



1 October 2021

Media statement from the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, Hon. Mark Brown

SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS MADE ON ALL FRONTS OF COVID-19 PLANNING

Plans have been put in place this week to move forward with the next stage of COVID-19 management in the Cook Islands, the Prime Minister Mark Brown said today.

After a busy week, with significant progress made on all fronts, Prime Minister Brown said he was pleased to provide an update, including:

- Repatriation flights - Pre-arrival plans and preparedness
- Managed Isolation Quarantine (MIQ) preparedness
- Vaccination rollouts for 12-15 years
- Economic Recovery Roadmap (Subsidies and Business Grants)

Repatriation flights

On Thursday next week, the first repatriation flight of stranded Cook Islanders departs from Christchurch for qualifying people currently sheltering in Alert Level 2 regions of New Zealand. They will arrive in Rarotonga on Wednesday 6 October, where they will enter into at least seven days of Managed Isolation Quarantine (MIQ) at the Edgewater Resort. During this period they will need to clear day 0 and day 5 tests for COVID-19.

On Thursday 14 October, the second repatriation flight of qualifying people currently sheltering in the Auckland region at Alert Level 3 arrives in Rarotonga. This group will enter into at least 14 days of MIQ at the Edgewater Resort and will have additional COVID-19 testing.

Both groups will undergo a COVID-19 test 72 hours before departure, as well as a health screening test at the airport before boarding.

MIQ preparedness

This week, in preparation for the above arrivals, training of all MIQ workers has been completed, with Puna Security workers to follow early next week. Training has also been provided to the staff of essential businesses including CITC and Prime Foods and will continue for other businesses that will be classified as essential services under Alert Levels 3 or 4.

Stand-up preparation of the Edgewater Resort has also been completed and all key agencies attended a briefing this morning ahead of the repatriation flight from Christchurch next week. Pacific Medical Association has been engaged to undertake the exit health screenings at both Christchurch and Auckland airports.

Vaccination rollout for 12-15 years olds

Prime Minister Brown said while he was pleased that more than 96% of eligible Cook Islanders are already fully vaccinated, he would be more comfortable when children were also safe.

“Vaccinations are our armour to protect us from COVID-19,” said Prime Minister Brown. “We know the vaccine is just as safe for younger people and that it is more than 95% effective in preventing COVID-19 infections.”

Last night, vaccination awareness meetings in Rarotonga were completed for children aged 12-15 years and their parents and guardians, with further opportunities available from Monday to Wednesday next week if requested by a school.

The vaccination rollout for children aged 12-15 years will start next week on Friday 8 October from 8am-7pm and will continue over the weekend - Saturday 9 October (8am – 4pm) and Sunday 10 October (1pm – 4pm).

The same process is being used as for the previous vaccination rollout. This means that people can drive to the Social Centre for pre-registration and are then taken by bus to the hospital. Baby care services will be available at the hospital.

On Aitutaki, a vaccination consultation meeting is scheduled for Monday 11 October at 4.30pm at the Araura College hall, with vaccinations starting the next day.

Economic Recovery Roadmap funds still available

Prime Minister Brown said he was optimistic that the current border closures would be for a shorter period than last year.

“We have \$15m budgeted contingency available for business support which has largely been spent between August and the end of October. The support has focused on wage subsidies, sole trader grants, and one round of business grants.

“If the border closure extends past 1 November we will then need to dip into the money available through our Economic Recovery Roadmap budgeted funds. We believe we have sufficient money available for further support that could take us through to the end of February if necessary.”

Cash Management Strategy

The Prime Minister said a cash management strategy was recently developed which ensures the Government has three months or \$60M cash available at any point in time to meet all of the Cook Islands Government’s outgoings.

“We have also produced a survival strategy which allows a minimum amount of cash available to one month or \$20M. Government has also negotiated with the Asian Development Bank an emergency fund of \$55M which can be accessed if it is triggered by a lack of tourists.”

Reassurance

The Prime Minister said he hoped all Cook Islanders would be reassured by today’s update about the many plans, preparations and actions being undertaken to ensure that not only is the health and safety of our people well protected - but that there are financial and economic protections in place too.

“Putting the health and safety of our people first by doing everything we possibly can to keep our nation COVID-free, must continue to be our top priority, whatever the cost,” he said.

General Reminder

Prime Minister Brown reminded people to keep up with frequent hand washing, mask-wearing and physical distancing and to get vaccinated, if they had not already done so.

“To our people in New Zealand waiting to return, please be vigilant and avoid exposure while you wait for your departure. Please stay isolated as much as you can prior to departure, we are relying on you at this time to do the right thing. I am sure you and you loved ones here at home are glad we now have a date for your return and we look forward to your arrival.”

People are also advised to regularly check official communications for both the Cook Islands and New Zealand at their websites, which are: www.covid19.gov.ck and www.covid19.govt.nz

[Ends]

For media enquiries, contact Karla Eggelton: QFT-A Comms Coordinator
karla.eggelton@cookislands.gov.ck