

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?