



Republic of Palau

Ministry of Health

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MINISTER OF HEALTH STATEMENT ON THE CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19)

March 30, 2020

Greetings to everyone. First of all, we praise and thank the Lord for his guidance during this difficult time and for his grace and blessing upon our nation of Palau. I take this opportunity to formally acknowledge and honor our nation's leadership, including Ibedul and Reklai and all Rubekul Belau and Mechesil Belau; His Excellency President Tommy Remengesau, Jr., Vice President Raynold Oilouch and all cabinet members; Members of the 10th Olbiil Era Kelulau including President of the Senate, Hokkons Baules and all Senators, Speaker of the House of Delegates, Sabino Anastacio and all Delegates; and Governors and State legislators of all 16 states, and greetings to all people of Palau.

It has been two months since the Ministry of Health activated its Emergency Operations Center, and together with our leadership, commenced preparedness and response activities for what we now call COVID-19, the new coronavirus disease.

As most of us know, over seven hundred and twenty thousand (720,000) cases worldwide of COVID-19 have been reported and more than thirty-three thousand (33,000) people have lost their lives, but over a hundred and five-one thousand (151,000) have recovered from this illness.¹

We have seen a decline in cases in Mainland China, but many other countries are now affected with increasing numbers of confirmed cases. Although Palau has not confirmed a case of COVID-19, our prayers go out to those affected, including our neighbor Guam, who reported its first COVID-19 related death on March 22, 2020.

While we do not want people to panic, we need to be vigilant and cautious, and to practice current recommended preventive measures, including frequent handwashing, practicing respiratory etiquettes, social distancing, and preparing as if we are going to get that first confirmed case.

¹ Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center, as of March 30, 2020.

I understand that most of us are concerned and afraid for the safety of our loved ones but know that the Ministry of Health alongside our government and community partners are putting in place measures to help prevent the spread of the disease.

We are in constant watch to monitor the global situation and report those numbers to the public and all stakeholders.

MOH personnel meet daily at its Emergency Operations Center, to respond to updated information, in collaboration with partners.

We are preparing the Belau National Hospital and an Alternative Care Site to receive and care for critically ill patients.

We continue to screen travelers coming into Palau and will soon implement screening at Belau National Hospital.

We continue to message with the public, urging everyone to practice good hygiene, and take other prevention and preparedness measures. We will escalate our communication efforts.

And more recently, in line with Executive Order 437, issued by His Excellency, President Remengesau, Jr. on March 17, 2020, urging the collaboration of all government agencies, the Ministry of Health issued Directive 60-20, declaring this event as an unavoidable public health emergency.

The MOH directive has accelerated response efforts, including lessening the traffic at Belau National Hospital by reducing non-urgent clinics and limiting visiting hours within the premises. All MOH employees will not travel overseas until further notice and will remain at home if they are sick.

We have also put forth measures to discourage mass gatherings of fifty or more people in the community. We understand that some gatherings are part of our culture, but we urge everyone to take precaution and follow preventive measures.

We urge everyone to exercise self-quarantine at home if you have traveled home from affected countries or if you are sick, and to call the Hospital for instructions before coming in. Our doctors and nurses are ready to answer your questions.

We encourage employers and businesses to take measures within their worksites to ensure safety to both employees and customers.

We have been messaging with the community that the elderly (55 years old and above) and those with underlying medical conditions (diabetes, heart disease, asthma/lung disease, hypertension) are at higher risk of severe illness. We urge family members, caregivers, and anyone involved in the care of our elderly and those with weak immune systems to take extra care as we help each other through this difficult time.

But this doesn't mean that younger people should not be mindful. We have seen that in other countries, people under fifty (50) years of age, are being hospitalized with severe illness resulting from COVID-19. And even if you are not very sick, you still need to be extra careful

and take preventive measures so that you do not spread it to others. It could mean life or death to the person next to you.

We all know that our health care system is limited in resources. And although we are doing everything we can to prepare the Hospital, it is still a concern. This is the case for many other countries around the world. The supply cannot catch up with the demand. This doesn't mean there is nothing we can do. We are working with regional partners for assistance in the event we get a case.

But most of all, we need the entire community to help. It is the only way we can survive this. WE have to look out for each and every one of us.

We can do this by being vigilant but not panic. Panic is fear driven and can hurt us more than the virus. If you feel afraid or overwhelmed, talk to someone. Take a break from social media; unfortunately, it contains rumors or news that might upset you. Get your information from MOH, or from a credible source like WHO or CDC.

Each and every one of us has a role in protecting the person next to us, our child, our parent, our spouse, our relative, our co-worker, or the person standing next to you in the store, bank, or in church. We thank our partners and everyone in the community who have already taken the initiative to implement and enforce recommended preventive measures. We have to take extra care to prevent the spread of COVID-19. We need to keep practice the preventive measures that I have mentioned above. Let me repeat. Frequent handwashing, proper coughing and sneezing etiquette, social distancing, and self-quarantine. If you are sick, keep your distance from others and call the Hospital for advice. I cannot stress these enough, until there is a vaccine, and that will take a while, these are our only protection.

Fellow Palauans and residents, I know that we are scared, worried, frustrated. But we have to persevere and help each other through this. We have to remember, that only together, can we pull out of this crisis. We can endure, but only together. Thank you.



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