app, and I would urge anyone who hasn't done so yet to get the app on their phone and get into the habit of signing into places. I can tell you from personal experience it is very quick and it is very easy to use.

The second new element of the health order is something I already briefly touched on this morning, and that is the requirement for people traveling out of Auckland to wear a face covering on a plane. We are specific to planes here because of the close proximity. Of course, we continue to ask people to only use this form of transport if they are leaving Auckland because it is not their primary place of residence and they need to relocate themselves. While we are not requiring everyone else in Auckland to wear a face mask or a face covering, we are strongly urging it. Think of it as a duty to one another and a simple act to help stop any spread, and it's now a proven line of defence to protecting your own health. It's also a sign you care about your community and the members of our team of 5 million.

As I said this morning, the Government has released 5 million extra face masks from the national health stockpile. I can now confirm that 1 million masks have been allocated to Countdown, and we have another million also available. The Government has been in contact with social service agencies and other providers today, and it is also our intention to distribute 3 million masks via social services and delivery agencies to those who may otherwise struggle to afford or access masks. We're working with suppliers and supply chains to ensure that masks are getting to supermarkets and other places where people can purchase them, and, of course, as I said before, cloth and reusable face coverings, bandanas, scarves wrapped around the nose and mouth—they will suffice. So if you can't get out to purchase one or the expense is a barrier, please use what else you may have on hand.

So just to recap: the orders are as they stood previously but now include the requirement around face masks for plane travel and the use of the QR code—that is the Government QR code for the COVID Tracer app specifically—is included.

I'm just about to finish, but I will wrap on this. I know many people have contacted Healthline because they have questions or because they might be feeling anxious. That is totally understandable. We have 600 people taking calls for our telehealth services. We've added another 90 staff today. By tomorrow, there will be another 180 staff working those phone lines. I understand, though, there are delays at the moment. I ask: if you've got questions about level 3 restrictions for Auckland, please jump online and just free up those services for those who might need them for health or mental health reasons.

The COVID-19 Leave Support Scheme—I do want to talk about this because of the anxiety that I know many businesses in Auckland in particular will be experiencing. The COVID-19 Leave Support Scheme is there for all businesses that are experiencing financial hardship. It covers workers who are unable to work from home and need to self-isolate. The rate is \$585.80 for full-time workers and \$350 for part-time workers. Applications for the wage subsidy scheme extension also remain open until 1 September. That means if a business hasn't used the extension to date but has experienced a 40 percent decline in their revenue—and that's across a 30-day period within the 40 days before they apply—they can apply and receive an additional eight weeks of support. Now, I know the restrictions that are in place in Auckland now may tip people into now being eligible for the extension of the wage subsidy when they may not have been prior. It is still available. I encourage you to reach out to Work and Income; make an application if you need that extra support.

The small business cash flow scheme remains open until 31 December, and that gives interest-free loans for up to a year of up to \$100,000 for businesses employing 50 or fewer workers. And, of course, finally the COVID income relief payment for people who lose their job between 1 March and 30 October as a result of COVID is paid at the same rate as the wage subsidy for 12 weeks, and that remains open until 13 November. Again, anyone interested in those payments, please reach out to Work and Income.

Alongside this, the finance Minister met with the Treasury yesterday, and they're working on targeted economic support for the Auckland region if we're in a scenario where level 3 is to last longer than the present three days. A reminder too, this re-emergence is the exact reason why we set aside the remaining \$14 billion of the COVID fund in case we had that need. Support aside, the best economic response remains that strong health response. Going hard, going early with a lockdown is still the best strategy for getting businesses back open as soon as it is safe.

Before I end, a quick reminder of why it is just so important that we stick to the plan we're rolling out at present. There were 322 new cases of COVID-19 in Australia yesterday, 664 people are in hospitals, 54 in intensive care units, and 39 on ventilators. Across the globe there were 19.9 million cases yesterday. Our response to the virus so far has worked. It opened our economy and our communities and it gave New Zealanders freedoms that we cherished, and we all want to get back there as soon as we can, but success relies on us all working together, looking out for one another. We know how to beat this, but we also know we don't need to look far to see what it can mean if we don't get on top of it. We have a plan and now is the time to follow it. We are happy to take questions.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, do you have any concerns about the Auckland family and where they were before they isolated other than the workplaces? Were they churchgoers, for example?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: There's been a very full discussion with the family. Aside from the trip to Rotorua, there are no other locations that present any particular risk. So, no, they hadn't been at a church or other service on the preceding weekend or two.

Media: The four new probable cases, are they all colleagues?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Two are—

PM: Four new.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: The four probable cases—

Media: Four new probable—that's it: four new probable cases—

PM: Yeah, sorry, it just rolls off like 40, so I just wanted to—

Media: Four.

PM: Four, thank you.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: The four probable cases are ones we have mentioned. So two are work colleagues and two are another related household that one of the cases had stayed at in the preceding week.

Media: Are we any closer to identifying the source of this strain, and is there any indication that anyone in this family was related to anyone that worked at managed isolation facilities?

PM: No suggestion as yet, but we were, just prior to coming down here, discussing the interviews that are ongoing with the new probable cases, because, of course, that's important to seeing whether or not there are any links to either MIQ or border workers, and so those interviews are ongoing and we are, of course, awaiting the test results to confirm if they are indeed cases.

Media: Will there be any penalty—

PM: You asked the other question around links and some of the testing. The genome testing: we're expecting that within the next 24 hours we'll have more information there. Quite a bit of analysis needs to go on, so that's why it's more than likely we'll just need that extra time.

Media: Will there be any penalties for those who don't display—or what will the penalties be for those businesses that don't display the QR code?

PM: So it is within the health order—I'll need to check, actually, the penalty regime that sits alongside it. I can give you an update on that tomorrow, but we are giving that week's grace, because, obviously, it does take a bit of effort. You've got to use your business number to generate the code. We have previously asked business development agencies to support businesses to try and produce those, and so we're giving those seven days, but really as soon as possible we'd like businesses displaying them, and many, many are.

Media: Is there any indication, Dr Bloomfield, as to how many people the Health Act Order that you've put in place—how many people that will affect?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, there are the 208 who we know are close or casual contacts, and it also will impact on family members of those people, and, as well as that, others who have visited and their family members. So, in total, that's likely to be at least several hundred and possibly over a thousand. It is the just over 200 close contacts so far who are being contacted by our service, and they will, on the basis of the discussion they have with them, then give them further advice around testing of both themselves and any family members.

PM: And just to add—probably helpful to add—many people will have seen there's a large number of people seeking testing at the testing stations that have been established. We have dedicated testing for those that are identified by our public health units as being close contacts or contacts of contacts so that we can expedite that testing so that we don't have them waiting in long queues when we need that information very, very quickly.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, you mentioned in your introductory remarks that there were other businesses, and you would provide details of those businesses, that the family had visited—when can we expect to get those? Because presumably you've been interviewing them for 24 hours now, why isn't that public?

PM: You mean the eateries in Rotorua where they may have eaten?

Media: You mentioned a couple. You alluded to the Skyline and that, but you said there would be others to come as well.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: That's right. So the family visit there was several days long. That has been a conversation that's been happening with them today. And before we release the information we want to have talked with the business first. These are the ones who we've got information, first of all, about the business; secondly, about the date and

time it was visited so we can make that available; and, third, there's been an opportunity to talk with the owners of the business before we've made that public. So we will continue to make that information available as it comes through.

Media: Because from a public perspective, when we talk about the speed that we need to have with contact tracing, 24 hours is a long time to have talked to this family. So people would want to know if they had been in the same place as these people by now.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yes. So what we were able to provide information about this morning was that they had made a trip to Rotorua. So we let all New Zealanders know: if you've been in Rotorua—and it's the same advice now—be very alert and, including people who live there, be just alert for symptoms. And we gave information about testing opportunities in Rotorua. Of course, the interview happens first with the first case, and then from there it goes out as we find out other close contacts, starting, of course, with family members—in this case there were a number, including three who tested positive as well. So then it's a matter of going and having a conversation and going right back to 14 days. And again, this is the value of the app, in that it provides that nice record and a reminder of where people have been.

PM: Keeping in mind—I think it's important to note that Dr Bloomfield noted, at this point, we are considering those that even would have been at those eateries to be casual contacts, so the advice would be the same as we are giving to, generally, those who have visited the Rotorua region. This just gives us more specificity around people being mindful of their symptoms and their health.

Media: What about the likes of dairies and supermarkets that they've used in their own local area? Why are you just, sort of, concentrating on Rotorua?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, that's, of course, part of the conversation that's been had with them—all the locations they have visited in the last 14 days, from symptom onset. Remembering that, of course, Auckland is now in an alert level 3 situation, so anyone who may have been in those businesses that they may have visited, or—there have been no other locations that have come to light so far that we need to name and specifically require people or notify people. The important thing here is if people have got symptoms, they should seek a test.

PM: Equally, at the same time, another reason why we've got that whole region at level 3—because as we work to identify those sites, we, of course, release that information. In the meantime, we are asking people who can to work from home and, when they go out, to wear masks. So those extra precautions help us as extra layers of protection as we continue to work through in more detail—more detail around who the exact close contacts are for these families.

Media: So you don't think at the moment it's necessary to test all the workers, for example, at those Rotorua businesses?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: At the Rotorua businesses? In fact, part of our advice to the businesses will be to get staff who were on those shifts who may have had contact to be tested.

PM: Yeah. You'll notice that we do take a precautionary approach, and even casual contacts are being tested in many scenarios.

Media: Last time we were in level 2, there was a requirement that businesses maintain a contact-tracing register of some sort. That doesn't appear to be in the new public health order. Are businesses only required to display a QR code but not maintain any other sort of register, or—

PM: Yeah, and this is something that the Minister of Health is actually working through at the moment. So at the moment there are, as I understand, actually some duplicate asks of businesses, but we need to reconcile those because the business has a responsibility to make sure they're keeping a register, so that essentially implies they have an obligation to

make sure that people use the app if it's available. So that's a detail we're just working through at present, but that, again, at the moment we're asking people: get that QR code up. We'll work through some of those extra obligations.

Media: So what's the intention of the order, or what do you expect it will be once that is worked through—that there will be required scanning?

PM: Yeah, the intention here is that everyone is able to use the app wherever they go. The concern is that unless we're requiring businesses to display it—some of you may have already experienced, you've come to go and scan and there hasn't been a QR code available, and sometimes that'll mean people just put their phone back in their pocket. We need to make it available, and the easiest way to do that, of course, is to make sure everyone is providing the opportunity.

Media: Have you considered revisiting the issue of testing within aged residential care since yesterday? It's obviously a really problematic area. Is that something you'll re-look at?

PM: Of course, those residential facilities—residential facilities across the country have gone into their own form of lockdown. So of midday today you will have heard—and this was actually something that they were very keen themselves to instigate; in fact, many instigated it yesterday. Visitors in and out—unless they are delivery services or staff coming to work, there are no visitors coming into facilities at present.

Media: But why not pre-emptively test, granted the risk?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Look, that's one of the settings we're in constant discussion with. So there's been a meeting with them today—actually, probably more than one. So we will have a low threshold for other measures, which may include testing or use of PPE and/or more stringent infection prevention and control.

Media: Has the Government given any more thought to the idea of postponing the election given the circumstances?

PM: Look, my view is that you'll already have heard me this morning talk about giving us a bit more time by moving out the date on which Parliament is dissolved, so that just gives us a few extra days. My view is that we'll have time to deal with that date once we have a bit more information. We're in the first 24 hours of a response to resurgence; our immediate focus has been that: giving ourselves the room to fully consider the implications of a move in date and what we find out about what resurgence we're seeing at the moment.

Media: So can we expect an announcement by Sunday?

PM: You can expect before—of course, we'll need to make that decision before we see Parliament dissolve, which is intended to be now on Monday. So yes, I will be filling you in with a bit more detail then. But immediate responses: let's use the time we've got to really get a full picture of what these cases mean for New Zealand over the coming weeks.

Media: Judith Collins is suggesting as late as next year. Is that even possible?

PM: Again, as I'd say again that we've got time to deal with the date. Right now, our absolute focus in this first 24 hours is on that resurgence plan. I will come back—we've given ourselves a few extra days to be able to consider some of the issues here. But I think, actually, it's only right that in this immediate aftermath we're focused on the health response and making sure we're doing everything we can to support people's jobs as well.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, are GPs still restricted to 20 swabs per order?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: No, they're not.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, as Americold—is there a risk that Americold has shipped refrigerated packages tainted with COVID-19 to businesses across the country?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: I couldn't say. As I said this morning, we're not ruling out—although, again, it's unlikely. We've had a look at the evidence—in fact the Prime Minister's

chief science adviser and her team had a look at the evidence—around the virus on fomites, and particularly in this sort of refrigerated setting. We're not ruling that out, and of course we want to get to the bottom of that, and that's why the actual cool store environment has been swabbed, so it will be interesting to see the results of those.

Media: Have you been following up with any of their customers?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Not at this point.

PM: So we will continue to investigate that as we have as we've tried to rule out all potential vectors, really. Fomites just being, you know, the static objects or materials that can carry infection.

Media: The name of the game at the moment seems to be contact trace, isolate, test. And, correct me if I've got the numbers wrong, there's around 200—

PM: Yep.

Media: —close contacts, and you've identified and made contact with about 160 of them?

PM: I've just been informed that, actually, that all have now been contacted. And keeping in mind, of course, that was the third, because, of course, the workplaces themselves have contacted, the contact tracers have now contacted, and, of course, we've given this verbal order as well.

Media: So the question is: are you satisfied with the speed? Is the system functioning as you would like it, or there are deficiencies?

PM: Oh, we're constantly working to move everything as quickly as we can, because, keeping in mind, we've identified these close contacts now. As we have additional probables, we're already instigating new close contacts. So it's good to have made contact in the initial first instance with all of those originally identified because we will have a continual rolling number of people that we'll be checking in with.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, when do you expect to receive the results back from those swabs from the cool store in order to rule out that as a—

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: You mean of the environment, of the surfaces? I couldn't say, but it won't be today. It could be tomorrow. I'll give an update on that tomorrow.

Media: Prime Minister, Gerry Brownlee is saying that it's "interesting facts" that you visited a mask store and that Dr Bloomfield had a COVID-19 test. Was that just a coincidence? What do you make of his assertions?

PM: You'll recall that it was actually on the day that there was a change in National leadership, from Todd Muller to Judith Collins that I first stood in front of you and talked about our resurgence plan and why it was necessary. The idea that we would keep information back from the public when that is critical to us being able to look after their health and, therefore, their financial wellbeing and their jobs—the idea that we would ever do that is just nonsense, and that's the last I'm going to say on it.

Media: Does this beating around the bushes that Gerry Brownlee's doing, sort of implying but not saying—does that undermine the country's health response?

PM: I do think that, you know, if I could ask for the energy of the Opposition to be channelled into anything right now, it would be supporting New Zealand's overall response to this resurgence, because the sooner that we can get on top of it, the sooner that we can ensure the security of people's incomes, their health, their livelihoods, and then, after that, of course, that of course enables us to hold, safely, elections. So that is where I would ask them to put their energy right now, because that's what New Zealand needs.

Media: It appears that a lot of the Opposition's energy is put into trying to get a consultation from the Government about what is happening. Are you likely to give another update or consult them on any further decisions?

PM: So, firstly, keep in mind I did give a briefing to the Leader of the Opposition last night, and that was, of course, at the point that we were about to announce the significant decision around the change in alert levels. Since then, it's been about sharing the additional information. Other than the changes in the orders, there hasn't been particularly anything new beyond that. What I would remind and just add is a point of interest: caretaker provisions, or the idea of caretaker provisions, in New Zealand actually only apply after an election has taken place. Before that, Cabinet has the right and ability to continue to govern, and that is what we are doing.

So, yes, I will continue to keep the Opposition informed, I will continue to let them know, because this is a significant health issue—just as I did with Simon Bridges when he was in the role. All I would ask in return is that we continue to see at least some unity in our response here. There should not be politics in this. It's a resurgence that no one wanted, so let's work hard together to get on top of it, and then we can get back to the normal resumption of whatever politicking the Opposition would like to engage in at that point.

Media: On the subject of the QR codes for the contact tracing register, will there be some way of maintaining a sort of hardcopy, manual contact tracing register for people who don't have smartphones or, you know, don't have the technology?

PM: Well, yes, and we have asked people to do that already. I mean, people just—of course, actually, the COVID Tracer app itself allows a digital diary manually to be added. But for people who aren't using a phone, we just ask that they keep a manual entry. So the only thing that's mandated is a business having to keep the QR code. We'll need to work through the issue of what if you have customers who are coming in who aren't using those apps, and that's the thing that the Minister of Health is talking about.

Media: But the onus is no longer on the business to keep a manual—that has now shifted to the individual?

PM: Actually, my understanding is the order does have a split on both, which is what we're having to work through, but at the moment the QR code is primarily where we're focusing.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, what's the consequences of that oral directive that you gave? If people who went to those businesses don't choose to self-isolate, what can happen?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: We're still looking at what enforcement might be necessary. However, it was really just wanting to emphasise the importance as part of our overall efforts, and I've now given that as a directive. I'm confident that people will have listened and will self-isolate, recalling that this is in Auckland and it's alert level 3 anyway.

PM: My recollection is you have the ability to put them into quarantine.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yes, I can require people to go into quarantine, if necessary.

PM: Perhaps I'm very quick to go to the penalty regime there.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, do you have any more details about the four probable cases? Are we talking adults, kids—what?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: The four probable cases: three adults and one teenager.

PM: And, as described, two were in a workplace and two related to the first case.

Media: And would you describe them as friends or family—those two related to the first case?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: They are family. Yes, they're relatives.

Media: OK, and then are there any possible cases that you're looking at beyond those?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Not at this stage.

PM: Possibles beyond the probables?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: No, they're the only—the four that have—and they're probable because there's a clear epidemiological link, and they are symptomatic.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, we've seen some long wait times at testing centres up in Auckland—particularly at Northcote, we've had a couple of reports. Some people have even been sent home. Is this because there's a lack of tests available with the demand?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: There's not a lack of tests. There's extra staff, there are extra testing sites, there are going to be even more tomorrow, and there are plenty of consumable swabs and so on. It's just simply a demand. It's the same issue that I think the supermarkets have seen as well. So I'd just encourage people to be patient, and also just a reminder: the testing at this point in time is for people with symptoms.

PM: Because, ultimately, if you have people who are asymptomatic, they then all have to be processed, and that slows down our chance to check those who might be symptomatic or those who are connected to at-risk places. So it is helpful, if you are waiting in a queue right now and listening on your radio, if you're not unwell, please do go home, put your feet up—please only visit those testing stations if you're unwell.

Media: And what are those plans to open more centres tomorrow? Can you just elaborate a little bit on that?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: I've got that information there, on hand—

PM: I'll take another question while I just see whether or not I've brought that down with me.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, just with that huge demand for tests, has the ministry got a time frame that you want them to be processed in—is there like a target time frame?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yes, we aim for 24 hours—for them to all be processed within 24 hours. Not everyone will receive the result of their test within 24 hours, except, of course, if it's a positive result. Those are the ones that are prioritised, and then they're notified immediately to the public health unit and followed up. But it may take a bit longer than that for an individual to receive a message—a text or something with their own result. But 24 hours is the processing time we aim for, and we move testing volumes around the country should we need to.

Media: What would you expect to be the longest that people would actually receive the text message?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, I'm not—I can't predict how long it might take. However, what I can say is that people will know straight away, very quickly, if they have a positive test, because that will be notified and followed up immediately.

Media: But in terms of those people that are isolating at home—if they have tests and they're staying at home because they've been told to, they could be at home for, what, a week because of the demand at the moment?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: No, not—it won't take that long.

PM: Keeping in mind, of course, level 3 restrictions, and also I would encourage anyone in that circumstance to look at the leave support that exists because they have been asked to isolate.

I'll just go over the testing stations, as asked. We have in Auckland—and keeping in mind the closure time for these centres is 6 p.m., although the centres will test people in the queue who are remaining after 6 p.m. Locations include Whānau House, Henderson; Eden Terrace; Northcote; Whānau Ora, Wiri. Pop-up community testing is also being stood up at Health New Lynn, Ōtara Mall—so those are the ones I notified this morning. By this afternoon, the following will be stood up: EastCare, Botany Road; White Cross, St Lukes; Counties Care, Takanini; Waiheke; Shorecare, North Shore Events Centre; and Coast to

Coast. By 8 a.m. tomorrow morning, the following will be stood up: White Cross, Henderson; Northcare, Constellation Drive, as well.

Media: So are you making any preparations—obviously, there’s a contingency. But are you making preparations to move New Zealand to level 4, or Auckland—

PM: Again, we’re being fully transparent here. We are waiting on further information, further testing, to demonstrate where our likely source case is, how likely the spread is from what we see around what we call those index cases. That is what we’ll be basing those decisions on. So that’s why we’ve used these three days. We’ll keep reporting in, and of course we’ll give an advance decision well before midnight Friday. But, at this stage, I’ve seen a lot of speculation. We are going to make an evidence-based decision. At this stage, it’s too early to say.

Media: Surely with that possibility, and if Cabinet meets on Friday and then that decision is made to do so, you would have to have made some preparations beforehand.

PM: Look, obviously our ability to move to level 3, of course—that has happened because we have all of the resurgence planning that the all-of-Government group has already been doing. So that’s work that, actually, as I said just moments earlier, we started from the day that I stood on this podium when there was a leadership change in the Opposition and reminded people about our resurgence plan; it’s been in play for a long time.

Media: What’s the threshold for turning level 3 down, coming to level 2, for instance, in Auckland? Do you need to find the source before you are comfortable with adjusting the alert level, and where have you set—

PM: It’s something that we’ve based on, obviously, the advice of the director-general as well.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: So in the first instance, our focus is on identifying the extent of the outbreak, and managing and controlling it, followed closely by the source of it, of course, because that will then help inform a decision about whether or not alert level 3 could be relaxed. The key information, as the Prime Minister’s mentioned, around the source will be the genome testing, which is well under way and we’re expecting to have results within about 24 hours.

Media: You were smirking a little bit over the Gerry Brownlee “interesting facts” quip. Do you think that they’re being a bit conspiratorial?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Was that to me?

Media: Yeah.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Oh, I was just smiling at the thought of the swab I had yesterday.

PM: It doesn’t usually bring a smile to most people’s faces!

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: I had actually planned to do that a week before, but yesterday was a good opportunity to go up to the clinic out at Ora Toa in Cannons Creek, and, if anyone’s interested, I actually just got the text from Dr Sean Hanna out there to let me know that my swab was negative, so I’m relieved about that. No, I was really just wanting to highlight the work that is happening and has been happening for several months, and also because I have been exhorting people to take the test for weeks, I thought it was only fair, having confessed that I hadn’t had one, that I lead by example.

Media: Notwithstanding Gerry Brownlee’s lurch to conspiracy theory or “interesting facts”, if these are extraordinary times that require unity, then why not reach the olive branch out to the Opposition, invite Judith Collins to Cabinet, or at least meet her request for more consultation?

PM: Well, firstly, I again just set out that New Zealand, of course, is not in a caretaker mode. That only happens after the election, so Cabinet still has the ability to make these decisions, and these decisions often are having to be made very quickly. But still, in spite of that, they've not stopped me from reaching out to the Leader of the Opposition. In fact, I spoke with her prior to me speaking to the full Cabinet. So I think that is a sign that at the point of those big decisions, we are seeking to do that. No further significant decisions have been made today.

I will continue to reach out to the Leader of the Opposition, but I would ask at the same time that, actually, we maintain the same relationship that I had with previous Opposition members in the way that we treat, essentially, our response here. It's not a political matter. It's in everyone's interests that we ensure that we stamp COVID out and we do that with very strong health messaging and support of New Zealanders' actions as our team of 5 million. OK, thank you everyone.

conclusion of press conference