



Republic of Palau

Ministry of Health

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MINISTRY OF HEALTH

DIRECTIVE NO. 114-20

AUTHORIZING THE RESUMING OF CLINICS AND SERVICES AT THE BELAU NATIONAL HOSPITAL AND PROVISION OF ADJUSTED 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 Wuhan, China 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 May 11, 2020, there are over 4,100,000 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 February 11, 2020, and further characterized it as a *pandemic* on March 12, 2020. The WHO and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (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, commercial air travel has been suspended since March 2020, decreasing the risk of import of COVID-19 into Palau, and over 500 molecular laboratory tests conducted in the Republic have all resulted negative for COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the National Emergency Committee (NEC) have designated and continue to prepare 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 has maintained 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 the scaling-down of certain community restrictions, albeit with emphasis on maintaining certain 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, and after consultation with the National Emergency Committee (NEC), I hereby authorize the following:

Section 1. Ministry of Health:

- Belau National Hospital (BNH) Emergency Operations Plan remains activated;
- Public Health Emergency Operations Plan remains activated;
- MOH Emergency Operations Center (EOC) remains activated to coordinate COVID-19 response;
- BNH chronic disease clinics and elective surgeries shall resume;
- BNH 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;
- Recommend those that are 55 years and older or persons with underlying conditions avoid visiting BNH unless seeking medical care or coming in for appointments;
- Restrict loitering at any and all MOH facilities;
- Encouraging MOH personnel to remain at home if they are sick;
- Restrict congregation at mortuary to one (1) hour maximum for viewing of deceased;
- Maintain health screening, surveillance and monitoring at all BNH points of entry;
- Extend suspension of overseas travel for all MOH employees;
- Certification of COVID-19 as an Unavoidable Public Health Emergency is maintained; and
- Measures authorized by MOH Directive 60-20 are amended as appropriate through this directive.

Section 2. Recommended Public Health Measures.

Worksites, restaurants, businesses:

- Resume regular operating hours;
- Engage in virtual meetings whenever possible;
- Maintain engineering and environmental controls including barriers, regular cleaning and disinfecting;
- 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 school closures until end of school year 2019-2020;
- Maintain distance/online learning for students;
- Promote proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette at graduations and other scheduled events; and
- Child-care centers implement proper hand hygiene activities, conduct regular cleaning and disinfecting of objects and surfaces, and disallow entry of sick children.

Public parks, gyms, and other recreational areas

- Resume regular operations;
- Promote proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette;
- Enforce strict no-alcohol consumption in public places;
- Maintain regular cleaning and disinfecting of frequently touched object and surfaces.

Organized activities including sporting, social, 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; and
- Bring own drinking water instead of sharing water cooler at events.

General measures:

- Spit bottles (olbaol) must have cover and should not be shared;
- Phones and other handheld devices should be regularly disinfected and should not be shared;
- Exercise self-care and stay home if you are sick;
- Stay away from people who are sick;
- Maintain mandatory fourteen (14) day quarantine for all travelers with a travel history from or through COVID-19 affected geographical areas;
- 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 ER 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 NEC and other relevant 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 takes effect on **15 May 2020** and unless cancelled, revoked, or re-issued shall remain in effect for **90 days**.

Issued this 11th day of May 2020 at the Ministry of Health in Koror, Republic of Palau.



Emais Roberts, MD, FACS
Minister of Health