Healthy Environment = Healthy Humans

What we can Learn from COVID-19 and other Pandemics?

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Outline

• What are the implications of COVID-19 or similar pandemic for Pacific people’s health and wellbeing?

• Where are the greatest impact likely to be?

• Are current responses adequate?
1918 Flu Pandemic

• 7 Nov 1918 MV Talune arrived in Samoa from Auckland
• No quarantine and all passengers allowed to disembark
• Estimated 8,500 deaths (22%) of the population
• 1947 UN Report - ‘one of the most disastrous epidemics recorded anywhere in the world during the that century’
• NZ Administrator Robert Logan was blamed for failing to quarantine, and refusing medical assistance from American Samoa
COVID-19 in the Pacific Region

• Most PICTS remain COVID19-free - commendable
• Measles epidemic influenced attitudes in the region
• Most/all PICTs have ‘pandemic preparedness plans’
• Geography, isolation, small population helps
• Most PICTS implemented restrictions early e.g FSM
• SPC, WHO, DFAT, MFAT technical assistance
• PIF Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19
• Exit plans, lifting border restrictions, vaccine plans?
COVID-19 Pandemic in Aotearoa

• Exceptional leadership by PM Ardern and Government
• No evidence of community transmission in NZ, testing levels
• All cases in NZ imported (1,540 total cases, 22 deaths)
• 83 Pacific cases – 50% under 30 years, 2/3 women, clusters
• Significant economic impact; job losses, business closures,
• Pressure to open borders from some political parties, business leaders, some media – exit plan?
• Trans-Tasman ‘bubble’ vs NZ/Pacific ‘bubble’
What are the implications of COVID-19?

- Impact and challenges across all levels of society – families, communities, institutions, jobs, restrictions on personal freedom, traditions and customs, security
- Health systems – preparedness, public health/epidemiology capability, working across all agencies, clinical capacities could be easily overwhelmed, ICU capacity, access to vaccine
- Existing health problems continue e.g NCDs
- Role of the media, especially social media
- A ‘new normal’ post COVID-19?
Where are the greatest impact likely to be?

• Impact on society in general - economies
• Impact on health systems, could result in increased health investment, workforce preparedness, ongoing
• Regional and sub-regional plans; COVID-19 anywhere is a risk for everyone
• Scenarios – elimination (vaccine), ‘live with scenario’
Our existing responses adequate?

• For most PICTS – YES, but insufficient
• Additional investment likely e.g. cost of vaccine, cost of isolation, quarantine, training
• What happens next?
• Longer term plans?
Conclusions

• COVID-19 most significant public health challenge in recent times; existing challenges remain e.g. Climate Change, NCDs

• Impacts all aspects of society, may result in a new normal e.g. working from home, remote learning, health systems adjustments, working arrangements

• Opportunity to reset current challenges e.g. reset diets and reduce reliance on imported food items

• A new ‘normal’ perhaps?