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# MINISTRY OF HEALTH & MEDICAL SERVICES



PRESS RELEASE SPEECHES

## Statement By The Prime Minister Hon. Voreqe Bainimarama On New COVID-19 Cases In Fiji

April 4, 2020 Riaz Hassan Comments Off

Last Updated on 7 months by



## STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER HON. VOREQE BAINIMARAMA ON NEW COVID-19 CASES IN FIJI

04/04/2020

Bula Vinaka.

Last week, we issued a nationwide directive to all people in Fiji to stay at home unless your life or livelihood depends directly on going outside. Again, my most important message to all Fijians this afternoon again is this:

Stay at home, save lives.

Tiko i vale me da bula kece kina.

Ghare raho, jaan bachao.

So, with very few exceptions, I expect that everyone watching this Saturday afternoon is doing so from home and doing their part to keep them and those they love from harm.

On Thursday, I told you we had a strong suspicion of how the sixth and seventh cases of COVID-19 in Fiji contracted the virus. The father of the gentleman — case number seven — stayed with the couple for several days after returning from India on the 22nd of March.

It turns out — as we suspected — the father-in-law has indeed tested positive for the virus. He likely became infected at a large religious gathering he attended while overseas in India. Upon returning to Fiji, he spent five days in the Nabua Settlement, and he then made his way by boat to Vanua Levu. He then travelled to his home in Soasoa. He is currently in stable condition in our isolation ward at Labasa Hospital.

This patient did not declare any symptoms when returning from travel, and did not follow the directive of entering into government-mandated home quarantine — a compulsory requirement for all those returning to the country from abroad that came into effect on the 19th of March. Three days after the directive came into effect, this individual proceeded to ignore it by hopping from Nadi to Suva to Labasa in the span of a week, potentially spreading COVID-19 via land, air, and sea over just a few days. So once again, quite sadly, we have seen the spread of COVID-19 in Fiji due to a disregard for the rules we've put in place to keep people safe.

Our contact tracing teams are in the process of identifying all other individuals who came into contact with this gentleman — including a few in Suva who he spoke with at car garages, and fellow passengers on the ferry from Nabouwalu Jetty to Vanua Levu on the 27th of March.

Following his arrival in Soasoa, this gentleman, his daughter-in-law, and his grandson were all taken into isolation and tested. We tested all three — and two of them, including the father— tested positive. We are currently doing a second-round test on the daughter-in-law and grandson to confirm their results. In the meantime, all three family members remain in isolation at Labasa Hospital where they are in stable condition.

After identifying the couple who tested positive for the virus in the Nabua Settlement, we had also entered their 11-year-old daughter into isolation before she had developed symptoms. Yesterday, she came down with a fever. She was tested and confirmed as positive for the virus this morning.

In the Lautoka confined area, the 39-year-old sister of case number five — the woman from our first patient's Zumba class — developed symptoms after she was already placed in quarantine within Natabua School. She alerted the Ministry of Health and

was tested. She was confirmed as positive for the virus this morning, and she has since been isolated at Lautoka Hospital where she remains in stable condition.

We also have a new case in Nadi which is unrelated to any of our other patients. This has many similarities to our first case in Nadera, Suva, the gentleman who immediately entered self-quarantine upon arriving back from abroad — a responsible move that has, so far, resulted in no additional cases. This new case in Nadi is a 20-year-old woman who also entered self-quarantine immediately after returning to Fiji from Auckland, New Zealand.

We're all grateful this young woman displayed the same diligence and compassion as that young man from Nadera as she placed herself into quarantine, and stayed there. She was brought food that was dropped off at her door, and she refrained from coming into contact with others. Her good habits have spared Nadi from a total lockdown.

All Fijians living with COVID-19 are in stable condition.

That means in total, we've confirmed five new cases of the coronavirus overnight. This is our single largest jump in cases in a day. Week over week, our new case numbers have doubled.

As we've seen around the world, the virus doesn't gradually add a few new cases day by day. It may start that way, but then, the spike in case numbers can hit hard and fast. Unmanaged, the virus can spread at an exponential rate, case numbers double and double and double, claiming lives along the way. If you see the graphs of how the virus exploded in China, Italy and the United States, it looks like a spaceship taking flight. Globally, there are over one million cases and over 50,000 deaths. In the USA, it was just reported that doctors are now ranking patients due to lack of resources. Basically, they are having to choose who to treat: who gets a life-saving ventilator and who doesn't. On the other hand, if you see a graph of case numbers in South Korea — where people acted quickly, adhered to strong government directives, and practiced good physical distancing — the curve looks very different. It flattens, dramatically, and the outbreak shows positive signs of relenting.

Those same tactics can work in Fiji, but only if people do the right thing and follow government directives. Our first patient in Suva — for example — did what the rules demanded and dramatically limited his exposure to others. So far, it appears he did not pass the virus to anyone. He showed responsibility. He stood in solidarity with this nation. And he won Fiji a small victory in the war against this virus.

His example makes clear: The virus does not travel unless people travel. We have to stop people from touching, hugging, or doing anything that puts them in close contact with each other. That is why we locked down Lautoka. That is why we locked down Suva. That is why social gatherings are banned. That is why the nightclubs, gyms and swimming pools are closed. That is why the nationwide curfew came into effect. That is why passenger travel by air and sea has ceased.

That is also why we are going to lock down a 240-square-metre portion of Soasoa area on Vanua Levu — where the contact tracing for the first case in the North is underway. The surrounding homes, and neighbours he came into contact with, will be under this contained area. If it's determined that the spread has risked going beyond these boundaries, we will expand them accordingly.

But rules only work when they are obeyed.

No one is immune to COVID-19. Anyone can be infected. Anyone can be a carrier. If anyone disregards the rules and acts as if — somehow — they are beyond this reach of this virus, they'll cost us Fijian lives.

Last night, the Police arrested another 123 individuals for violating curfew — up from 60 the day before. The hours of the curfew are 8pm to 5am, every night. Do whatever you need to do to remember that fact. If you need to go to work, you can travel. If you have a medical emergency, you can travel. Otherwise, don't be the next person who doesn't have a damn good reason to be outside when questioned by our police officers.

We also had two rugby players returning from overseas who broke compulsory quarantine after coming back to Fiji. Like every other person disembarking from international flights, they were required to self-quarantine for 14 days. But they violated the directives, and put their loved ones — and all of Fiji — at risk.

One of them was coming in from Singapore and had a high-risk of exposure to the virus while overseas. After reports he was breaking quarantine, he was actually brought into the hospital in Sigatoka — and then he bolted and disappeared, forcing our police officers to track him down. Unlucky for him, he couldn't step his way past our Fiji Police Force. He's been arrested, and he is now securely in isolation at Nadi Hospital.

Last night, in violation of curfew and our rules against inter-island passenger travel, we received another report of a mother who took her family on a fibreglass boat and shipped herself to Wakaya Island. The police are investigating this alleged breach as well.

This level of lawlessness is irresponsible, un-Fijian and just plain stupid. We are at war with the most devastating global pandemic in 100 years and any disobedience in our ranks will cost us lives. We don't care who you are, rules are rules. Break them, and you will be found and punished. It doesn't matter how famous you are, it doesn't matter how rich you are, it doesn't even matter how religious you feel you are, no one has the magic cure to coronavirus, and no one is immune to our laws.

As always, these few bad examples hang a dark shadow over much of the good work being done all throughout the country. A few irresponsible actors shouldn't take away from the many more who are following the rules, or the long hours being put in by our frontline workers who are combatting COVID-19.

In Lautoka, for example, thanks to the ongoing efforts by our medical teams on the ground, over 30,000 Fijians have been screened for fevers through temperature checks and in-person outreach. I thank the people of the Lautoka confined area for stepping up. In my eyes, every Fijian who gets themselves screened on the streets or tested at a fever clinic is a true patriot.

And I especially thank our nurses and doctors who are out there treating and testing every new patient, sacrificing time with their own families to ensure that those who are blessed with good health are able to spend more time with their own. As I said on a video posted to my Facebook page yesterday, these healthcare heroes are embodying “vei lomani” — love and care for their community — and all Fijians owe them a debt of gratitude. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you for your service and sacrifice.

So from our healthcare workers to our firefighters, from our disciplined forces to our containment and tracing team, our nation is coming together to battle coronavirus. But, come next week, if we don't see our fever testing numbers go dramatically up, and we don't see the numbers of our curfew and quarantine violations go dramatically down, we will initiate a nationwide 24-

hour curfew. So if you're feeling flu-like symptoms visit a fever clinic or call 158. If you're not going to work, buying food, getting money or accessing an essential service, stay at home. Otherwise, we will bring in the military and police to lock down all of Fiji — it's that simple.

But even if we do that. Even if we throw every dollar we have into this effort. Even if we direct every police officer in the country to force our people to stay in their homes, the government cannot win this war alone. We need you — every person watching or listening, and every person in your lives — to take responsibility for our nationwide response.

Children don't leave the house. The elderly don't leave the house. Every time anyone sees a sink, wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds. And keep a safe distance between yourself and all other people. If you need to go somewhere, do not bring your family with you, go alone. And wherever you go and whatever you do, keep a safe distance of two metres' from all others. Remember: We must all stand together in solidarity to defeat this virus — just not too close.

I'm joined today by our Chief Medical Advisor, Dr. Jemesa Tudravu, our Minister for Health, Commissioner of Police, and Attorney-General and Minister for Economy, who will be going into detail about some of these cases, the steps Fijians need to take contain the spread COVID-19, how those affected by our economic slowdown can claim their FNPF relief and how some new businesses will be permitted to operate in a safe and hygienic manner.

I'll first hand things over to Dr. Tudravu.

Vinaka vakalevu, thank you, and God bless Fiji.

**Riaz Hassan**

<http://www.health.gov.fj>

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 June 29, 2016  Riaz Hassan

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Last Updated on 6 months by STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER HON. VOREQE BAINIMARAMA ON COVID-19  
Bula vinaka. Back on the 18th of April, we clinically confirmed our 18th case of COVID-19. This was in the midst of our response to the devastation of severe Cyclone Harold, which had ripped across our islands the week [...]

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