



Proactive Release

The following items have been proactively released by the Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister:

Decision paper: COVID-19 Weekly Monitoring Report

Minute of Decision: COVID-19 Weekly Monitoring Report

Some parts of this information release would not be appropriate to release and, if requested, would be withheld under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Where this is the case, the relevant section of the Act that would apply has been identified. Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

Key to redaction code:

- 9(2)(a), to protect the privacy of individuals

Decision paper

COVID-19 WEEKLY MONITORING REPORT

To: COVID-19 Ministerial Group			
Date	15/04/2020	From	National Crisis Management Centre

Purpose

To provide an initial version of the weekly monitoring report for discussion by the COVID-19 Ministerial Group each Friday beginning on 24 April 2020.

Recommendations

It is recommended that COVID-19 Ministers:

- note** that on Thursday 9 April the COVID-19 Ministerial Group directed AOG officials to develop a set of measures and regular reporting that will inform future decisions on changing Alert Levels or the overall strategy and to report them regularly [COVID 19 Ministers 9/04/2020 decision];
- note** the attached initial weekly monitoring report, which aims to synthesise the best available evidence from across government, to be updated for discussion by Ministers each Friday;
- agree** that the indicators and insights in the attached initial monitoring report are the initial set that Ministers would like to see updated weekly, to be added to or adapted as required reflecting the phase in the development of COVID-19;
- note** that the next full report will be prepared for Friday 24 April, and that all-of-government officials will work with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to provide any specific updates that are required sooner.

Contact for telephone discussion if required:

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COVID-19 WEEKLY MONITORING REPORT

Purpose

1. This paper provides an initial version of the weekly monitoring report for discussion by the COVID-19 Ministerial Group each Friday beginning on 24 April 2020.

Background

2. On Thursday 9 April, the COVID-19 Ministerial Group directed all-of-government (AOG) officials to develop a set of measures and regular reporting that will inform future decisions on changing Alert Levels or the overall strategy and to report them regularly [COVID 19 Ministers 9/04/2020 decision].
3. This paper provides an initial weekly monitoring report. It will COVID Ministers a view of the relevant indicators so that Ministers can regularly discuss alert levels and other strategic settings based on the best available evidence.
4. In addition, there will be a formal check in on the overall response strategy at least monthly. This will draw on the measures in the weekly monitoring report, alongside other advice and information. The first such assessment will be at Cabinet on 20 April.

Purpose of the COVID-19 Weekly Monitoring Report

5. The report provides:
 - a) A consistent set of measures most relevant to decisions around Alert Levels, or the overall strategy. These will be primarily derived from other subject-specific daily and weekly dashboards that Ministers receive, including health, economic and social dashboards.
 - b) Analysis and advice on those measures, including:
 - i) how New Zealand is tracking against the overall strategy;
 - ii) New Zealand's position in respect of criteria for changes to alert levels or other strategic settings; and
 - iii) areas of vulnerability, including risks to health, compliance and social licence, the economy and social impacts.
6. This report was developed in collaboration across National Crisis Management Centre (NCMC) functions and government agencies.
7. Together with a report being prepared by the Ministry of Health, which will include the very latest public health data, this initial report is focussed on measures relating to the principal matters that need to be taken into consideration in determining whether the government can step down from Alert Level 4 in all or part of New Zealand. As set out in the decision by COVID Ministers on 9 April, these include evidence and data relating to:
 - a) cases, tests and sources of transmission that aims to address whether there is undetected community transmission;

- b) whether there is sufficient capacity and capability in the testing and contact tracing, with surge capacity available in the case of an outbreak;
 - c) whether the self-isolation, quarantine and border measures are sufficiently robust and adhered to;
 - d) whether there is capacity in the health system more generally, including the workforce and ICU capacity (plus the availability of PPE for those for whom it is recommended);
 - e) the effects of the measures on economy and society more broadly;
 - f) public attitudes towards the measures and the extent to which people and businesses understand, accept and abide by them.
8. The approach taken to how future decisions about changes to alert levels should reflect the broader approach taken to decision-making to date. That is, a risk-based approach, which applies judgement looking across a range of factors – health outcomes, health system preparedness, economic and social impacts. This approach is more appropriate to a complex situation such as COVID-19 than alternatives, such as quantitative cost-benefit analysis. A cost-benefit style approach may not fully capture the dynamic nature of the information and choices available at particular points in time. For instance, some options will become unavailable (such as 'going back' to get health benefits, if economic benefits have been prioritised).
9. A further key consideration not covered in these reports, but considered by Cabinet Business Committee on 15 April, is the ability to operationalise the restrictions, including satisfactory detailed implementation planning by the AOG team and government agencies. These matters are covered in separate reports to Ministers.
10. The subsequent iterations of the weekly monitoring report will include new measures as they are developed and as data becomes available. The measures will also be adapted to reflect the phase in the development of COVID-19 and upcoming strategic questions.
11. This report focuses on the national situation. Officials have also provided advice on the potential of de-escalating on a regional basis. At this stage, regional equivalents of the indicators in this report are patchy, although data is available sub-regionally for the crucial health domains (COVID-19 in New Zealand and health system preparedness) and some economic aspects. It is likely that assessments of the remaining domains at a regional level will have to rely on qualitative insights rather than data.

Key insights from the COVID-19 Weekly Monitoring Report

12. The current strategy is to eliminate the virus from New Zealand. This requires that we keep it out of the country with border restrictions and stamp it out wherever it occurs, minimise its spread and severity with systematic public health measures (testing, contact tracing, isolation and surveillance) supplemented by population-wide behaviour changes and social restrictions.

COVID-19 cases and confidence in testing and sources of transmission

13. New case numbers appear to have flattened out over the past week. The time taken for cases transmitted within New Zealand to double has slowed down. If there was uncontrolled spread we would expect to see a doubling approximately every three days.
14. We have relatively few serious cases, and relatively low incidence of cases amongst the particularly vulnerable elderly population. Analysis suggests that 2-3 weeks ago, there was undetected community transmission, but we did not know how widespread this was.
15. Our high number of tests (see page on testing, tracing and health system capacity) and low proportion of positive tests, together with the low number of hospital presentations, increasingly suggests that there is not widespread community transmission of the virus at this time in the areas where we have data, and that we have not had a large number of cases that have not been tested. However, the Ministry of Health is now undertaking targeted over-sampling in certain areas (both in known hotspots and areas that have tested fewest people) to add further assurance to our data on cases ahead of a decision on whether to extend or reduce Alert Level 4.
16. There are a number of gaps in the data we have used to prepare the report. In particular, a significant number of cases have missing information and some others have been under investigation for a long time. This somewhat reduces our confidence in the data on cases of community transmission.

Capacity and capability in the testing and contact tracing

17. Our testing capacity is now over 6,000 symptomatic cases per day. As at 15 April, complete test stock on hand in labs is 71,693, equating to approximately 26 days' supply at current (7 day average) levels. We have moderate confidence in our testing regime. National testing rates and capacity are good, but some regions and populations may be somewhat under-represented. The average speed of the process needs to improve.
18. Our contact tracing capacity has been sharply increased to around 1,000 contacts per day currently. The contact tracing centre is starting to see a reduction in the number of close contacts (now to 2–3 close contacts per person). This is likely due to the lockdown, which makes close contact tracing simpler. Additional pressures on capacity associated with greater personal movement at Level 3 (and in time, Level 2) will need to be estimated and planned for in order to provide assurance to move between Levels.
19. In addition to capacity, timeliness measures are critical to understanding the performance of the testing and contact tracing systems. The Ministry of Health will very soon have data on the time between symptom onset and self-isolation, and symptom onset and a test result. This data will give us a much better insight into how effective our test-trace-isolate response will be at controlling any new community transmission or outbreaks.

Adherence to self-isolation, quarantine and border measures

20. We have recently strengthened measures at the border to ensure all arrivals are quarantined or placed in managed isolation for two weeks. The border is now closed to all but returning New Zealanders, with minor and managed exceptions.
21. Any other suspected and confirmed COVID-19 cases, as well as close contacts of confirmed cases, are meant to self-isolate. However, we currently have little understanding of compliance with that self-isolation.

General health system capacity

22. Our health system is not currently under significant strain due to cases of COVID-19. Public hospitals report only limited admissions or use of ICU beds due to COVID-19, suggesting there remains headroom to deal with a potential surge in cases. However, there are wider issues affecting the financial sustainability of primary and community-based services, in particular for those areas which have been required to move away from face-to-face models of care or which have constrained access (and, therefore, reduced payments which are based on activity). Moreover, there is a substantial risk that the effect of Alert Level 4 has been to create latent demand for health services which may translate into actual demand at a lower Alert Level (e.g. elective surgery or services which have been deliberately postponed to manage pressures; and individual choices of patients to delay appointments owing to restrictions on movement). The Ministry of Health is seeking to further model these wider capacity issues and incorporate regular monitoring on impact into health system dashboards.

Economic impacts of measures

23. Latest data confirm a very large fall in a range of economic activity measures. Road and airport traffic, energy usage and discretionary retail spending are all well down, and consumer and business sentiment continue to decline. Businesses across every sector have slashed expectations to employ and invest. Large numbers of businesses have applied for the wage subsidies, and Jobseeker benefit numbers have sharply increased. As global and domestic economic conditions have weakened, the New Zealand dollar exchange rate has fallen, but recently stabilised.
24. How the economy performs from here will depend on how movement restrictions evolve, global demand conditions and household and firm behaviour under different alert level settings. China is slowly recovering, which is promising for the NZ primary sector in particular, but weaker export demand and softer prices remain likely in the short term.
25. Treasury's modelling of economic scenarios shows potential falls in annual GDP for the year to March 2021 from 13% in the least restrictive scenarios considered (a relatively short period at Alert Levels 3 or 4), to closer to one third in a scenario that involves tight restrictions throughout the year. Peaks in the unemployment rate vary from around 13% to 26%.

Social impacts and resilience

26. There is clear evidence of significant impacts on New Zealander's material wellbeing – including increased demand for special needs grants, calls to financial crisis support lines, and loss of income since the start of level four restrictions.
27. The number of police family harm investigations appears to have returned to pre-lockdown levels, after a marked increase during week one of lockdown. Numbers are being closely monitored as there is widespread concern about level four restrictions creating conditions that

make family violence more likely (e.g. victims constantly being in the same space as abusers, increased alcohol consumption, financial stress, limited space for men with anger management plans to de-escalate) and limited opportunities to report harm.

28. Survey data suggests that, at a population level, there is no evidence of increasing rates of depression and anxiety symptoms between the first and second weeks of lockdown. This warrants ongoing monitoring given international evidence that self-isolation (especially if prolonged) is associated with increased psychological distress.
29. Key issues raised by selected groups at risk include:

- a) Disabled people and older people are reporting concerns about limited access to information, disruption to services (including disruption due to limited access to PPE for those providing personal care) and concerns about accessing food and other vital supplies.

For disabled people, the need for accessible formats such as easy read translations, sign language translations and formats for blind and low vision is an additional barrier to information. A lack of access to respite support for carers of older people, and uncertainty about recent changes to in-home supports, may make it harder for some older people to live at home and this may increase demand for aged care facilities.

- b) Māori and Pacific communities report pre-existing concerns made worse by the COVID-19 situation, including poverty, disruption to seasonal employment, digital exclusion, and increased family violence under Alert Level 4 restrictions. There are also reports of a reluctance to seek testing for COVID-19 owing to fears about missing work while self-isolating. Pacific people, like other migrant communities, are additionally disadvantaged by language needs, which may limit their understanding of the situation and their ability to seek support.

Public attitudes towards the measures and the extent to which people and businesses understand, accept and abide by them

30. Independent surveys suggest there is broad buy-in to the Government's response and strong trust in Government. A significant proportion of people think lockdown should be extended. The majority consider the measures imposed are about right but about a third think they do not go far enough. This may indicate some appetite for measures to be strengthened if necessary.
31. People generally appear to be complying with Level 4 restrictions. Measures of activity (light vehicle traffic volumes, people movements as indicated by mobile phone location data) are all greatly down from the pre-lockdown period and self-reported compliance is high.
32. However, results from polling combined with a large number of online breach reports suggest concern in the community about whether others are adequately complying. This has the potential to erode confidence in Alert Level 4 restrictions and compliance over time.
33. There is limited information about business plans and processes for essential workers, which is a key area of transmission risk. There are an estimated 529,000 essential workers at physical workplaces under Alert Level 4, and would be an estimated 1.1 million workers at physical workplaces under Alert Level 3. MPI has been conducting onsite visits to check that primary sector businesses have robust plans and processes in place. As of 9 April MPI had completed 2,730 on-site verification visits and 2,401 remote verifications, resulting in 9

warning notices. We do not have data on whether other essential workplaces have robust plans and processes in place.

Attachments:	
Attachment A:	COVID-19 Weekly Monitoring Report as at 4pm Wednesday 15 April 2020

Ministry of Health comment

34. The Ministry of Health supports the analysis based on the monitoring report. In addition, the Ministry is working to develop a more detailed health system dashboard that will present further data on system capacity and preparedness, and align with the criteria used to inform decisions on Alert Levels.

Next Steps

35. The next full report will be prepared for Friday 24 April. AOG officials will work with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to provide any specific updates that are required sooner.

Consultation

36. The Ministry of Health, Treasury, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment and the Ministry of Social Development were consulted on this paper. The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet was informed.
37. The weekly monitoring report was developed in collaboration across NCMC functions and government agencies.

Communications

38. No publicity on the weekly monitoring report is envisaged.

Proactively Released



Meeting of the COVID-19 Ministerial Group

Minute of Decision

This document contains information for the New Zealand Cabinet. It must be treated in confidence and handled in accordance with any security classification, or other endorsement. The information can only be released, including under the Official Information Act 1982, by persons with the appropriate authority.

COVID-19 Weekly Monitoring Report

The group of Ministers with Power to Act on COVID-19 matters [CAB-20-MIN-0130] convened on 23 April 2020 at 10.30am, and in accordance with their Power to Act:

- 1 **noted** that on 9 April 2020, the COVID-19 Ministerial Group directed All-of-Government officials to develop a set of measures and regular reporting that will inform future decisions on changing Alert Levels or the overall strategy, and to report them regularly;
- 2 **noted** the weekly monitoring report as at 22 April 2020, which provides information about COVID-19 in New Zealand and health system capacity alongside evidence of the effects of the restrictions on the economy and society more broadly, and public attitudes towards, and compliance with, the restrictions.

Rachel Hayward
for Secretary of the Cabinet

Distribution:

The Cabinet
Hon James Shaw

Copied to officials via email