



Office of the Prime Minister  
Press Release

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**15 March 2020**

### **Official Statement – Social Distancing Measures**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 4PM**

Social distancing practices, including minimising close contact with other people, can stop or slow the spread of infectious diseases such as the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Cabinet convened a special meeting yesterday to consider several initiatives to reduce person-to-person transmission of infection.

An important initiative was the decision to bring the school holidays forward nearly a full month. The last day of this term will be Friday 20 March. At this stage there will be a two-week break. This applies to schools on Rarotonga only. Schools on the outer islands (including Aitutaki), our Pa Enea, will continue as usual.

In the meantime, schools have been tasked with teaching students to practice good hand hygiene and coughing etiquette before the holiday break. During this period education officials will be preparing remote teaching capability as a contingency measure.

The Government is urging all members of the public to help reduce close personal contact with others.

At home, health officials are asking people to wash their hands regularly, avoid touching your face, handshaking and kissing, regularly disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as doorknobs, bathrooms, and kitchens, increase ventilation in all rooms, and avoid family outings when possible.

Government and health officials are strongly discouraging the gathering of groups of more than 50 people, large gatherings involving singing, sporting/church/cultural events, and gatherings at indoor venues where spacing between people of more than one metre cannot be achieved.

In the workplace, both employers and employees are being asked to stay at home if they display symptoms associated with COVID-19, defer meetings and gatherings or

hold meetings outside, avoid shaking hands, practise proper hand hygiene and cough etiquette, and avoid sharing drink and food.

“We must all work together and continue to be extremely diligent in practising effective hand hygiene, cough etiquette and social distancing measures that local and international health officials have stressed.”

The Government is taking firm action to protect the people of the Cook Islands, residing in Rarotonga and the Pa Enua, especially our vulnerable populations,” said Prime Minister Henry Puna.

Vulnerable groups include people aged over 60 years, those with medical conditions, such as lung disease, hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer. Those who smoke or are obese are also at risk of severe illness.

“A collective national effort will keep us prepared for any event,” the Prime Minister said.

For Health-related questions or concerns please visit [www.health.gov.ck](http://www.health.gov.ck) or contact the Healthline on 29 667.

To view the Cook Islands Emergency Response Plan to COVID-19, go to:

[https://www.health.gov.ck/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CookIslandsEmergencyResponsePlanCOVID19\\_Mar2020.pdf](https://www.health.gov.ck/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CookIslandsEmergencyResponsePlanCOVID19_Mar2020.pdf)

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