



*Republic of Palau*

# Ministry of Health

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## MINISTRY OF HEALTH

### DIRECTIVE NO. 10-21

#### **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 February 12, 2021, there are over 107 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 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 mandatory COVID-19 testing and quarantine since March 2020, decreasing the risk of import of COVID-19 into Palau, and to date, over 3,600 molecular laboratory tests have been conducted in the Republic with negative results for COVID-19; and

**WHEREAS**, the Ministry of Health (MOH) 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 MOH 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, including hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, physical distancing, 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 Minister of Health of the Republic of Palau, pursuant to its laws and Constitution, I hereby authorize the following:

**Section 1. Ministry of Health:**

- 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;
- MOH EOC remains activated to coordinate COVID-19 response;
- MOH COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan remains activated and to be revised as necessary;
- MOH maintains quarantine and isolation measures as authorized by relevant MOH directives and Rules & Regulations for Isolation and Quarantine of Contagious Diseases.
- BNH chronic disease clinics and elective surgeries shall be maintained with addition of virtual clinics;
- MOH clinic hours to be staggered with regular cleaning and disinfecting to be maintained;
- Maintain enforcement of no-tobacco use regulations in MOH 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;
- 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 MOH facilities;
- MOH personnel to remain at home if they are sick;
- Maintain MOH Hotline and risk communication activities;
- Restrict congregation at mortuary to one (1) hour maximum for viewing of deceased;
- Maintain health screening, surveillance and monitoring at all BNH and Community Health Center (CHC) points of entry;
- Extend suspension of overseas travel for all MOH employees (unless for emergencies);
- Implement COVID-19 mass vaccination to immunize at least 80% of Palau residents; and

**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 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; and
- Encourage employees and patrons to continue practicing proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

*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 a plan with MOH to identify, isolate, and conduct case tracing in the event of a positive case in schools and child-care centers;
- Teach and promote proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette;

- Require and strictly enforce sick children, students, and staff to stay home; 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 and avoid attending events if you are sick;
- Promote proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette;
- Regular cleaning and disinfecting of event spaces;
- Maintain proper food safety practices; and
- Avoid sharing materials and other items, i.e., water containers, eating utensils.

*General measures:*

- 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;
- Exercise self-care and stay home if you are sick and stay away from people who are sick;
- Maintain quarantine and testing requirements for all travelers in accordance with relevant MOH directives and regulations;
- Encourage agencies responsible for elderly care to maintain practice of relevant preventive measures to limit the risk of infection of the elderly;
- 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 general public to contact the BNH Emergency Room if they exhibit COVID-19 symptoms;
- 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 211-20, which was issued on November 12, 2020. Unless cancelled, revoked, or re-issued, this directive shall remain in effect for 90 days from the date of issuance until May 13, 2021.

Issued this 12<sup>th</sup> day of February 2021 at the Ngerulmud, Republic of Palau.

  
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 Surangel Whipps, Jr.  
 President  
 Republic of Palau