

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 24 AUGUST 2020

PM: Kia ora koutou katoa. Good afternoon, everyone. Cabinet met today to determine the next steps in managing the re-emergence of COVID-19 in New Zealand. Tomorrow marks 14 days since the re-emergence of COVID-19 beyond our quarantine facilities. In those almost two weeks, enormous effort has gone into rolling out our resurgence plan. You can see that in the sheer scale of the response, and I want to briefly to recap on that response, because, in sharing those details, it gives a sense of why we are well equipped to deal with the cases that will continue from this current cluster for some time to come.

Since Wednesday, 12 August, we have tested more than 100,000 Aucklanders and 194,000 in total across the country. That is more than a quarter of all the testing New Zealand has done for COVID since the beginning of the year in just the last 13 days. On contact tracing, where we find all the people someone with COVID-19 might have come into contact with, we have reached the gold standard of reaching 80 percent of contacts within 48 hours since 12 August. That's a sign we are getting ahead of the virus and are finding people and making sure they are in isolation before they are even symptomatic. In fact, that is exactly what has happened in the majority of our positive cases. And, on contact tracing generally, I do want to make mention of the remarkable efforts of our Auckland Public Health Unit.

At the end of last week, I spoke with Sir Brian Roche about what he had seen first-hand while visiting our Auckland Public Health Unit. He was there to see if they had all they needed to do their incredibly important job. He said he found watching them a humbling experience, and I have seen that from afar. I have seen them go back to patients with COVID once, twice, three times if that's what it takes to help find close contacts. They have used CCTV footage, HOP cards, swipe cards, docketts—whatever it takes—to help them establish people's movement and help keep other people safe. They are the ones that have to tell people they have COVID-19 and then work through all of the anxiety that creates, to help them build a picture of every move someone has made over a 14-day period. Not only do they do incredible work; they do a job that has been supported by our level 3 restrictions.

We have seen in recent days cases emerge that happened before level 3 came into force. They have shown us how tricky this virus is. They have happened on a bus journey, between absolute strangers. We have seen a case we believe occurred through a retail shopping experience—many, many cases through churches. If it weren't for level 3, this cluster would be exponential—of that I have no doubt. This is a contained cluster, but it is our biggest one, and that means the tail will be long and the cases will keep coming for a while to come. You might remember that it took us over 12 weeks to close our largest cluster in our first wave. But we can manage that. What we need to do, though, is put ourselves in the best long-term position to manage it successfully and in the most contained way we can.

Ultimately, our goal needs to be managing this cluster, eventually from level 2 as soon as we feel confident we can do that. That means feeling confident we have the perimeter of the cluster well understood and defined and are not seeing too many cases cropping up that we haven't found through contact tracing. Based on the advice of the director-general, we believe that confidence can be built over the course of this week. That is why the director-general has recommended to Cabinet, and Cabinet has agreed, to apply a short extension of level 3 restrictions in Auckland until 11.59 p.m. this Sunday, 30 August. You may recall we were due to lift restrictions on Wednesday. These extra four days are believed necessary to allow us to move down a level in Auckland and stay down. We want both confidence and certainty for everyone.

We also agree with the director-general's view that, as we did before, Auckland should step its way into level 2. That means from midnight on Sunday, schools, hospitality, retail, and those entities that are all able to operate at level 2—they all reopen. But we will keep a limit

on mass gatherings. That means groups of no more than 10, with the exception of tangihanga and funerals, which you will recall occurred with up to 50 people the last time we stepped into level 2 gradually. The rest of the country will maintain the current level 2 settings. We will put these settings in place for one week from Sunday and review them before Sunday, 6 September.

So just to review again: we will be keeping in place the current settings for Auckland until 11.59 p.m. on Sunday. From there, we will then move into level 2 for Auckland, with the exception of mass gatherings that will be limited to 10 unless you are attending a tangihanga and a funeral, where 50 will be able to be applied.

As for the rest of New Zealand remaining at level 2, I do want to share the rationale for keeping New Zealand at that level. Many will argue that given we haven't seen cases elsewhere, the rest of New Zealand should see a lift in current restrictions. I absolutely understand the sentiment that sits behind that. It does make sense—except for one issue, and that is regional travel. There are many people and businesses who will want to enter and leave Auckland once it is at level 2 from Sunday night, and many others who will want to see the benefit that comes from our biggest city moving around the country again. That includes, for instance, hospitality or retailers. But with that movement does come risk, so there is a choice to be made. If we want the economic benefit of regional travel, the trade-off is keeping in place the social distancing and mass gathering limits that help keep everyone safe in the meantime. It's a finely balanced decision but the right one, I believe, when interregional borders—they just don't work when the restrictions start reducing.

Finally, I want to speak to some of the activity over the week ahead. We continue to ask everyone who is on public transport and planes to wear a mask or face covering. Given the recent transmission we have seen on this form of transport, Cabinet has decided to move to mandating the wearing of face coverings on public transport for level 2 and above. These new orders will come into force from Monday. This isn't a decision we took lightly, but we know masks protect you and the people around you, and we now have a real-life example of that. They limit the chance of COVID-19 spreading in places where it is often harder to distance yourself and to trace people. In the meantime, we again urge everyone in Auckland to wear face coverings in public generally, as we have continued to urge over the past week.

Finally, I've been asked whether the Government or New Zealand's strategy should change when it comes to taking on COVID-19. The answer is no. As I look around the world and at the experience of others, we are still of the view that now more than ever a "stamp it out" strategy is best for our people and for our economy—for the long-term wellbeing of New Zealand. That means every time we see cases, we act, we test, we trace, we isolate, and we repeat as many times as we need, and we work incredibly hard to limit the impact of COVID on everyone. That does not mean heavy restrictions every time we see a case. In fact, our ongoing goal has to be to maintain our elimination strategy while trying to reduce the impact on as many people and businesses as possible.

But there is no denying that the price Aucklanders are currently paying is the greatest. I want to say that even though many of us haven't been in the city or haven't experienced the second round of level 3, we know it's been tough. I know there are many who have found it harder this time. In part, I imagine the reminder that this is the world's reality and that COVID is ever present is part of that. It is a hard reality to accept.

Now, we may not have any choice about whether or not the world is in a global pandemic, but we do have choices around how we deal with it. We have made a choice and we have a clear plan that means we can get through, however long this pandemic is in the world, and keep as much normality, including for our economy, as possible. We have done that for six months already, and we can keep doing it. The next seven days—in fact, the next several weeks—will see more cases, but it will also see thousands of tests, hundreds of workers contact tracing, a team out in full force to stamp out COVID-19 in New Zealand. I hope it will also see everyone playing their part, staying home if they're sick and getting a test,

downloading the COVID Tracer app, keeping a log of everywhere they go and everyone they're with, washing their hands, being kind.

In our fight against this virus, we have held some records. Now the one we have to beat is around resurgence, and if any one country knows how to bounce back, it is us. This has been a hard year. It's been a hard year for Christchurch, who has fresh reminders of that this week. It's been a hard year for Auckland. It's been a hard year for drought-stricken and flood-ridden parts of the country. So if it feels hard right now, it's because it is. But let's also remember, in a world where 2020 has frankly been terrible, we are strong, we have been kind, and we are doing really well. I'm happy to take questions.

Media: With the mask-wearing, do you regret not making it mandatory on some forms of public transport earlier? Because that would have stopped the prevention, perhaps, say, on the bus example.

PM: Keeping in mind the bus example we have is before, of course, we knew of any resurgence in New Zealand. So that we caught right on the cusp, then. Right on the edge, of course, of when we were bringing in restrictions, this bus trip occurred. So it was pre those restrictions being in place and pre us saying that we wanted everyone in Auckland wearing masks when they were out and about. If you're asking whether or not I regret that decision not being made, say, back in February or March, I do think it's fair to say the whole world has continued to learn, and New Zealand is one of those countries where wherever we've seen new evidence, we've always been willing to act on that, and we are. But it is fair to say we've continued to learn lessons and make improvements all the way through COVID-19.

Media: Last time we went from level 3 to level 2, we had almost a week of very low case numbers. We had three days in a row of zero. Why do we only need to extend it by four days, and are you confident we'll get down to those low levels again? Why is it different this time?

PM: Of course, it's what we look for, and those links to our existing cluster is what we continue to look for, and so our strategy has not changed. Of course, you'll see from the alert level framework we do talk about managing cases within that part of our system as well. So it's all about making sure they're linked. We're seeing those connections between cases. We have confidence we'll be able to build that certainty over the next seven days.

Media: Prime Minister, what could prevent a shift down alert levels on Sunday?

PM: Again, anything that demonstrates exponential growth outside of our cluster and cases outside of the cluster that we really struggle to link on a larger scale. Over the course of this cluster, we've continued to see a pattern that we expected. We've continued to be able to build links over time to the existing cases, but what we need to prepare ourselves for is, because this is a larger outbreak—a larger cluster than usual—we will see a longer tail or a bigger tail than usual. In part, that'll just be because there are more people connected to it.

Media: How much responsibility does the Government take for this outbreak?

PM: Of course, we continue to do everything we can to find the source of where this outbreak occurred, not necessarily because merely an outbreak demonstrates a systems failure but because we learn from that. Then we can see what more we can do to tighten up New Zealand's protections. To date, despite comprehensive testing at the border, comprehensive work within our isolation facilities, we have as yet not been able to find what occurred here. We continue to look.

Media: Given that there were those failures at the border, how much responsibility does the Government take? Do you take any responsibility for this outbreak?

PM: I always want to base both the changes that we make and, of course, the decisions we take based on evidence. We will keep looking for the evidence of what happened here. It's in our interests to do that. We want to learn from it. But regardless, we

are tightening up constantly in our COVID response everything we do, to try and make sure we affect as few people as possible any time we have future cases.

Media: Prime Minister, you've mandated the use of masks on public transport in level 2. You've already said that there are about 5 million masks that the Government have made available. Are you worried that there's going to be a mask shortage as a result of this announcement?

PM: No. I read a brief last night of availability in, for instance, our supermarket retailers and others. They still do have availability. They continue to have orders coming into the country. But what we continue to encourage is that New Zealanders also explore those alternatives that exist too. I know it can be prohibitive, the cost of a specific face mask, but there's lots of advice available online and through the all-of-Government group around how you can fashion at home a face covering that should provide you protection as well.

Media: And last time we moved up the alert levels, we saw a bit of a rush on some supermarkets across the country. Are you worried that there is going to be a similar rush with people getting out to get masks under level 2, and if so, what would be your message?

PM: Well, actually, we've encouraged mask use all the way through for Aucklanders generally when they are outside their homes. We've encouraged it generally for everyone for public transport. Now what we're saying is that we'll be mandating face coverings for public transport, then, from Monday. Ultimately, though, we're not mandating a singular type of mask; it is a face covering. So as long as people are making efforts to cover their face—we encourage that they look up advice on the best forms of that—that will then satisfy that order.

Media: How will you enforce the masks?

PM: Well, of course, some people will ask why aren't we doing it generally. We have chosen an area where it is easy to enforce. Of course, as you're entering and exiting public transport—and, of course, we are including Uber in that as well—of course, it's easy to see whether or not someone has a face covering and whether they'll therefore be able to come on the bus or train.

Media: So they won't be able to catch public transport without a mask?

PM: It will be mandated. Entry will be mandated at level 2 or above on someone having a face covering. We're working now through the orders. Cabinet's given enough time for Crown Law and Parliamentary Counsel Office to draft those orders by Monday, but we want to give fair warning to people that that's the expectation we have. Do you know, I think people will see the cases that we have. We have several cases now where people have become unwell from a bus journey, and so this is a common-sense approach to protect everyone's health.

Media: Did Cabinet consider taking the rest of the country to level 1 but having some kind of restriction on movement into and out of Auckland, and what was the thinking behind not doing that?

PM: Yes, we did, and that's one of the reasons I dwelt on that a little bit. We did consider whether or not the rest of the country moved to level 1, but, of course, it becomes very difficult to enforce, then, anyone from Auckland coming into level 1 areas and not participating in mass gatherings. So it's the enforceability issue. Keep in mind that Auckland is going to come out of level 3 restrictions. Once it comes into level 2, you wouldn't want a farcical situation where Aucklanders are able to travel across the country to go to large events and large gatherings, because we do still want to manage that risk in Auckland. Having a regional boundary around Auckland where the police check every single person who's leaving, to ask them whether they are going to a mass gathering, is just not workable. So the alternative, the trade-off, is that we keep interregional travel but we all stay at level 2—and that is the trade-off.

Media: We saw a bit of vigilantism during lockdown level 4. Are you concerned that the public might try and enforce the mask-wearing themselves?

PM: Look, of course, I hope that doesn't occur. So what we will do is, obviously, work with our public transport operators around making sure that we just manage, as best we can, enforcement around face coverings. It is ultimately there for everyone's safety, but I'd just ask other users of public transport to have faith that we will enforce it and that they therefore don't need to. If they want to make an offering of a face covering to another passenger, by all means—and that's the kind of support I'd like to see.

Media: Does it put undue pressure on the bus drivers to try and police their spaces?

PM: Yeah, and that's something that we need to make sure that we're really careful about how we manage that. We don't want to put them in a difficult position. The best way to prevent them being in a difficult position is everyone to take responsibility for their own face covering when they arrive to use public transport.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, are you satisfied with the mandating of the masks at this level or would you like to see it more widely used?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: So the advice that our team have put together on this was absolutely mandating face coverings on public transport from level 3 and above. We felt level 2 was a line call about—we thought it was definitely worth doing, and it was a line call about whether you mandate it or whether you strongly encourage, and Cabinet's gone with the mandating from level 2 and above. I think, as I commented at 1 o'clock, one of the things we're trying to do is use all the tools in the tool box, including the new ones that come up, to help avoid having to go up alert levels in the future, and if use of masks on public transport at alert level 2 alongside all our other tools helps us avoid going up to alert level 3, I think that's a very good idea.

Media: Personally, do you think it would've been a good idea to mandate it at level 2?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, that's the decision Cabinet has taken.

PM: Yeah. So it will be from level 2 and above across the country, any time that we move into a level 2, level 3, or level 4 situation—of course, keeping in mind public transport doesn't operate at all those levels. We will be mandating mask use, and our view is that to keep that simplicity, it's aligned with the alert level and not regional. So depending on if you're in a place that's at level 2 or above, you're required to use a mask on public transport from Monday onwards. Of course, we continue to strongly encourage it from Auckland in between as well.

Media: Will there be exemptions for people who have breathing issues or small children or maybe, particularly, old people, and how will those exemptions be managed if they are there?

PM: Good question.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: It is. So there are already exemptions in some situations—for example, that mean people don't have to use a seatbelt or wear a crash helmet. They're rare, but people would require a letter, usually from their doctor, if use of a mask was contravened. Children—we generally don't encourage or don't require them to be used in children, and the age that we would be working on would be—at this stage is age 10, but we'll get some firm advice out around that.

PM: And that's why giving ourselves the time to draft the orders for Monday allows us to work through some of those exemptions and also make sure we give really clear advice on our expectations for children as well.

Media: Who is liable if someone gets on public transport?

PM: Sorry?

Media: Who is liable if someone gets on a public transport without a mask? Is it the bus driver or the Uber driver or is it the person who gets on without a mask?

PM: Yeah, and so these are some of the issues around enforcement that will be— Cabinet's made the decision. They've given those seven days for Crown Law and also for the Parliamentary Counsel Office to draft the orders. That will then help us with any issues around liability and enforcement. But generally, this is falling on the individual to make sure they're complying, but, equally, a question particularly for Uber around their ability to stop passage for someone if they're not wearing one. So that's what we'll be working through.

Media: Will the Government be extending the wage subsidy to go with this small extension of the lockdown?

PM: Yeah, so what we will do—of course, we've already got the two weeks covered for the wage subsidy. That remains as it is. What individuals who previously may not have been eligible for the eight-week extension will be able to count this full period of level 3 as part of their application for that extension. So we more likely see more people eligible when they take into account that full period of restrictions.

Media: How heavily did the economic impacts weigh on you when Cabinet made this decision today?

PM: Always. We are constantly keeping in mind the cost to business, the cost to the Auckland economy, but, equally, we have to keep in mind the wider costs if we make a premature decision that doesn't give enough certainty, that we can come out and we can then stay out. We've learnt that lesson well before. So we want this to be as short a period as possible but also one where we can have certainty; we can move with confidence.

Media: With the 100,000 tests in Auckland, what percentage of that would be with the Pasifika community, and how cooperative have they been?

PM: Forgive me that I haven't brought my breakdown up until Monday, but at the end of Friday—from Friday last week, it was representative testing amongst the Pasifika community, from memory, roughly representative of about 20-ish percent of our overall testing—so, high, and well over the proportion of the population that our Pasifika community represent. So that has been fantastic. What we want to do over the next week, and we've discussed this this morning with the Minister of Health and the Director-General of Health, is have a really targeted, intensive regime of testing over the coming week. We do want to work with the DHB and Margie Apa around making sure that we're taking testing to the community—so, utilising things like supermarket carpark and others to really lift our surveillance testing in communities where we have seen the majority of these cases.

Media: Prime Minister, you mentioned that the potential costs of going too early were greater than the costs of extending for four days. What advice—

PM: Potentially could be, yeah.

Media: Yeah. What advice have you got from Treasury or others on what those actual potential costs were and what were the benefits of not going early?

PM: If you look at the weekly impact on the economy, which has been in the hundreds of millions, here we've made a decision around a four-day increase versus the potential that you come out prematurely. Without the full confidence that we have the cluster and the full perimeter of that cluster well understood, you then run the risk of going into another transmission cycle.

Media: Was any analysis actually done of the potential costs and benefits of [Inaudible]?

PM: Well, in order to do that, you would have to be able to fully appreciate the likely behaviour of the cluster, and that has been where it's been difficult. Some estimates have been made around the size of these clusters, but there's been a lot of caveats around modelling for clusters that make it very hard to make those calls. So we'd have to make some assumptions first about the behaviour of our largest cluster, then assumptions

around, if we came back in, how long we would be in for. I do think it's commonly appreciated, though, that the idea of yo-yoing, not least because of the uncertainty that gives a regional economy, is very, very unsettling for an economy and comes with a high price.

Media: So you're saying Treasury said it was just too hard to model the cluster movements and therefore they didn't give you any analysis?

PM: No, I'm saying that Health have always caveated and those around Health—epidemiologists—have always caveated assumptions around clusters, and that Treasury certainly haven't gone to the point of trying to take uncertain cluster modelling to then make assumptions around whether or not we might have resurgence that might take us back in.

Media: So did you ask them to do any analysis?

PM: We know what the weekly cost is to the Auckland economy. It's in the hundreds of millions. So we can make a fair assessment that's saying, "Well, we'll take ourselves for an extra four days"—which, keep in mind, takes in two business days and two retail business days—"versus the potential of it extending into a full transmission cycle."

Media: When it came to that line call on masks, did you take into account the, sort of, vitriol that's come out of places like the USA with people not wanting to wear them under compulsion?

PM: Yeah, to be fair, I didn't consider—so the line call for us was level 3 and level 1 for the rest of the country, not so much masks. On masks, Cabinet was very, very clear. We weren't concerned around people's response, generally, to mask use, in part because we have a very clear link to public transport and transmission. So I think New Zealanders—we are pragmatic. We are common sense. If COVID has been spread on a bus and we know masks make a difference, let's wear masks.

Media: How key is Uber to that? Because Uber is, as you said, going to be one of the trickier parts of that to do. You don't control your Uber; it's essentially a private driver taking a private passenger.

PM: Yeah, and so that's where there are a few more—

Media: If you had to cut off Uber and not do Uber, would that be that bad, given it's not the same, you know, 18 people in a small space?

PM: Yeah, so we've signalled our desire for them to be included and taxis to be included, and certainly you have seen, for instance, drivers—you will commonly see drivers are already using them for their own safety. So now, as we work through the order, we'll work with them and ascertain whether or not it's workable around the enforcement of passengers as well. We want to keep our drivers safe too, though, so that's why that's our starting point. But we'll now work it through with them.

Media: Are you considering providing additional financial support to hospitality businesses that will be affected, effectively, at the level 2.5?

PM: Yeah, yeah. And so we've kept, currently, the wage subsidy two-week extension as it is. But there will be some who may, for instance, tip into the extension of the wider eight-week wage subsidy who may not have previously made the 40 percent drop in revenue who will now potentially make that threshold, which means they'll be able to access even a larger period of support.

Media: But what about targeted support for hospo?

PM: No, our view was that, actually, if you just set criteria around revenue, you'll end up mopping up those groups anyway. So that's why we took that approach. We weren't specific to Auckland, recognising that there are a large number of businesses that would have their revenue affected by Auckland being contained at the moment as well.

Media: And on the back of that, as Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage—

PM: Oh, sorry, I don't think I had come to you. Jo, forgive me; I'll come to you next.

Media: Just as Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage, a lot of shows, a lot of artistic events will need to now be cancelled. What's your message to that sector?

PM: Well, they'll know that we specifically designed the wage subsidy to make sure that they were eligible for it, and there was good reason. We identified very early on that this was a sector that would be hit hard by our COVID response and the protections we're putting in place, because mass gatherings are just so difficult. So their eligibility for the wage subsidy. We also have a number of support funds being administered by the Ministry of Arts, Culture and Heritage. They include a fund that is around specifically the arts recovery, and also we've seen a lot of surge funding coming through from Creative New Zealand to support our artists as well. We have even, for instance, had Make Good Fund on New Zealand Music Month venue support. We have a domestic touring fund that, when it's possible again, will help support some of those live acts to be able to get back on the road. Doing that supports hospitality and it supports tourism and it supports accommodation. So we've taken a whole ecosystem view.

Media: Restrictions on tangihanga and funerals have been one of the more difficult things that people have had to deal with. Is it almost accepted now that it's going to become a new norm that there just will need to be restrictions on those sorts of gatherings in the future?

PM: I think you'll see that we learnt from last time we moved levels, and the big learning there for us was, actually, there are ways that we can support family and whānau with tangihanga and funerals, and particularly using funeral directors. So remember, the first time we stepped into level 2, we had blanket 10-person limit for gatherings. But after getting really strong feedback, understandably, from representatives who worked in this space, from Māoridom and a wide range of others, we lifted that to 50 and we created a system that helped make it work. So we're going back to what we learnt the first time, utilising all of those lessons, and just redeploying it again.

Media: Prime Minister, [*Inaudible*] operating in a level 2 environment outside of Auckland [*Inaudible*] in Wellington we don't have cases, they'll see this as a real step backwards.

PM: And they can have 100. Again, so just keeping in mind the stepped approach, stepping into level 2—the rest of the country's got the same level 2 settings.

Media: But for those who want to attend funerals and tangi, they are going to be very restricted—

PM: For Auckland—for Auckland, yes—but that's for good reason. We have to look at how many cases we've had attached to churches, to social gatherings. This is where COVID thrives, and so it is the area where we will have restrictions. What we've always tried to do is identify the areas that are the toughest, place the restrictions there, and try and ease off everywhere else. That does come at a cost, though, for areas like, for instance, those social gatherings. The other reason we're keeping level 2 for everywhere else is because we have to keep in mind, you know, New Zealanders travel. So Aucklanders, when they're allowed to move again, will want to go to funerals and other gatherings, and that's why we've just got to keep a lid on how large they are for now while we put New Zealand back in a good position again.

Media: Do you see those mass gatherings, particularly around those sorts of very personal gathering—do you see that as a key tool to pull people back and restrict people long into the future though?

PM: No, I think it's just when we have enough to justify restrictions, those are the areas where the restrictions are a bit tighter, and that's just been from lessons learnt. Dr Bloomfield, do you have further you want to speak to on that?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Nothing on that, actually, Prime Minister.

Media: Pacific Islanders are highly represented in the tests. They've been doing an awesome job, really, haven't they.

PM: Yes.

Media: How instrumental has their cooperation been in getting the country's biggest city to a level where, hey, we may be able to move down a level? How instrumental has that been?

PM: We would not be in the position we are, of having a cluster, you know, under control, were it not for those who have gone out to be tested, were it not for those who have had COVID being identified, and it saved lives. I don't say that to be flippant. It is literally true that without those members of our community being willing to be tested, lives would have been lost, and we can't make any estimates on how large that would've been. So particularly to our Pasifika community, who at the moment are carrying a great burden, I want to say thank you, because they have helped all of us get this back under control. It's been through their work, so thank you. Fa'afetai lava.

Media: A few people have been in touch with us, Prime Minister, this afternoon, pointing to photos of Megan Woods appearing not to socially distance. Is it worth putting out a reminder to people about social distancing, including to your Ministers?

PM: Look, this is—again, actually, I'd say this for everyone. When you're outside of Auckland and when you are in other parts of the country, it is a constant reminder to ourselves that we are in a level 2 environment. People often approach you—I've had that experience—or maybe want to engage in conversation, and I know it's awkward for New Zealanders to step back, to try and keep that distance. We just need to keep reminding ourselves that social distancing is in for a reason. It means if we find a COVID case and you've caught up with that person, when we call you, you might not have to stay home if you've remembered those rules. If you haven't, that's a period of isolation.

Media: And will you be reminding Megan Woods to be a bit more vigilant?

PM: I'll be reminding everyone, including myself, because this is a constant, daily reminder—daily reminder—for everyone.

Media: Prime Minister, some of the businesses and workers on Auckland's borders have been telling us they've been suffering because of the restrictions. Did Cabinet look any exemptions for these or—

PM: Yeah, so we did have a conversation about this, because we get this feedback through our MPs as well. This is a really good opportunity for me to remind everyone: if you check in on the COVID-19 website, you'll see that there is a list of permitted travel in and out of Auckland. It includes personal circumstances where you don't need an exemption; you are able to travel, and it gives a list of just some evidence you can carry with you to make it easier when you talk with someone at the checkpoint. It also includes a list of reasons or areas where you can move between Auckland and other areas for work purposes. Now, that list of exemptions means you do not have to get an individual permission from the Ministry of Health to travel.

So if you check the website, you will see the list. It is reasonably significant and comprehensive. If you are on that list, you can carry evidence and travel. You don't have to wait for any permission to be processed. The reason I wanted to point that out is because there is a percentage of requests coming into the ministry that do not require permission at the moment, and they'll be getting caught up in the system. Please do check that list. It's updated frequently. If we see a lot of requests coming through the same area, the Director-General of Health will take a look at it and add it to the class exemptions, which means that we can speed up the movement of people coming through. I'll give you a follow-up: is there anything specific from people particularly that are coming through?

Media: No, just—so you're expecting until Sunday that—or are you hoping that that will ease some issues—

PM: I am hoping we'll get more efficiency around that, because as I say, where we see a large number of applications, we then make a common-sense decision around whether they should just have a class exemption. Then it's enough for them to carry a letter from their employer.

Media: Why are the Ministry of Health making those decisions rather than the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment?

PM: Because these are, basically, health-based decisions around whether or not they're going into workplaces that can safely maintain the restrictions that you would expect for level 3 environment. So I'll give you an example: people who are moving around for food processing, even—we've got people who are on the cusp for a bread producer. We do need to make sure, if you've got people moving between those environments, we have good safety standards at those workplaces.

Media: For those who are planning big events or sports events and that sort of thing, do you anticipate a step back into level 1? So is there any certainty you can give them beyond that 6 September date?

PM: Yeah, so I want to be careful about not creating an expectation that then will change. So it will be a very genuine review. Again, people over the course of the week will see where our trajectory is, but it is possible for us at different parts of our alert level to continue to maintain cases. We'll want to make sure, though, that we're doing that safely and with confidence.

Media: In terms of the wage subsidy, can I just confirm: for a business that got the eight-week subsidy and that finished and then they got the two-week one—

PM: Yep. Then they can get the two-week.

Media: Yep. They can't get that extension for another week?

PM: No, we've kept it at two weeks—we have kept it at two weeks.

Media: So why have you done that given you're extending it by four days? Why not just extend it by a week and give businesses a hand?

PM: Because it does imply that it's a simple act to extend for a four-day period; it is not. So, of course, we are already processing and have tens of thousands of applications that have already been processing with those payments. And so our view is if we find ourselves any longer than that, then absolutely we will come back and revisit that decision, but for now, with a Sunday cut-off, we've kept it as it is.

Media: The finance Minister said that the wage subsidy would extend for as long as Auckland is at level 3. Do you not think it's a little bit cheeky that it's extending by four days and you're not just extending the wage subsidy one week?

PM: Keeping in mind that the extension was due to lift roughly on Wednesday midnight. Now we have several extra days where it is extending. Of course, people will have different work cycles for that period. The decision has been made. If we extend beyond where we are now, yes, we come back, but with a Sunday lift, we are keeping—we are processing those applications as they stand. It is not a simple exercise to simply tack on additional—it would require an entirely new application processing regime. Our focus is getting the money out the door quickly for everyone who's already applied.

Media: Prime Minister, what does—

PM: Yeah, I'll come to Jenna and then last question to Jo.

Media: Was it appropriate for the Labour Party to post an ad featuring yourself and Dr Bloomfield?

PM: Whilst I haven't seen it, I don't believe it's accurate to call it an ad. Of course, that would not be appropriate, but you'll recognise that from time to time, I do things as Prime Minister that do have Government agencies in the background. Regardless, we have taken

it down, because we don't want to lead to any questions of there being any comprised position of anyone in this case. But again, not an ad for the Labour Party, as I understand.

Media: How was it not an ad?

PM: Well, an ad would be advertising Labour. I have a lot of videos on my web page, for instance, that are me doing my job. Yep, Jo.

Media: What does the extension mean for campaigning and also for whether Parliament will sit next week as well?

PM: Whether Parliament will sit will be determined by the Business Committee. So no decision yet as to whether it will have any impact on the sitting schedule. Certainly, for this week, the sitting schedule is as it stands—

Media: Do you have a preference for next week?

PM: —Tuesday and Wednesday—well, our hope and expectation, of course, is that we'll see alert level change at the end of the week. But ultimately that's a decision for the Business Committee.

Media: So level 2 would mean campaigning, for all parties, again?

PM: Well, some parties are making the decision to operate in other parts of the country. Ultimately, it's a call for them. All we expect is that people just continue to follow the rules of level 3 and level 2 where they exist. OK—

Media: What is the purpose of a video of you doing your job—

PM: Henry, I called time on last questions.

Media: —of you doing your job on your Facebook, if it's not an advertisement for the Labour Party?

PM: Well, I'll just point out that this is currently being streamed on my webpage, and I don't consider this to be an ad for the Labour Party. OK, thanks, everyone.

conclusion of press conference