



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

Covid-19 Policy Update
22 April 2022

A short time ago, Prime Minister Mark Brown addressed the nation. Here is his address:

Kia orana tatou katoatoa,

I wanted to address you today on the eve of another long weekend, one in which we will remember ANZAC day on Monday.

Let us not forget that our own Cook Islands young men were and still are part of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps soldiers, who fought and died for their countries on the anniversary of the Gallipoli campaign of the First World War.

This weekend we remember the almost 500 men from our islands who volunteered to serve with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force's Māori Pioneer Battalion during World War I – some of whom made the ultimate sacrifice, losing their lives either on the battlefield or later from war-related illness.

So let us all pay tribute to all our Cook Islanders who have served or are currently serving in the various forces around the world. Your country is very proud of you and your efforts.

Back home, I want to say again, how proud I am of the way our country and our people have come together to confront our battle against this Covid Pandemic. We have not underestimated the struggle many have faced, but we have not been alone in this struggle, we have faced them together as a nation, a nation I am very proud to lead.

Apart from a sharp increase in cases after the weekend, a weekend during which testing numbers were light, we are seeing our daily new case numbers decreasing on Rarotonga, with 72 new cases reported in the 24 hours to 8am this morning. This brings the total number of cases on Rarotonga to 4264, 3832 of these cases have recovered and there is currently 432 active cases on Rarotonga.

Aitutaki recorded 46 new cases in the 24 hours to 8am this morning, bringing their total to 331 cases of which 130 have recovered and 201 are currently active.

The three cases that were reported on Tongareva last week have all recovered and I'm pleased to advise that almost all that island has been tested with no new cases discovered. This means the outbreak there has been contained, which will be a huge relief to all who live there and their relations abroad.

Mauke currently has 3 active cases, all who have been in isolation since their arrival on island.

In summary, the Cook Islands has so far had a total of 4609 cases, 3973 have recovered and we have 636 active cases as of this morning.

As a result of our improving situation on Rarotonga and Aitutaki we have a number of changes.

From 1 May travel to Aitutaki will be unrestricted, meaning no one travelling there will be required to have a pre-departure RAT test. It also means that unvaccinated people will be able to travel to Aitutaki.

Regarding travel to the remainder of the Pa Enea.

Atiu has already reopened its domestic border since 18 April. From 25 April onwards, Manihiki, Rakahanga, and Penrhyn will open their borders, and this will be followed by reopening on Mangaia, Mitiaro and Mauke on 1 May.

RAT tests will still be a pre-departure requirement for travel to the remainder of the Pa Enea. However, travelers will not be required to be vaccinated nor will they need to have been in Rarotonga or Aitutaki for 7 days before travelling to the Pa Enea. The dates these changes take effect on individual islands is still being worked through and you will be advised as soon as opening dates are confirmed.

Our TMO team along with our MPs and Island Councils are leading the awareness programmes to our Pa Enea to reassure our people about what to expect when COVID arrives. We just need to look at Rarotonga with over 4,000 positive cases and nearly the same number that have recovered. COVID is nothing for us to fear because we have protected ourselves. And we are now seeing it is time to start relaxing some of our restrictions.

Our team is now looking very carefully at the application of the mask mandate with a view to relaxing mask wear and making it voluntary rather than compulsory.

Additionally, we will be removing on Rarotonga the restriction on all indoor settings just as we have for outdoor settings with no more limits applying. This will apply from next week.

Further I will be making announcements on reducing and removing the need to isolate for new positive cases in the coming weeks as our numbers decline even further. But for now, let us here on Rarotonga reassure our families in the Pa Enea that Omicron is not to be feared because we have prepared.

I would like to end by again referring to ANZAC day. The story of the Cook Islands in the First World War is a remarkable one.

One of the smallest territories in the British Empire, the Cook Islands responded immediately to the call for service and eventually sent five contingents to the war, totaling close to 500 men.

Remarkable too is the way we have come together these past 2 years and responded to the battle we are currently in. Side by side we are standing and working together for the love and safety of our people and our country. A country our young men left home all those many years ago to protect.

Auraka rava ratou kia akangaropoina ia – we will never forget them.

Hon Mark Brown
Prime Minister