

**POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 6 DECEMBER 2021
HANSARD TRANSCRIPT**

PM: Kia ora koutou. Good afternoon, everyone. First up today, I want to speak to the latest progress we've made in securing COVID medicines. As we settle into the new traffic light framework you'll see that our COVID response remains one where we push forward cautiously with fewer restrictions, more careful travel around the country, and families and friends reuniting. COVID treatments are an important part of this momentum and provide an extra layer of protection to keep people safe as those restrictions are eased.

Today, I can announce that Pharmac has signed an advance purchase agreement for 60,000 courses of Pfizer's oral antiviral treatment, which is now subject to Medsafe approval. While only early and interim data has been released, clinical trials have shown this treatment is shaping up to be particularly promising, with an 89 percent reduction in hospitalisation and death. In simple terms, this drug taken orally over the course of a few days is the first of its kind to really home in on coronavirus and can be taken at the first sign of symptoms to help stop people from getting really unwell. It's a big step forward for the management of COVID-19 globally. I know many of you may be interested in some of the clinical trials and other elements of this purchase, so Dr Bloomfield, Dr Ian Town, and Sarah Fitt from Pharmac will be providing a briefing at the end of this week. That will also be live streamed.

This is our second advance purchase agreement for an oral antiviral to treat mild to moderate cases of COVID-19 with an agreement for 60,000 courses of molnupiravir signed in October, and that brings our suite of COVID medicines secured and managed by Pharmac to six in total, three of which are already in use in our hospitals and the rest of which, subject to Medsafe approval, will arrive in New Zealand early in the New Year.

Alongside vaccinations, our hospital treatments are already reducing the likelihood of people needing ICU care, and for a range of factors the ICU rate in Auckland has dropped to 3 percent of hospitalisations, down from the 5.7 percent that we saw earlier on in the pandemic. We've made sure Pharmac can continue to secure early access to new and promising COVID medicines as soon as possible, with \$175 million allocated for medicines and supply chain costs and another \$300 million available for purchasing more COVID-19 therapeutics.

Treatments are only one part of our plan. We must continue with all the other elements of our strategy to manage COVID-19, like, for instance, contact tracing and testing, and here's another good reason why. Pfizer's new antiviral has a three- to five-day window from the beginning of COVID symptoms to be effective, most effective from three days but still with efficacy up to five. So while the drug will work for people early on in their illness, they may have already been sick for a day or two, which is why we need to maintain an effective contact tracing, testing, and clinical assessment regime to make sure that we reach people in a timely way so these drugs can really have their full benefit. But, of course, preventing people from getting COVID in the first place, through vaccination and safety nets built into the traffic light system, is still the very best protection we can offer. We don't want to wait until people are well and then treat them.

Per capita, New Zealand maintains the lowest number of cases and deaths in the OECD and they're well below other countries too. Our total case numbers sit at a total of about 12,000, the lowest in all of the 38 countries of the OECD. Next up is Iceland at 18,000, 90,000 in Luxembourg, and then all other countries come in at hundreds of thousands then millions, peaking at nearly 50 million in the US. On deaths, well of course every single one of our 44 deaths is obviously an absolute tragedy that we would rather have prevented. So too are the 880 in Luxenberg, the 2,000 in Australia, and the 788,000 in the United States.

And even right down to the local level, we see the success of our cautious approach. In the past week across the northern DHBs, which include the three Auckland DHBs and Northland, there were 432 fewer cases and 70 fewer hospitalisations than has been projected. That demonstrates that vaccines are working, but we know, with the transmissibility of Delta, that

we will have more cases in our communities and more people recovering at home, and so we must be as prepared as possible to support all of those individuals to get well soon. And so treatments are another way we can keep people safe and ensure that our hospitals maintain capacity.

Finally, an update on vaccination projections. As we move forward and look to review the traffic lights on Monday, 13 December and the Auckland boundary eases on Wednesday, 15 December, we move forward as a highly vaccinated population—88 percent of our eligible population is now fully vaccinated, and 93 percent have their first dose. We've some new projections that I want to share today. As a nation we are projected to hit 90 percent double dose on 14 or 15 December, as the Auckland boundary changes. All Auckland DHBs are projected to hit 90 percent by 15 December also.

My message, finally, then, is simple. We are in a system that relies on a good spread of vaccination, and we have achieved that. But every percentage point helps, which means every vaccination helps. So if you're due for your second dose, please get it this week. If you haven't yet had your first, please talk to someone who has, reach out, make sure you're having your questions answered. It's the number one thing you can do to help make sure we have a safe Christmas and summer for you and your loved ones. We're happy now to take questions.

Media: Prime Minister, what are you going to do about the fraudulent use of vaccine passports, which seems to be easy and already prevalent?

PM: I don't think it's fair to say that we have evidence of this being a widespread issue. However, of course, we have the ability through the verifier app to make sure that the pass that someone has is a legitimate pass. We also have enough details on the pass itself to also check that someone is who they claim to be by using photo ID, and the fact that you may not know at any given venue which will be used is a way that we can keep those checks and balances. We do want to make sure, though, that if passes aren't being checked, the public have a way to raise concerns if there are any, so we're working through how we might enable people to do that if they have concerns.

Media: Looking forward, I guess it's kind of OK for hospitality outlets because there aren't as many people in there, but looking forward into festival season when there are those bigger events, will you be expecting festival directors to be using that verifier app every single person, every single time?

PM: Actually, a number of ticketing agencies are working on ways that they can build into their ticketing process some of those checks that otherwise might be at-gate. That's one of the reasons, of course, you'll know that we release some of the technical details for the tracer app, to try and make it as accessible, as seamless, as possible for large-scale events.

Media: Just really quickly on a completely different topic, you're going up against Christopher Luxon for the first time in the House tomorrow. What are you expecting?

PM: Look, obviously, this is now the fifth Opposition leader I've faced, and that doesn't change my job. My job is exactly the same as it's always been, so my approach, be it in the House or in any other regard, will be the same as well.

Media: Do you see him as a more formidable foe?

PM: Again, I've treated every Opposition leader exactly the same, and I'll continue to do so. It doesn't change my job and what I have a responsibility to do.

Media: He is used to being, you know, in those positions of power in the boardroom, and so on. Are you expecting that to play in his advantage when he comes up against you tomorrow?

PM: I think, look, Parliament and politics and a pandemic is a completely different environment. But, look, I wish the new Leader of the Opposition well. I don't imagine it's easy

to manage a caucus where you have three past leaders within, so that can't be an easy job. So I do wish him good luck.

Media: Is that a dig?

PM: No, it's a statement of fact.

Media: Just on COVID please, Prime Minister, have there been any issues raised with you about the first few days of the traffic light system? Is there anything that needs to be changed or looked at?

PM: Look, having come in now and had a bit of a sit-down and talk through with our team following the weekend, and, of course, reading some of the feedback from those who've been operating the system, as well as just speaking to those who have been using it day to day, I think a remarkable change has been implemented with actually a reasonably small number of issues, which is fantastic. However, we do expect there to be some issues that we will work very hard to iron out very quickly. I do ask those who might be operating the system, if you do come up against tweaks you believe will make the system a little easier, then please make sure you get in touch with your associations. We're very keen to have that feedback.

Media: Are you able to give us an idea on where some of those tweaks might happen?

PM: Look, none of them are particularly substantial. So, for instance, retail actually aren't required to use vaccine passes. We've noticed that some are using them. We want to make sure they know that they're not required to. So if they choose to, that's fine, but we just want to make sure retail are really clear that they have those options. Otherwise, just making sure, again, that if, you know, people are concerned that they haven't been asked for a pass, where they should have been, they've got a way of raising that if they have a concern.

Media: Just on changes, very quickly, on Friday night, there was a change where takeaways no longer have to have staffing cuts when they're vaccinated. Why was that?

PM: Oh, that's not a change. So there was, I guess, a bit of a question mark. Some takeaways weren't clear on whether or not they were to be treated as hospitality or whether or not they were treated as retail. But you can tell from, of course, the framework that when people are using vaccine certificates, it's very much around people dining in—the ability to dine in, and so on. If you're just coming to pick up your fish and chips, it's a bit more like retail.

Media: Prime Minister, just back to what you were saying before. You said if the public are worried about vaccine passes not being checked, you're looking at a way of sort of having a system in place. Are you going to be encouraging Kiwis to dob in—

PM: No, no, not at all. But, of course, if someone has a concern, we don't want them necessarily escalating those things at a higher level than they need to. So it's just thinking about if people want a bit of clarity on how do they raise a concern like that, just making sure we've got a single point for them.

Media: And in terms of you being out and about in the community, given your case is probably different to most Kiwis, have you experienced people checking the passes, or have you been—

PM: Yes, I have—yes, I have.

Media: So you're happy with the compliance so far?

PM: Yeah, absolutely. I can report that, yes, I have absolutely been asked to show my vaccine pass, and that's exactly as it should be.

Media: And, as I was saying, you'd be an exemption to that. Obviously, people would see you coming and panic a little bit, even if they weren't doing it usually. In terms of the general report back, have you got an idea of compliance level at this stage?

PM: It's fair to say that based on what we're hearing from different sources, including the fact that no police district has reported any significant compliance issues. You will have heard that they were out in central Auckland, just being present, undertaking the odd spot

check. They had nothing to report. And, so, no, nothing significant at this stage. Of course, we will have examples where someone may not have been asked or they may be concerned about whether or not rules being followed. That's not unexpected. And, as those arise, will work through them.

Media: Could you set up a similar system as you did to the wage subsidy, where employees could escalate it without—

PM: Yeah. And so this is the question. I mean, of course, what we're mindful of is it is important that people follow these rules, because we've actually seen in countries that have used vaccine passes, the ones that have been most successful at preventing people from getting sick are the ones where they've been used properly, rather than just something that people ignore. We can't afford to ignore this. We've done it for good reason. It does have a positive impact. And so it's just about making sure we're encouraging everyone just to keep doing the right thing.

Do you mind if I just pan around and then I'll come back to you, Amelia?

Media: Have there been any more testing or positive wastewater results in Gisborne, and, I guess, what's your assessment of the situation, be it positive?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: We haven't had any further wastewater results. We're expecting the latest one back shortly. Testing rates in the population—we could do with more testing. In other words, we need people who've got any symptoms to go and be tested. But we haven't found what the source might be of that positive wastewater result yet in Gisborne. The important thing is, as we've found in other places like Pahiatua, if we keep testing, we will eventually find if there is a positive case there. So I would just encourage in Tai Rāwhiti, especially in Gisborne: if you've got symptoms, go and get a test.

Media: And a couple of questions on child poverty for you, Prime Minister. Will you try and get more support towards Māori, Pacific, and disabled whānau to lift more children out of poverty?

PM: So, of course, you know, one of the reasons that we have this additional data is because we've instigated it. We have wanted to, at a more granular level, dig down into our child poverty numbers in New Zealand so that we can make sure that our policies are making a difference to those children that we need to reach. One thing we do know that is that the measures that we've taken so far do have a disproportionate impact on Māori and Pacific children. And you can see why—because they are overrepresented in our poverty statistics. So already, of material deprivation—so children not having enough food to eat, clothing, and so on; we know of the impact we've had there. We've lifted nearly 10,000 children out of material deprivation. About half of that—sorry, 10,000 Māori children, and that represents about half of the total number. So you can see that, actually, our child poverty measures generally are having a disproportionate but positive impact.

Media: Just that gap—are you concerned about the gap between Māori, Pasifika, disabled children and Pākehā children?

PM: Yes, absolutely. We know that Māori and Pacific children and children with disabilities or living in families with disabilities are overrepresented in our child poverty statistics—we know that. One other thing we want to do is make sure that we have a better understanding of the impact of our policies on these groups as well. But we also know that of the positive progress we've made, it's also positively impacting these children too. We just need to keep going.

Media: Those Child Poverty Monitor figures are from before COVID, though. Do you expect things to get worse?

PM: So they are. One of the things that's been a little difficult is our ability to survey. So these are all based on survey data that, of course, has been impacted because of COVID itself and our ability to adequately survey. We do expect COVID to have an impact, but that's why we haven't waited for numbers to tell us that. That's why we've made changes to Working

for Families, some of which you saw only a matter of weeks ago; it's why we've lifted Government support rates; it's why we made changes to the in-work test for families. So all of those things have been to try and get ahead of the impacts of COVID.

Media: Prime Minister, what's your latest understanding of the transmissibility and virality of Omicron? You can flick that if you'd like.

PM: Yeah, no, well—so I've heard some modellers' assumptions around this, but it's very preliminary, so I'd be a bit hesitant to share what they are saying at the moment. Most, I believe, are tending to base it on what they're seeing in South Africa, but there's many variables around that density profile of the population, and so on. So Dr Bloomfield, I'll leave you to give—

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: My main problem would be there's more speculation than fact still on Omicron. And it will be another week or two before we know. And I think of particular interest to us is the experience and the increasing number of high-income countries that have got cases, and, in particular, looking at how it behaves in places like Norway, where there's been an outbreak in an indoor setting—in a party—rather than, perhaps, the comparison with South Africa. So saying, my team today is again doing an updated risk assessment, so I'll expect advice later on today.

Media: There are 25 cases and rising in Australia, as of today. When you announce the reopening plans to the rest of the world and starting with Australia on 17 January, the switch from MIQ to self-isolation, Chris Hipkins said you were very committed to that fact. Will Omicron—could it change that?

PM: We haven't changed any of those decisions. And I think it would be too early to do that or to rule in or out any further future possible decisions. We are going to use the research and evidence that sits in front of us when we make any substantial decisions like that, but none have been changed to date.

Media: But is that decision set in stone, or will Omicron naturally cause you to revisit?

PM: We haven't changed it. But, of course, if we're presented with evidence that suggests that presents a significant danger to the population for issues around vaccine efficacy and so on, of course we will look at that data and consider whether or not we need to change anything we're doing. We don't have that data yet, so it would be too early. The only other thing I would say is look, we've put in place measures to make sure that we are taking a cautious approach at our border. It is inevitable that there will be an Omicron case at our border—that it inevitable, in the same way that we had people come into MIQ with Delta. What's key for us is to continue to work hard to manage that at our border rather than in our community.

Media: Does that eat into your summer holidays, needing Cabinet to sit or Cabinet can manage to sit all through that?

PM: No, no. So what we'll—because, of course, you know, it won't be unexpected. I don't think any of us would be surprised if we had a case in our MIQ, given what we're seeing happen internationally. What we're making sure is that we've already pre-emptively considered any protocols that we may or may not need, should that occur over the coming weeks, because it is a when not an if. But, of course, Ministers remain available all the way through the summer period as well.

Media: On the sort of notion of suggestion or commentary that New Zealanders should maybe not travel for the summer holidays to reduce the risk of COVID spreading, what's your view on that? Is that necessary or excessive?

PM: So we have built our arrangements: our COVID protection framework, the requirements of all Aucklanders—those are the protections we've put in place so that we can enable safe movement. So we are not asking people to stay home. We're instead asking them to follow the rules wherever they are in the country. So if you're an Aucklander, and you're double-vaccinated, then you're able to move; if you haven't been, you need to be

tested. If you don't want to do either of those things, then of course we would ask you stay where you are. For the rest of the country, of course, we ask people to follow the COVID protection framework. If you're in a red area, make sure you follow those guidelines. They've all been set to ensure that despite there's movement around the country, we're doing that as safely as we can.

Media: Can I ask the same to Dr Bloomfield? I mean, would there be any public health benefit to people staying home and not going on holiday, for instance, you know—particularly people who live in Auckland, for instance, and maybe wanting to travel to areas that are less vaccinated?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: The reason we've put so much effort into our vaccination programme and got our rates up so high, particularly in Auckland, is to help support getting back to normal and allowing people to travel around again. In addition, there's of course the safeguard of requiring a test of people who are unvaccinated when they leave Auckland. Likewise, the protection framework puts in a range of measures in any part of the country to limit the activities that unvaccinated people can undertake, particularly higher risk settings. So the whole purpose of it is to enable people to move around safely.

Media: So would you disagree with those people who are saying that—who say that people shouldn't travel for the holidays?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: More important is that people who are unwell don't travel and in fact that they stay home and get a test and do all the things we've done right through this pandemic. It's not about travel per se; it's about what people do if they either have symptoms or have been a contact or are a case. That's where we need to restrict movement and that is no different from right through the pandemic.

PM: That's true and that's no different regardless of whether you're in Auckland or in any other part of the country.

Media: Thanks. And just quickly, on electoral law reform, the Ministry of Justice has put out its consultation document on transparency around political donations, and I just would like to know if the Government and/or the Labour Party would support a ban on anonymous donations outright and the opening of parties' annual financial reports to the public as—

PM: Yeah, and so look, this is where I think we're putting out a range of questions to the public around what's going to continue to increase public confidence, and so whilst we haven't taken a final position on those issues, we're genuinely interested in what we can do to really shore up people's trust in their democracy. So I think we're very keen to go through that process and hear from the public on that.

Media: Do you think it would be pragmatic to entirely ban anonymous donations?

PM: Oh look, I don't see why it wouldn't be pragmatic. I guess, you know, that would be able to be implemented. I guess the question you're asking is it pragmatic from a political party's perspective. Is that the question?

Media: Yeah and, I mean, is there not a benefit to having anonymity for some, you know?

PM: Yeah, look, I mean, if your question is will there be some who choose not to donate if they lose their anonymity, I'm sure that would be the case—absolutely—but I think the question really here is allowing the public to have their say on their views.

Media: And would you want to see your party's annual returns made public every year?

PM: Oh well, of course there is a degree of transparency already around political parties' returns. The question is the degree of expansion around that. Again, it's in everyone's interest to ensure that people trust in their democracies and, yes, we have a job to be able to go out and campaign and communicate with voters, and that, traditionally in New Zealand, has required every party to rely on political donations. But what we all are weighing up is making sure that through that process, we don't lose people's trust and support in the system that we're all a part of.

Media: Some aren't weighing it up. The ACT Party says that you're just doing this in order to stop parties like themselves or—you know, stop the Opposition basically from incurring as much donations.

PM: Obviously, that's not the case, because we all operate on party donations. We all do. It's the nature of our system, so I think we've all got the same issues at stake. But equally, I would have thought that we all have the same interest in ensuring that people have trust and confidence in it too. Yeah, I did say I'd come back to Amelia and then I'll come over on this side too.

Media: Dr Bloomfield, just for the layman, can you please just give detail on how these antiviral treatments work? So you start noticing the symptoms, you get tested, and then are you able to go to a pharmacy and pick them up? You can just take them at home—sort of—

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Well, the first thing is just to reiterate that Friday we're going to do a full briefing with the people who know more about these things than I do; so that's the first thing. The second thing—I think the thing that is particularly helpful for this new Pfizer medication, and just remembering they only published the first results—or they haven't even published them in a journal—a month ago. So this is very early for us to be able to secure the supply of this drug.

The important thing here is that it can be taken in the community because it's a tablet rather than the other anti-virals, which require hospitalisation, and it's particularly useful for people who are at high risk but are not requiring hospitalisation, and especially if it's used early. All the issues around who would provide it, how it would be supplied are still to be worked through. Obviously it needs to go through the Medsafe process and then we need to get the supply here, I'm sure. But we'll work out all those sorts of details. The key thing here is that it's another option for helping prevent people getting really unwell or dying, but, at the moment, the option that is of course the best one and is available to everybody is vaccination.

Media: And it would be specifically for the higher risk people who would get it?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: That's the group that it's been trialled on, and, yes, it's people at higher risk of hospitalisation or death, but who are not necessarily requiring hospital care. So it prevents the illness getting worse.

Media: And, Prime Minister, just on the travel for summer plans, is it not a "Don't travel at all"—it's perhaps a "Don't travel to certain places"? Like, we've seen the Maitai Bay campsite being closed because the iwi are so concerned about the low vaccination rates and they just want to snip the corner of that. Is it perhaps, reconsider—

PM: No, it's just as I said. We've factored all of that in. So, you know, if we do have members of community who are concerned about the low vaccination rates in their community, that is where we've said, well, OK, that area is in red; that means there are extra layers of protection where the highest risk is, of course, unvaccinated people, large gatherings, and so on. And that prevents that kind of activity, which of course we would all be concerned about. But keep in mind, most have concerns around, for instance, the greater movement of Aucklanders. They are amongst our highest vaccinated group now. We've been very careful to make sure that we ease carefully with high vaccination rates but also with that extra layer of protection through the COVID protection framework.

Media: Thank you. Sorry, you could have already mentioned this, but how is that the only [*Inaudible*] monitoring fraudulent vaccine pass use?

PM: So, of course, the checks that are available are twofold. The two issues you want to protect against is (a) that you've a pass that just is fake, and that's where the verification app allows through QR scanning to ensure that it is a legitimate pass. The second issue is if someone uses a legitimate pass but it's not theirs, and that's where at any point some venues may well use photo ID, particularly if they're already using photo ID because of the nature of their business. I think the fact that you at any point could be asked for either is an extra

mechanism. Some countries do neither and have continued to successfully operate vaccine passes. We've got that extra check in there.

Media: So if a person, sort of, turned up at a bar and was turned away for having a fake pass or had someone else's pass, is that logged anywhere?

PM: So, look, we have the ability, if there is an issue and the person was still on premise and we're contacted and able to issue, then we do have the ability to issue fines, because, of course, you can be penalised for trying to use a pass in that way. I would have to ask our technical team whether or not, if something scans up as a red, whether or not there's any automatic enforcement around that.

Media: If there are any repeat offenders or, like, a certain pass that has happened—

PM: Yeah, because we have heard that, obviously—I've heard reports of a couple of people being turned away at different venues. But I think what we have to keep in mind is that, for the most part, people who are not vaccinated won't try, for the most part.

Media: Two, in terms of the very high risk countries, are you adding more of the countries with Omicron into that? So, for example, Norway; and, if not, why are the nine African countries still in it?

PM: So we added those countries on the basis of public health advice. We are expecting to receive renewed public health advice on Omicron, I believe, this week. And if any further recommendations are made, then Cabinet Ministers will consider that. But we make all of those decisions based on the public health assessment. One thing we will keep in mind, of course, will be prevalence, and just the number of cases. Even if you're not necessarily seeing those reported in-country, you can still see countries of destinations still reporting the likely link between the northern African countries that we've already designated.

Media: Secondly, there's some confusion among local businesses about the rules for swimming pools, under the traffic light system. The advice you've given still says "Swimming pools TBC".

PM: Oh, that shouldn't be the case. I can make sure that we clarify that. My recollection is they're all counted under public facilities.

Media: Because some councils at the moment have them shut and others have them open because they don't know.

PM: I'll make sure that that's clarified if that's in a public space. Nothing should be TBC now.

Media: You mentioned that [*Inaudible*] days on compliance for checking vaccine passes. There seems to have been mixed reports over the weekend. So how is the Government in a more cohesive way monitoring the compliance and how low would compliance have to be before you started to do spot checks or—?

PM: I think we need to keep it in proportion. I mean, from the reports that we've seen through the police, from the reports we've seen from those businesses operating, I don't believe it's fair to say that this is a large-scale issue. That's the first thing. The second thing, of course, is that we want to make sure that we maintain a sense of confidence in the system. So that's why we're thinking about ways we can allow people if they have concerns over whether or not the system has been utilised as it's intended, we have an outlet for that that's pitched at the right level so we don't, for instance, necessarily burden the wrong enforcement agencies with those queries. We do have a portal as it happens at the moment where queries like that or issues like that are then flicked off to either Worksafe, the police, or others as required. But, again, as I say, there's nothing to suggest this is a widespread issue and I remember being asked the same thing over scanning, and, of course, when we put in those scanning requirements, actually people's compliance with that has been solid.

Media: Yeah, it happened to me twice over the weekend but I don't understand how—

PM: What happened to you twice?

Media: Where I walked into places and wasn't checked.

PM: OK, so this is where we want to make sure that people are checking. They were hospitality venues? I don't mean to pry into your weekend but we would have an expectation, of course, that if you enter into a hospitality venue, even if it's not at the door, in the course of your meal or service there that you are asked.

Media: But what I'm trying to understand is how is the Government going to check? Are there going to be mystery shoppers?

PM: So, as I said, we have had compliance checks up in those areas, particularly in Auckland. The police have been undertaking compliance checks. Worksafe also have a role to play. But we also need to be able to respond to people when they raise concerns, as you have.

Media: Just on the broadcasting for double vaccination, you mentioned Auckland and the rest of the country. What are the forecast double vaccination rates for Māori and Pasifika, and in particular those DHB areas such as Northland, Tai Rāwhiti, Whanganui?

PM: So we're already over 90 percent first dose for Pacific. We're at 84 percent first dose for Māori. We've reached 90 percent first dose in Auckland DHBs, I believe, but I'll leave it to Dr Bloomfield to provide a further breakdown. You may not have that data, though, broken down, do you?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: No. Well, two things around the forecasting. I don't have it broken down by ethnicity. We just have it for the whole population, as the PM said. So at the moment, Pasifika 92 percent nationwide first dose, 84 percent second dose and climbing; Māori 84 percent and 72 percent, and Māori is the fastest growing, which is good. In terms of DHBs, the two that will take the longest to get there will be Northland and Tai Rāwhiti, but they continue to make progress. The key thing is that it is still going up nationwide, and particularly those rates for Māori.

PM: Tai Rāwhiti's under a thousand now, as well. Lakes have been chugging along too, but there's quite a distance between those DHBs and Northland still.

Media: Just finally on the decision about whether to take Auckland down from red to orange, is it possible that Cabinet could decide that next Monday or is it something like the green thing has been ruled out—

PM: No, we haven't ruled anything further out, other than some of those that I've already shared with you. So our decisions, we'll assess based on the public health advice that we receive.

Media: What's your feeling about the health—

PM: Actually, I do place a lot of weight on the public health advice, and, of course, we will be cautious, as we have been to date. I will wait, though, with an open mind on the advice that we receive.

Media: Prime Minister, just in terms of your upcoming nuptials over the summer—

PM: A change in tack.

Media: Just a touch. How does the change in the traffic light system—how will it affect that?

PM: I'm reluctant, really, from the podium to discuss it because these are weighty decisions that are about Aotearoa, not about my personal circumstances and what comes first is the public health decisions—nothing else.

Media: Prime Minister, Angela Merkel leaves office this week after 16 years running Germany. Do you have any thoughts about her legacy and her leadership style and how she's sort of remade Europe?

PM: I actually had the opportunity to share a few thoughts on this. On occasion over the last few weeks there's been some media outlets that have sought views within Europe and, of course, had the opportunity with the panel that she was a part of from APEC to share a personal reflection with her directly, which I was really pleased to have that opportunity because in my mind she's had a profound effect on politics globally, because of the role she's played within the EU, but she's also, I think—she had a real effect on me personally as well. My visit to Germany was quite early on in my role as Prime Minister. And to meet with a leader who took such an interest in our part of the world, but also who genuinely wanted to hear the perspective of someone from this part of the world in, as I say, a quite genuine way, had a real impact lasting effect on me. Just again, it was a reminder to me that no matter where we are, no matter the size of our country or the size of our economy, we all have a perspective that is useful if we want to be politicians that are empathetic, that are inquisitive, that want to continually learn from others. And to have someone of that stature who's been around for that long still so interested in learning new things I think speaks to why she was such an exceptional person.

Media: Do you aspire to her longevity?

PM: Ha, ha! Well, one of the questions I asked her was: "That's a really long time, aren't you exhausted?" One of her reflections was how much politics and the political cycle has changed over those years, and I think it has, in the same ways it's changed for journalists—you know, the cycle is so fast and rapid and very little room for error. I think it's a different environment, and if you've been in that long, you've seen that massive shift.

OK, I might take a last question from anyone if there is one. I bored you to tears with my reckons! Thank you everyone.

conclusion of press conference