

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE HON. PRIME MINISTER, FIAME NAOMI MATAAFA: NEXT STEPS FOR COVID-19 ALERT LEVELS IN SAMOA, 16th May 2022.



Good evening Samoa.

Our country, through the Ministry of Health continues to proactively respond and lead measures to counter the spread of COVID 19 in the community. The Ministry of Health confirmed from its latest report, that from the 10th to the 12th of May, 358 new community cases were identified, taking the total number of cases for Samoa to 11,671 including repatriated passengers.

Six people are currently isolated at the Motoootua hospital with none at the ICU. It is encouraging to note that most of the people who contracted the virus have made full recoveries. A total of 88,483 RAT tests have been administered and testing continues at all district hospitals in the country and private General Practitioner clinics. One person sadly passed away during this period, taking the number of deaths to 24.

Our district to district vaccination roll out using school buildings was completed last week. To date, **92.9%** of people in the age group 18 years and above have completed vaccinations; **88.3%** for the age group 12 to 17 and **83.5%** for the age group 5 to 11. A total of **74,218** booster doses have been administered.

As of current our vaccination programs for these age groups continue at all district hospitals and centres at the Motoootua hospital. Vaccination remains our best defence against severe effects of COVID 19, leading to hospitalisation or death.

Last weekend, new quarantine requirements for travelling passengers were implemented, which now require all passengers to self-isolate at home for seven days. Strict health measures and conditions have been put in place to ensure that these passengers adhere to reporting of their test results on the third and seventh day to the Ministry of Health. A breach of these home isolation health requirements will incur a fine of SAT\$2000.00.

Commencing from next month (June 2022), weekly flights will arrive from Australia and New Zealand and fortnightly from Fiji. Beginning from the flight this Sunday, 22nd May, all booking reservations, and other airline arrangements for flights coming into and out of Samoa will be handed back to airline companies and travel agents, as have been the normal procedures before our borders were closed. The services for registration that were done through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade have now reverted back to the airlines offices using both online and onsite services. The traveling public is advised to do bookings online with the relevant airline companies.

The first step for reopening of borders began with entry allowed for all Samoans, resident in Samoa and travel on Samoan passports, Samoans that travel on foreign passports but with exemption stamps for entry as well as foreign contracted workers with the relevant work and temporary resident permits.

In reassessing our preparations for the reopening of our borders to international travellers as initially announced, important consideration was given to our current rates of vaccinations, sector planning for the reopening of our borders especially the private and business sector, as well as the experiences of other neighbouring countries.

Our schools have begun resumption of classes this month with the National University of Samoa restarting classes on May 10th. All Colleges including those of the government, private and mission will resume this Wednesday, 18th May 2022. Primary schools will resume on Monday, 30th May, 2022 and pre-schools will resume on Monday, 4th July, 2022.

Cabinet this afternoon considered these important facets of the next steps of our COVID 19 alert levels. Vaccination rates remain a critical component of our response, especially for the 5 to 11 years cohort who have just completed their second dose, and who according to the Ministry of Health's advice, will need at least two weeks to acquire full immunisation effectiveness against the COVID 19.

Further, as we have just implemented new quarantine measures for home isolation for passengers it is vital that we carefully monitor these new measures particularly compliance and monitoring.

In this connection, Cabinet this afternoon approved that the country remains at alert level 2, for another two weeks from Tuesday midnight, 17th May, 2022 to midnight of Tuesday 31st May, 2022.

New changes introduced under these State of Emergency Orders include the following:

1. Removal of curfew hours which now allow people greater mobility throughout the whole day.
2. The referral of airline bookings and all other related airline arrangements to airline companies and travel agents for all travels to and from Samoa beginning on the 22nd May, 2022
3. Opening of our national borders to everyone on the 1st of August 2022.
4. The resumption of Colleges, Post-Secondary Education Training on 18th May, 2022, primary schools on the 30th May, and pre-schools on the 4th July, 2022.

All other SOE Orders remain unchanged.

Government through the usual channels will communicate details of these Orders.

Our condolences to the families and loved ones of those persons who have passed away due to complications of the virus. We continue to keep you in our prayers.

God bless Samoa

SOIFUA