

## **FSM Information Services**

### **Press Release**

#### **President Panuelo Meets with U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention; FSM to Receive First Phase of COVID-19 Vaccines by Christmas**

PALIKIR, Pohnpei— Through the Enduring Partnership between the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and the United States of America, as codified through the Compact of Free Association, as Amended, the FSM is expected to receive the first shipment of COVID-19 vaccine by the end of December 2020. The details were discussed in a recent meeting between His Excellency David W. Panuelo, President of the FSM, Her Excellency Carmen G. Cantor, Ambassador of the U.S., and U.S. Government officials.

The meeting began with the U.S. Government congratulating President Panuelo and the FSM for retaining its COVID-19 free status. It was described that retaining this status has required the President to make difficult long-term strategic decision-making in the interest of public health.

The U.S. Government, through Operation Warp Speed—a public-private partnership that has allocated personnel, funding, and resources to COVID-19 vaccine development and distribution—has two COVID-19 vaccines authorized. The first of these vaccines has been developed by BioNTech and Pfizer, both biotechnology companies; the second of these vaccines has been developed by Moderna, another biotechnology company.

The Pfizer vaccine requires deep-freezing infrastructure that the FSM does not have. The Moderna vaccine can be shipped in the same cold-chain environment as ice cream. For this reason, the FSM National Government has chosen to only receive the Moderna vaccine from the U.S. Government. “We chose the Moderna vaccine because of the practicality of our infrastructure,” the President said. “That’s the sole reason why we have selected the Moderna vaccine.” Both vaccines are safe and both vaccines are effective.

Although the COVID-19 vaccine provides scientifically measurable and significant protection to individuals who receive it, it is not a “magic bullet”, it is not “literally a cure”, and it is not “a replacement for social distancing,” as some citizens have suggested through social media and radio programming. The FSM National Government continues to encourage the public to practice best preventive practices such as handwashing, mask wearing, and physical distancing between individuals.

In the meeting between President Panuelo and the U.S. Government, the FSM was assured that it will receive a fair and proportionate share of the Moderna vaccine, adjusted for its population, as any U.S. jurisdiction; by way of example, the FSM will receive the same amount of vaccine per capita as the U.S. Territory of Guam, or the U.S. State of Hawaii.

The FSM expects to receive 9,800 doses of Moderna vaccine in the first distribution phase, of which 1,600 doses are expected to arrive by Christmas 2020, equivalent to 800 individuals becoming vaccinated. Each person taking the vaccine must take two doses, spaced out over twenty-eight (28) days. The vials must be kept frozen, and then stored in a refrigerator prior to use. Additional shipments of vaccine will continue on a regular basis.

The amount of vaccine at any given time is dependent upon Moderna's capacity to produce it, but the FSM National Government is hopeful that it will receive enough supply of vaccine to reach the needed coverage rate to protect the FSM population against the COVID-19 disease.

The first priority group to receive the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine are frontline workers—healthcare workers and border control workers—followed by the elderly, and individuals with underlying medical conditions, which is the standard recommendation for prioritization from the U.S. CDC and the World Health Organization (WHO). Approximately 2,700 individuals in the FSM meet the definition of a frontline worker. Pregnant women and those younger than 18 years old are not yet scheduled to receive the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, since there is not sufficient evidence at present of the safety of the vaccine in these groups.

“It is my intention for the FSM to achieve a 100% vaccination rate for COVID-19,” President Panuelo said in the meeting. “I also ask that [the U.S. Government] be mindful of our citizens abroad, and they receive the same priority as U.S. citizens. Our stranded citizens in Guam, Hawaii, and the U.S. Mainland are desperate to come home, and we are desperate for them to return, and it will make everybody's life easier if our citizens are given the same priority as U.S. citizens. Our foreign service officers in our Guam, Honolulu, and Portland Consulates, our Embassy in Washington D.C., and our Mission to the United Nations in New York, are constantly risking their health to serve our citizens. I will not be able to sleep until I know they are taken care of.”

At the meeting, the FSM Government requested that the vaccines and ancillary kits be shipped directly to the States. Accomplishing this task requires additional paperwork on behalf of the FSM National Government, the U.S. Government, and potentially the FSM States of Yap, Chuuk, and Kosrae; as of December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020, only the FSM Immunization (National) Depot located in Dekehtik, Pohnpei, is registered in the U.S. CDC's system for the purpose of directly receiving vaccines. Government officials in the States of Yap, Chuuk, and Kosrae, are encouraged to

collaborate with the FSM Department of Health & Social Affairs for the purpose of registering their States for receipt of the COVID-19 vaccine.

“I want to say,” President Panuelo said in his concluding remarks, “on behalf of our Government, Vice President George, and our citizens, how deeply honored we are—how deeply proud we are, of our relationship with the United States, and to all of you working behind the scenes for our security and prosperity. This relationship we have is something we value. This Enduring Partnership we have, based on our shared values of democracy, liberty, and respect for others—including respect for human life—is something we are so proud of, and appreciative of. We are deeply appreciative of the work of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, and the U.S. CDC...know that we are committed to our relationship for a free and open Indo-Pacific region, and that we look forward to getting our lives back to normal. I express our sympathies and prayers with the families throughout the United States, for those who have succumbed to the coronavirus...but this is a new day, and soon a new year. The FSM looks forward to Americans getting inoculated to prevent their families from any more loss of life, and we extend our prayers, our sympathies, our peace, our friendship, our cooperation, and love in our common humanity, with all of you. Thank you, and Merry Christmas.”



**Pictured Above:** President Panuelo expresses the Nation's sincere appreciation for its Enduring Partnership with the United States, and its enthusiasm to receive the COVID-19 vaccine as developed by Moderna

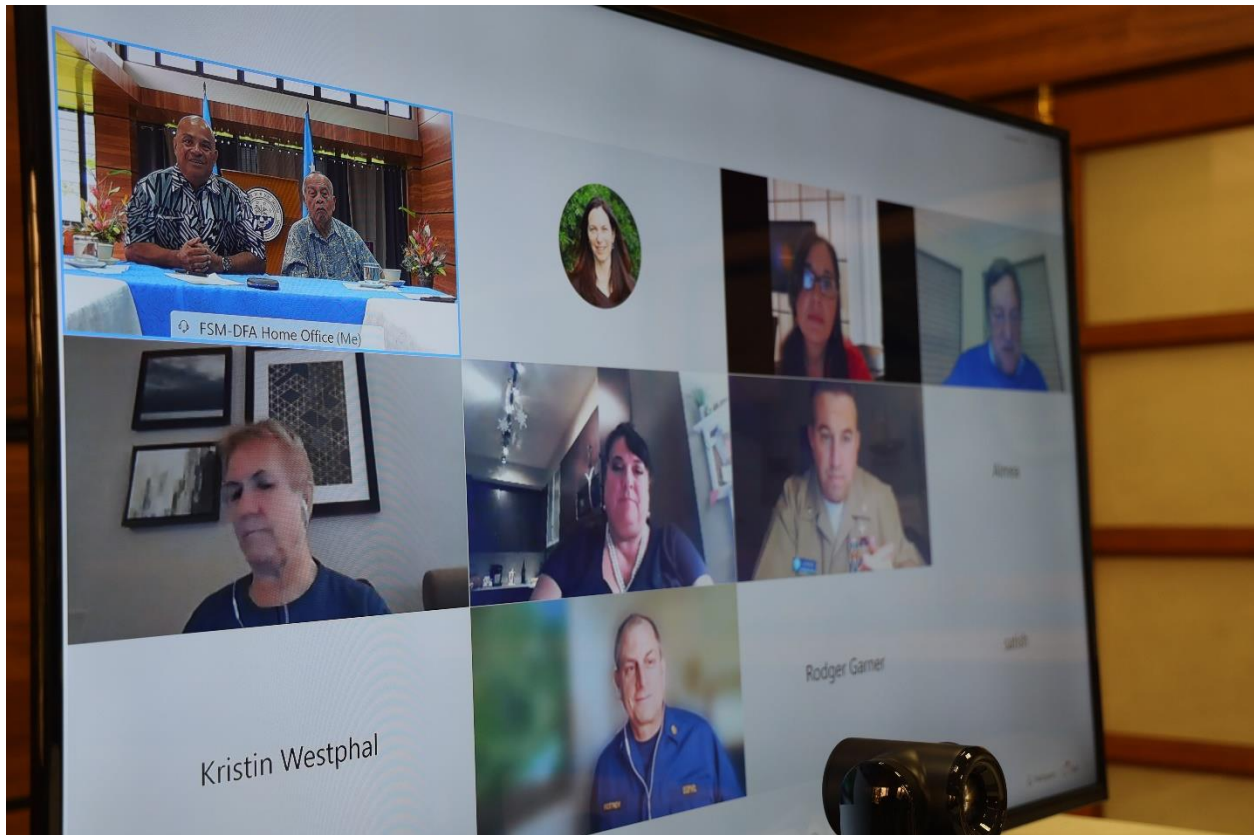


**Pictured Above:** President Panuelo and Vice President George listen to the Nation's American allies discuss the COVID-19 vaccine





**Pictured Above:** Approximately halfway through the meeting, President Panuelo requested to be muted so he could liaise with Secretary Taulung; here the Secretary confirms relevant information to the President; as has been the case ever since the Declaration of Public Health Emergency, the President makes his decisions based on the medical advice from the Department of Health & Social Affairs



**Pictured Above:** President Panuelo describes the FSM's interest in receiving the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine