



Ministry of Health & Human Services

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MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES DIRECTIVE NO. 04-22 BELAU NATIONAL HOSPITAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

WHEREAS, Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a severe acute respiratory illness that was first identified in December 2019, and that occurs through human-to-human respiratory transmission and presents symptoms that are similar with influenza; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 remains as a major threat to public health in the Republic, and is particularly dangerous to the elderly or those with respiratory or other underlying medical conditions; and

WHEREAS, as of January 2022, there are close to 300 million confirmed cases globally, including confirmed cases in jurisdictions in near proximity to the Republic; and

WHEREAS, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on January 30, 2020, and characterized it as a Pandemic on March 12, 2020, and further reaffirmed the outbreak as an ongoing PHEIC on August 1, 2020. The WHO and CDC recommend that all countries and territories implement aggressive measures to prevent and control the transmission of COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, the Minister of Health and Human Services (MHHS) certified the COVID-19 pandemic as an unavoidable public health emergency in the Republic on March 17, 2020, channeling all efforts toward limiting the risk of import and local transmission of COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, all international travel to Palau has been subject to appropriate COVID-19 testing and quarantine since March 2020, decreasing the risk of import of COVID-19 into Palau, and to date, over 18, 000 molecular laboratory tests have been conducted in the Republic, and has detected twenty-five (25) travel-related cases of COVID-19, allowing for early response and mitigation; and

WHEREAS, the Ministry of Health (MHHS) has been conducting a COVID-19 mass vaccination campaign since January 2021, resulting in 95% of the entire population fully vaccinated against COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, the Ministry of Health and Human Services (MHHS) and the National Emergency Committee (NEC) have prepared and continue to maintain appropriate quarantine, isolation, and alternate care sites for COVID-19 cases, close contacts, and travelers, and the MHHS has secured testing and medical equipment and supplies, including personal protective equipment in response to potential COVID-19 cases; and

WHEREAS, the community at large is encouraged to maintain the practice of personal, social, and public health measures for the prevention of COVID-19 infection and transmission, including receiving COVID-19 vaccination, wearing masks and physical distancing as appropriate, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and disinfection practices; and

WHEREAS, notwithstanding the ongoing threat of the COVID-19 pandemic, the aforementioned epidemiological findings, quarantine, healthcare, and public health capacities and community engagement signify reasonable support for maintaining basic COVID-19 preventive measures;

NOW THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me as the Director of Public Health of the Republic of Palau, pursuant to its laws and Constitution, I hereby authorize the following:

Section 1. Ministry of Health and Human Services:

- Certification of COVID-19 as an Unavoidable Public Health Emergency is maintained.
- Belau National Hospital (BNH) Emergency Operations Plan remains activated;
- Public Health Emergency Operations Plan (PHEOP) remains activated;
- MHHS EOC remains activated to coordinate COVID-19 response;
- MHHS COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan remains activated and to be revised as necessary;
- MHHS maintains quarantine and isolation measures as authorized by relevant MHHS Directives and Rules & Regulations for Isolation and Quarantine of Contagious Diseases as appropriate;
- BNH chronic disease clinics and elective surgeries shall be maintained with addition of virtual clinics and infection control measures;
- MHHS clinic hours to be staggered with regular cleaning and disinfecting to be maintained;
- Maintain enforcement of no-tobacco use regulations in MHHS facilities and grounds;
- Maintain physical distancing (3 to 6 feet) in clinics and healthcare settings;
- BNH in-patient visiting hours is maintained at one (1) hour per day, with no more than two (2) visitors at a time;
- All admitted patients to only be allowed one (1) caretaker at any given time;
- High-risk individuals including 55 years and older or persons with underlying conditions are discouraged from visiting BNH unless seeking medical care or coming in for appointments;
- Prohibit loitering at all MHHS facilities;
- MHHS personnel to remain at home and isolate if they are sick;
- Maintain MHHS COVID-19 Hotline and risk communication activities;
- Maintain health screening, surveillance and monitoring at all BNH and Community Health Center (CHC) points of entry as appropriate;
- Mandate mask-wearing in all of MHHS facilities
- Maintain COVID-19 mass vaccination efforts to cover at least 80% of Palau residents, including boosters; and

Section 1.1 Private clinics:

- Maintain/ensure universal precautionary measures/infection control measures
- Implement screening, surveillance and monitoring outside the clinic/entry points
- Enforce/maintain mask wearing for patrons (patients and visitors)
- Maintain/mandate vaccination (including boosters) for all employees
- Prohibit loitering at premises.
- Discourage vulnerable populations from visiting unless for medical attention
- Employees to stay home and isolate if they are sick
- Promote employee wellness

Section 2. Recommended Public Health Measures.

Worksites, restaurants, businesses:

- Maintain regular operating hours;
- Engage in virtual meetings whenever possible;
- Maintain engineering and environmental controls including barriers, regular cleaning and disinfecting, and adequate ventilation in establishments;
- Monitor employees and patrons and disallow entry of sick people;
- Employers encourage employees to remain home/isolate if they are sick and provide adequate sick leave for sick employees;
- Utilize your own pen and other stationery supplies;
- Maintain proper food safety practices;
- Implement pandemic-safe certification measures (if certified); and
- Encourage employees and patrons to continue practicing preventive measures including proper hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and wearing of facemasks.

Schools and child-care centers:

- Maintain face-to-face learning in schools;
- Ensure distance/online learning capacity and preparation for virtual classes;
- Develop a continuity of operations/contingency plan for when a child, student, or staff member tests positive for COVID-19;
- Develop or update a plan with MHHS to identify, isolate, and conduct case tracing in the event of a positive case in schools and child-care centers;
- Teach, promote and implement proper hand hygiene, mask wearing, respiratory etiquette, and other relevant preventive measures as appropriate or recommended by Public Health;
- Students and school staff must remain at home/isolate if they are sick, and to call healthcare provider for advice as necessary; and
- Maintain regular cleaning and disinfecting of objects and surfaces.

Public parks, gyms, and other recreational areas

- Maintain regular operations;
- Promote proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette;
- Enforce strict no-alcohol consumption in public places; and
- Maintain engineering and environmental controls including barriers, regular cleaning and disinfecting, and adequate ventilation in facilities;

Organized activities including sporting, social, religious, and cultural events:

- Stay home/isolate and avoid attending events if you are sick;
- Promote proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette;
- Regular cleaning and disinfecting of event spaces;
- Implement mask wearing and physical distancing measures as appropriate or recommended by Public Health
- Maintain proper food safety practices; and
- Avoid sharing materials and other items, i.e., water containers, eating utensils.

General measures:

- Practice proper hand hygiene of at least 20 seconds with soap and water or with 70% alcohol-based sanitizer;

- Practice cough and sneezing etiquette by covering mouth and nose with disposable tissue or shirt sleeve;
- Encourage public to wear mask indoors and practice physical distancing when appropriate or recommended by Public Health;
- Spit bottles (olbaol) must have cover, should not be shared and disposed of properly;
- Phones and other handheld devices should be regularly disinfected and should not be shared;
- Stay home and away from others if you are sick; avoid others who are sick
- Exercise self-care
- Encourage agencies responsible for elderly care to maintain practice of relevant preventive measures to limit the risk of infection of the elderly;
- Maintain quarantine and testing requirements for all travelers in accordance with relevant MHHS directives and regulations;
- Encourage general public to contact the BNH Emergency Room if they exhibit COVID-19 symptoms;
- Encourage all eligible individuals in the community to receive full COVID-19 vaccination (including boosters);
- Adhere to Pandemic Safe Certification measures for all businesses and establishment;
- Encourage all in the community to observe all MOH alerts, advisories, information releases, and technical guidance; and
- Maintain MOH collaboration with relevant government and community partners to execute and implement all necessary COVID-19 prevention and containment measures in the community.

Section 3. Effective date and term.

This directive supersedes and replaces MOH Directive 15-21, which was issued on May 25, 2021. Unless cancelled, revoked, or re-issued, this directive shall remain in effect for 90 days from the date of issuance until April 10, 2022.

Issued this 10th day of January 2022 at the Ministry of Health and Human Services in Koror, Republic of Palau.

Sherilynn Madraisau
 Director of Public Health
 Ministry of Health and Human Services