



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
HON MARK BROWN
GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS

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Kia Orana,

You will have seen in recent days in the news that New Zealand has ordered 10-million doses of the Pfizer vaccine that combats COVID-19. That's enough to vaccinate all New Zealanders. It's good news for them and it's also very good news for us too; because, as well as providing two jabs for each of the team of 5-million who want the vaccine, New Zealand will be providing vaccine cover for us here in the Cook Islands too.

That's a huge contribution from New Zealand not just from a health point of view for our people, but with immunisation we and our economy have a big chance to start to get back to some form of normality. So we're very grateful for that.

The Pfizer vaccine is one of the top four in the world. It has been trialed, thoroughly tested, and reviewed by countries like America, Britain, Australia and New Zealand and the World Health Organisation (WHO), before being approved for general use.

It has a success rate of 95% and is administered in two jabs in the upper arm three weeks apart. The full immunity afforded by the vaccine kicks in a week after the second injection.

New Zealand already has a limited supply of the vaccine which is being given in the first instance to frontline medical and border workers.

We are working very closely with New Zealand to ensure the speedy procurement of supplies for our people. While we don't yet know exactly when our supplies will arrive, we do have a comprehensive plan for it's distribution and for vaccinating our people; both here in Rarotonga and in the Pa Enea.

The plan is a whole of society one and involves not just government agencies and employees but many different branches of our society like the Puna.

The government is eager to vaccinate 100% of the eligible population to help prevent a nationwide outbreak of the coronavirus here but moreso to allow us to fast track the kick-start of our tourism industry. COVID-19 has had a devastating affect on our economy, bringing to a stand still our tourist industry which is responsible for 70% of the country's income – worth approximately \$370-million a year.

Like other countries when we do get the vaccine, we will begin by inoculating our frontline health care workers and border people first along with their households.

Our next priority will be our over 60s followed by our under 60s with chronic medical conditions and then the rest of the adult population.

The vaccine is being offered to people 16 years and over, its estimated there are 14 146 people in that category in our islands. There are 3 288 children under that age.

I note with interest comments by Dr Collin Tukuitonga – Associate Dean Pacific at the University of Auckland Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences – saying he believes there are good reasons for New Zealand to supply vaccines early to the so-called realm countries – like ourselves, Niue and Tokelau; especially the Cook Islands which relies so heavily on tourism – to allow us to quickly open up again for business. We certainly support this viewpoint.

I encourage everyone to attend the Te Marae Ora hosted vaccination meetings taking place this week. I know there are some in our country who are hesitant about receiving the vaccine, and some who are adamant they won't have it. I and my government are urging everybody able to receive the vaccine, to have it. It will save lives, maybe yours.

Already tens of millions of people have been inoculated with one or other of the several vaccines developed and approved for use around the world. In our region Fiji has received an early shipment and it intends to begin by vaccinating it's frontline workers.

So far with help from New Zealand, and with New Zealand and it's public health measures acting as a buffer for people entering our country; as well as being vigilant ourselves, we have managed to keep COVID-19 at bay. But as we have seen - even in New Zealand and Australia – this tricky virus manages to get around their measures.

Getting vaccinated provides another layer of protection, and we should seize the opportunity when it arrives. Ultimately it may also determine whether or not we are able to travel freely again.

Your government will keep you informed on when we will get vaccine supplies and how it will administered throughout the country.

Kia Manuia.

Hon Mark Brown
Prime Minister