

This Situation Report is jointly issued by PNG National Department of Health and World Health Organization once weekly. This Report is not comprehensive and covers information received as of reporting date.

Situation Summary and Highlights

- ❑ As of 28 February 2021 (12:00 pm), there have been 1316 COVID-19 cases and 13 COVID-19 deaths reported in Papua New Guinea. From the period of 22 to 28 February, there have been 260 new cases: 100 from West Sepik, 95 from the National Capital District, 43 from Western Province, 6 from East Sepik, 3 cases each from East New Britain, Central and Western Highlands, and 2 cases each from the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Southern Highlands, and West New Britain. **Over one-third (34%) of PNG's total reported COVID-19 cases to date were reported in February, highlighting the extent of the surge currently occurring across PNG.** The total number of provinces that have reported COVID-19 cases to date is seventeen.
- ❑ Daily surveillance updates are being received from less than half of the 22 provinces. These indicate that there has been an increase in the number of reported cases of suspected COVID-19, influenza-like illnesses (ILI), simple cough, and pneumonia cases reported in the last four weeks.
- ❑ There have been 47,278 RT-PCR tests and 6,157 Genexpert Tests conducted since the start of the pandemic.
- ❑ New epidemiological analyses have been undertaken to highlight the scale of the outbreaks that are currently occurring in several provinces. This includes more detailed investigations into recent testing rates by province, descriptions of the surges in five provinces, and epidemiological descriptions of NCD cases.
- ❑ A joint NDoH-WHO response team deployed to Vanimo, West Sepik Province to assist with the surge of cases occurring. They conducted training of surveillance staff, assisted with filling and collecting Case Investigation Forms (CIFs), and provided technical advice and support.
- ❑ The deployed team will continue on to East Sepik Province this week to provide further support and ensure outbreak preparations are in place, due to the high risk of further imported cases from neighbouring provinces.
- ❑ New Public Health Measures for the Autonomous Region of Bougainville were released on 27 February. The measures can be viewed at:

<https://www.abg.gov.pg/index.php/news/read/public-health-measures-no.-2-of-2021>

Table 1. COVID-19 IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA¹

	New Cases (22 to 28 February 2021)	Cumulative Total
National Capital District	95	492
Western	43	323
West New Britain	2	196
West Sepik	100	139
East New Britain	3	38
Madang	0	35
New Ireland	1	23
Central	3	14
Eastern Highlands	0	13
Western Highlands	3	13
Morobe	0	9
East Sepik	6	9
Enga	0	3
AROB	2	3
Southern Highlands	2	3
Milne Bay	0	2
Hela	0	1
TOTAL	260	1316

¹ As of 28/02/2021, 12:00 pm, PNG time

Table 2. COVID-19 GLOBAL AND REGIONAL UPDATE²

	Confirmed Cases	Deaths
Global	113 467 303	2 520 550
Western Pacific	1 620 580	29 006

² WHO COVID-19 Dashboard as of 28/02/2021, 5:31 pm CET



Summary of Activities and Upcoming Priorities

Surveillance:

- ❑ With an average of 37 cases each day for the past 7 days, the surveillance team has been working hard to capture all new case data coming in from the provinces. Support from the data entry team at CPHL has been critical in timely analysis and reporting of cases.
- ❑ The surveillance team also worked closely with NCD PHA to provide technical support and assistance for the surge response in NCD, including facilitating increased screening and swabbing at health facilities and liaising with the PHA to organise contact tracing for all new cases.
- ❑ This week the surveillance team will continue to monitor the situation unfolding across the country and prepare data in a timely and accessible manner to brief key people in the response and keep stakeholders informed. Additional analyses, both planned and ad hoc, will be undertaken.

Quarantine & Port of Entry:

- ❑ Persons in Quarantine (PUQ) numbers rose to above 750 this week after 2 charter flights landed from India and Malaysia, increasing numbers.
- ❑ NCD PHA has begun screening duties for the domestic terminal from 22 February.

Laboratory:

- ❑ Antigen Rapid Diagnostic Test (AgRDT) validation training has been completed and entry of data and analyses of test sensitivity and specificity is currently ongoing.
- ❑ The provincial sites that have been trained and are currently conducting AgRDT validation are: NCD, PMGH, Western Province, Morobe, East New Britain, and Western Highlands,
- ❑ There have been 47,278 PCR tests and 6,157 Genexpert Tests conducted in PNG since the start of the pandemic.
- ❑ This week CPHL will hold a stakeholder meeting on the review and update of the national reference laboratory management strategic implementation plan for strengthening laboratory system which is scheduled for March 4 2021.

Clinical Management and Infection Prevention and Control:

- ❑ The clinical management and Infection prevention and control team had a busy week in Vanimo supporting the outbreak response by providing technical expertise and training on IPC and clinical management.
- ❑ The WHO Clinical Management & IPC lead visited health clinics and hospitals in the NCD region. It was observed that health facility screening still requires correct implementation to ensure screening is done on everyone entering the health facility and based on case definition as screening is an essential strategy to help prevent transmission into the health facility.
- ❑ The WHO Clinical Management & PIC lead also visited Rita Flynn isolation facility and is working closely with the NCD PHA to re-establish the facility.

Risk Communication & Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs):

- ❑ Vaccine communication infographics have been completed, reviewed, endorsed and now out for public consumption.

- ❑ NCC RCCE team is currently supporting Madang and Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) RCCE lead on communication strategies and awareness. The first health care workers training in Madang conducted on the 17th February and follow up training will be provided by the RCCE team. The team are now assisting the ABG cluster lead in her awareness to the ABG house of representatives.

COVAX/Vaccine Planning & Introduction:

- ❑ Part B of the Vaccine Request form was signed and submitted to COVAX facility last week, fulfilling another prerequisite for the vaccine allocation to PNG.
- ❑ The NDoH Pharmaceutical Services Standards Branch (PSSB) has begun review of the information on the AstraZeneca vaccine as the initial step towards regulatory approval for PNG
- ❑ Microplanning will commence to develop the detailed vaccine deployment plans down to provincial and district levels.

Logistics and Supplies:

- ❑ The logistics team will focus this week on the continued monitoring and distribution of distributing Personal Protection Equipment and laboratory supplies to provinces that are experiences spikes in positive cases.

Transmission Assessment

There are currently surges occurring in several provinces across PNG, with major outbreaks in the National Capital District (NCD) Western Province, and West Sepik. These outbreaks include a large number of healthcare workers, as well as other key populations of concern, such as incarcerated people and people working in closed settings including mine sites. Large-scale population-level testing remains low across most of PNG, with few health facilities conducting routine screening, swabbing symptomatic patients, and reporting test results on a regular basis.

Currently Western Province, West Sepik, and NCD are in Stage 3, large-scale community transmission, with almost all infections locally acquired and not linked to specific groups or locations. Seventeen out of 22 provinces, including the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, have reported at least one COVID-19 case since March 2020. However, current testing rates and contact tracing data are inadequate to make more detailed sub-national transmission assessments within these provinces.

More information on the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office COVID-19 transmission stages can be found here: bit.ly/WPRODashboard

Epi Update COVID-19

Tests	Cases	Deaths
2442	260	3
NAT Tests past 7 days	New cases past 7 days	Deaths past 7 days
52360	1316	13
Cumulative NAT Tests	Cumulative Cases	Cumulative Deaths

0
Imported Cases in past 28 days
155
Cases in past 7 days with no link
8*
Active Clusters in the past 7 days

*Case investigation ongoing

Table 3 Number of GeneXpert and RT-PCR tests conducted* in PNG in February 2021, compared to monthly testing target, by province

Province	Feb 2021 tests	Monthly testing target	% of target completed
AROB	0	171	0%
Central	0	163	0%
East New Britain	215	192	112%
East Sepik	88	329	27%
Eastern Highlands	172	368	47%
Enga	38	246	15%
Gulf	12	97	12%
Hela	49	155	32%
Jiwaka	0	171	0%
Madang	363	369	98%
Manus	0	34	0%
Milne Bay	128	178	72%
Morobe	376	474	79%
NCD	316	230	137%
New Ireland	0	109	0%
Northern	0	121	0%
Simbu	0	194	0%
Southern Highlands	0	333	0%
West New Britain	1206	179	676%
West Sepik	187	162	115%
Western	35	153	23%
Western Highlands	214	227	94%
Total	3399	4656	73%

*Please note, this information is based on the test results received at the time of reporting. Some provinces may have conducted additional testing but have not shared their results with the National Control Centre.

Epidemiology

Figure 1. Epidemiological curve of COVID-19 cases in Papua New Guinea, 15 March 2020 to 28 February 2021

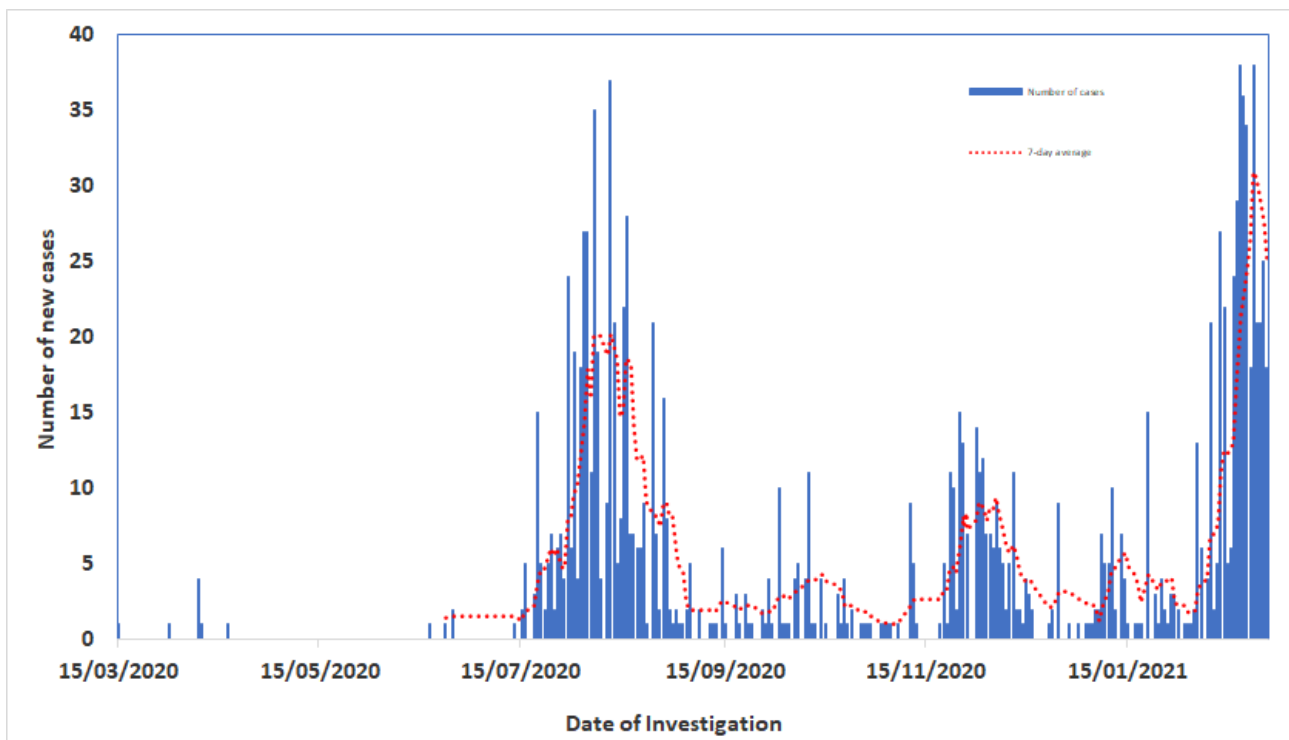
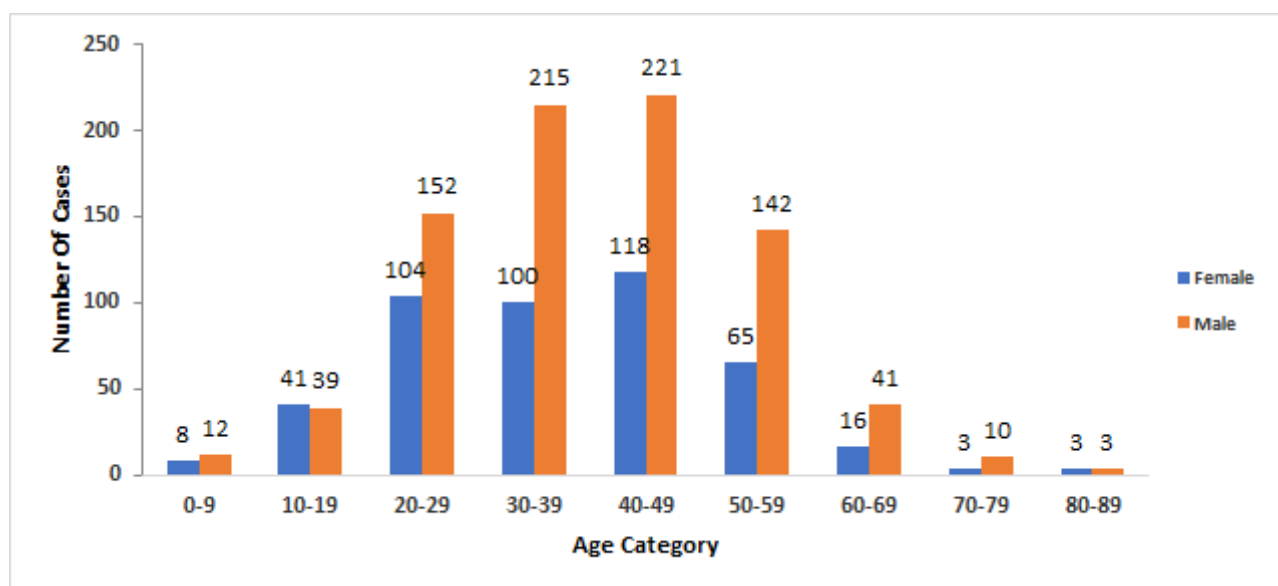


Figure 2. COVID-19 cases by age-group and sex in Papua New Guinea, 15 March 2020 to 28 February 2021



- For the period of 22 February to 28 February, the COVID-19 National Hotline received 2,878 calls. Of these, 46 (about 1.39%) were health-related calls. 36 of these were referred to Rapid Response Team/PHA. As of 28 February, the hotline had received a total of 173,155 calls. Of these, 5,172 (3%) were health-related calls. A total of 1,846 calls to date have been referred to Rapid Response Team/PHAs.

Table 4. Persons Screened by Point of Entry

Total Number of Travelers Screened before SOE (until 22 March 2020)	29,387	
Total Number of Travelers Screened during SOE (23 March – 16 June 2020)	3,788	
Total Number of Travelers Screened after SOE (17 June 2020 – 27 February 2021)	Air	15,455
	Sea	671
	Land	6
	Total	16,122

Strategic Approach

National and Provincial Public Health Response

- ☐ The Pandemic Response Coordination Group and the Health Operations Team continue to meet regularly at the National Control Centre.
- ☐ Focus continues to be on supporting PHAs with Surveillance, Clinical Management and Testing.

Outbreak response visit to Madang

- ☐ From 16 – 21 February a joint NDoH–WHO response team consisting of specialists in Provincial Coordination, Clinical Management and Infection Control, Risk Communication and Niupla Pasin were deployed to Madang to support the Provincial Health Authority.
- ☐ Part of the aim of the visit was to assist in strategizing the surveillance response to rapidly reprioritise activities to meet demand in the current response. This included; normalizing swabbing and integrating into designated triage and testing facility, mapping and zoning of swabbing sites based on location of GeneXpert cartridges, mobilisation and rotation of Swabbers to Madang Hospital for skill set development and observing/ trialing community testing strategy.
- ☐ Training was provided to staff on the topics of Contact tracing criteria, swabbing and completing the case investigation form (CIF).
- ☐ At the time of the visit, all positive cases were not isolated as there was no facility in the province to isolate positive cases. There was also very minimal monitoring of the positive cases due to very minimal manpower and resourcing of communication support to conduct home isolation monitoring.
- ☐ The visit also found that the Provincial Surveillance and Rapid Response team is very limited in staff strength with only 2 surveillance officers managing all other surveillance activities.

Operational COVID-19 Surge Plan

- ☐ The NCC has developed an Operational COVID-19 Surge Plan template has been developed to provide guidance on a range of strategic response activities for provinces to effectively prepare and respond to surges in the health system caused by a COVID-19 outbreak in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Plan is intended to provide guidance on the response to an outbreak in a Province in order to reduce the adverse health impacts on the population and reduce the burden and disruption to health-related services.
- ☐ Surge Plan template and Surge Capacity Assessment documents have been shared with provinces experiencing increase in positive COVID-19 cases; East New Britain, Madang, East Sepik, West Sepik, Morobe, NCD, Western Provinces. The first province to use the surge template was West New Britain in January, 2021, who have incorporated this well into their emergency response to mitigate widespread transmission.

ARoB

- ☐ Since the 2nd COVID-19 case detected in AROB, the ABG Health Clinical Team has conducted contact tracing and sample collection has already commenced for close contacts of the positive case.
- ☐ While the COVID-19 Response Team is engaged in its quick response efforts, the general public is urged to remain calm and to strictly adhere to Covid-19 protocols to prevent spread of the virus.

- ☐ Niupla Pasin measures are being enforced through existing systems, and any individuals experiencing flu-like symptoms are advised to call a hotline or visit the nearest health facility. The cough triage located at the Buka General Hospital is operational and has the capacity to conduct assessment of clients and collection of samples for testing.
- ☐ ABG through the Bougainville Public Health Committee will take immediate action to implement necessary precautionary containment measures to prevent any further transmission including the introduction of new measures on 27 February 2021.

National Capital District

- ☐ NCD PHA submitted a revised ERP of 8.4million, with 5 million for Rita Flynn Isolation facility. This covers equipment, short term contract staff, transport, catering and other necessities to keep the Isolation/field hospital in operation for a year.
- ☐ Due to previous social challenges, NCD PHA working closely with the Governor will try as much to avoid a lock-down but have necessary restrictions in place to assist in controlling the current trend of transmission.

Western province (Tabubil)

- ☐ Active surveillance has continued to detect cases on a daily basis with continued isolation & contact tracing.
- ☐ All active positive cases & those in quarantine are well and asymptomatic with no moderate to severe cases so far.
- ☐ Tabubil Hospital Laboratory has run out of GeneXpert cartridges and none can be sought through the OTML suppliers. They have requested support from NCC which is currently being facilitated.

West Sepik Province

- ☐ The province has released Measures covering all Niupla Pasin.

Hela

- ☐ Hela PEOC were not able to provide COVID-19 updates for the last couple of weeks due to tribal fighting on the ground affecting all other operations in the province.
- ☐ Hela has had its first COVID-19 committee meeting earlier this year and are providing POE surveillance for travelers at the Tari domestic airport.
- ☐ The Hela PHA has also recruited additional staff trained to increase number of staff able to collect nasopharyngeal specimen.

Western Highlands Province

- ☐ WHP PEOC through its lab cluster continue to update on number of specimens tested by GeneXpert.

COVID-19 Prevention and Control

Considering current surges in COVID-19 cases across PNG, all provinces have been requested to immediately prepare a Provincial Operational Surge Plan, including an assessment of resources, facilities and capacities. PHAs have been requested to include information on all available resources and capacities within the province including public, private, NGO and faith-based facilities.

Communication, Community Engagement and Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (Social Measures) – NIUELA PASIN

- ☐ Information and communications products are in development for COVID-19 and COVID-19 Vaccines.
- ☐ Updated infographics on Quarantine and Isolation have been completed and are under review before finalization, translations and printing.
- ☐ A Review of Vaccine Communication Plan underway, distributed to cluster for input, with all input to be collected on Tuesday 2nd March.
- ☐ Work is also being undertaken to adapt communications materials such as FAQs into Tokpisin for distribution.

Logistics and Supplies

- ☐ Biomedical bundles consigned for Hela, Enga, Southern Highlands and Jiwaka Provinces.
- ☐ NCD delivered supplies to the Rita Flynn facility.
- ☐ Gulf Province were notified to collect biomedical bundles at HFSB.
- ☐ PPE Distribution was provided to West Sepik, NCD PHA, Gerehu Clinic, PMGH Lab, Laloki Hospital.
- ☐ UTMs were distributed to West Sepik, East Sepik, Madang, Morobe, Eastern Highlands, Simbu, Jiwaka, Western Highlands, Southern Highlands, Enga, Hela, Milne Bay, NCD, Western (Kiunga, Daru & Tabubil), Manus, New Ireland, East New Britain, West New Britain & AROB.
- ☐ Gene Xpert Cartridges were distributed to West Sepik, East Sepik, Madang, Morobe, Eastern Highlands, Simbu, Jiwaka, Western Highlands, Southern Highlands, Enga, Hela, Milne Bay, NCD, Western (Kiunga, Daru & Tabubil), New Ireland, East New Britain, West New Britain & AROB.
- ☐ Information, Education and Communication Materials (IEC) were also distributed to West Sepik & Madang.

COVID-19 Health Care Worker Training

- ☐ Since 23 June 2020 UNICEF have been facilitating COVID-19 training for Health Care Workers around the country on all aspects of COVID-19 response. The training is funded by the World Bank and will run through to the 3rd quarter of 2021.
- ☐ The training program aims to build capacity of district-level health workers and covers a range of topics including IPC, surveillance (including POE & quarantine), clinical Management, Risk Communication & Community Engagement and Testing & Contact Tracing.
- ☐ Since June 2020, 846 health care workers have been trained across 16 provinces.
- ☐ In the last 2 weeks COVID-19 training was provided in AROB and New Ireland.

Table 5. Healthcare Worker Training

Table of Healthcare Worker Training				
Province	Number of Districts Covered	Number of Training Batches Completed	Number of Individuals Trained	
Western Highlands	4	3	72	
Jiwaka	3	3	65	
Simbu	6	3	64	
Hela	3	1	18	
Central	3	3	54	
Morobe	4	8	124	
Madang	6	2	85	
Eastern Highlands	8	1	32	
Southern Highlands	5	3	43	
Gulf	2	2	21	
Milne Bay	2	2	38	
Oro	2	2	44	
Western	2	2	80	
Manus	1	1	25	
ARoB	2	2	45	
New Ireland	1	1	36	
15	52	37	846	
			Male	524 (62%)
			Female	346 (38%)
Health Worker Cadres Trained so far under UNICEF Arrangement				
Doctor	Nursing Officer/CHW (including midwives)	Paramedics (HEO)	Public Health Managers	Other health workers
31 (3.7%)	579 (68.4%)	103 (12.2%)	107 (12.6%)	26 (3.1%)

ANNEX A – Photos



Photos 1 South Bougainville District Training provided by UNICEF



Photos 2, 3 Surveillance training in Madang, including swabbing training in partnership with World Vision

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