



## **Proactive Release**

The following item has been proactively released by the Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister:

**Noting Paper: Table-Top Exercise 5 March 2020**

# Noting Paper

## TABLE-TOP EXERCISE 5 MARCH 2020

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| <b>To</b>   | Ad Hoc Cabinet Committee on COVID-19 Response                     |             |            |
| <b>From</b> | Tony Lynch, Deputy Chief Executive, National Security Group, DPMC | <b>Date</b> | 11/03/2020 |

### Purpose

1. This document provides a summary of the first table-top exercise held Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> March to check planning for the COVID-19 event.

### Background

2. To inform the response to COVID-19, ODESC is placing a particular focus on scenario-based planning. This includes a regular sequence of table-top exercises based around a series of scenarios ranging from the current situation through to a “worst case”. These exercises will be conducted over the coming weeks, and will focus on gaps identified during the exercise.
3. The first such exercise was held on 5 March 2020. It tested the government response actions to a ‘cluster’ scenario, with clusters in a Pacific community in Auckland, a group of adults with links to a marae in Gisborne, and a rest-home in Nelson. These scenarios were extended during the day to test the impact on schools and of a cruise ship with sick individuals on-board. In this situation, the focus was on containing the virus, to stop transmission between individuals and limit people infected.

### Outcomes

4. The exercise participants identified the following key lessons:
  - a. Public health capacity and capability is sufficient to manage the cluster scenario as outlined above. In all scenarios, ‘contact tracing’ of those close to affected individuals is a time and resource-intensive endeavour, but an essential step and one where resources can be diverted from other agencies as needed.
  - b. The Ministry of Health has extensive powers under Section 70 of the Health Act 1956 to require people to submit to medical examination and/or quarantine to prevent the movement of people, livestock, goods or vehicles, aircraft or ships. The proactive use of these powers will be crucial to effectively prevent the spread of this virus – but it will have a disruptive effect on communities.
  - c. Public communications has crucial roles in containing the spread of this virus. The exercise reinforced the need to increase core public hygiene messaging and pre-empt potential non-compliance with actions undertaken by government agencies. Messaging will be developed with several audiences in mind; the general public, and those who have been in contact with affected individuals and may be asked to self-isolate. The theme of the messaging will be on actions that individuals and communities can take to keep themselves safe, including explanation of why certain actions are necessary.

- d. Parallel to the table-top exercise, the New Zealand Customs Service has been leading urgent cruise ship focused operational planning, under the direction of the Border Sector Working Group. This will interrogate our ability to effectively manage a COVID-19 outbreak on-board a cruise ship in areas where we have responsibilities, i.e. our territorial waters and/or search and rescue zone, and options for mitigating this risk.
- e. Accommodation for people required to self-isolate was one of the biggest concerns during the exercise. Most people will be able to self-isolate in their homes and welfare support may be required to enable this to occur to best effect. More broadly, many families lack the resources to self-isolate for some weeks, particularly if doing so affects their financial means, has implications for childcare, or they do not have the support structures to enable them to stay in-situ. There will be instances, especially for foreign nationals and visitors, where private accommodation and additional support is required to enable quarantine and self-isolation.

## Next steps

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5. The exercises are kinetic, testing existing processes by following the projected path of the virus. The second exercise, to be held on 11 March, will test the New Zealand system's ability to transition between the containment and the management phases. The exercises include but are not limited to:
  - a. Supply chains;
  - b. Critical infrastructure;
  - c. DHB and public health system capacity thresholds;
  - d. Vulnerable communities;
  - e. Population movement control (including Mass Events); and
  - f. Define trigger-points for actions.
6. Subsequent exercises will focus on the management phase proper and the road to recovery.
7. These exercises are augmenting existing planning underway, as outlined in the Influenza Pandemic Action Plan and individual agency plans.