



Ministry of Health & Human Services

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MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES DIRECTIVE NO. 40-22 BELAU NATIONAL HOSPITAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

WHEREAS, Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a severe acute respiratory illness that was first identified in December 2019, and that occurs through human-to-human respiratory transmission and presents symptoms that are similar with influenza; and

WHEREAS, COVID-19 remains as a major threat to public health in the Republic, and is particularly dangerous to vulnerable populations including the elderly and those with underlying medical conditions; and

WHEREAS, as of March 21, 2022, there are over 470 million confirmed cases globally, including confirmed cases in the Republic; and

WHEREAS, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on January 30, 2020, and characterized it as a Pandemic on March 12, 2020, and further reaffirmed the outbreak as an ongoing PHEIC on August 1, 2020. The WHO and CDC recommend that all countries and territories implement aggressive measures to prevent and control the transmission of COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, the Minister of Health and Human Services (MHHS) certified the COVID-19 pandemic as an unavoidable public health emergency in the Republic on March 17, 2020, channeling all efforts toward mitigating community transmission and limiting the risk of import and local transmission of other variants of COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, MHHS has conducted over 20,000 molecular laboratory tests in the Republic since April 2020, and has detected over 3,900 cases of COVID-19, allowing for appropriate response and mitigation, and MHHS maintains appropriate COVID-19 testing and clinical care in Palau; and

WHEREAS, since January 2021, MHHS has continued to conduct COVID-19 mass vaccinations since resulting with at least 98% of the entire population being fully vaccinated against COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, MHHS and the National Emergency Committee (NEC) have prepared and continue to maintain appropriate quarantine, isolation, and alternate care sites for COVID-19 cases, close contacts, and travelers, and the MHHS has secured testing and medical equipment and supplies, including personal protective equipment and pharmaceuticals in response to potential COVID-19 cases; and

WHEREAS, the community at large is encouraged to maintain the practice of personal, social, and public health measures for the prevention of COVID-19 infection and transmission, including receiving COVID19 vaccination, wearing face masks and physical distancing as appropriate, hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and disinfection practices; and

WHEREAS, notwithstanding the ongoing threat of the COVID-19 pandemic, the aforementioned epidemiological findings, quarantine, healthcare, and public health capacities and community engagement signify reasonable support for maintaining basic COVID-19 preventive measures;

NOW THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me as the Director of Public Health of the Republic of Palau, pursuant to its laws and Constitution, I hereby authorize the following:

Section 1. Ministry of Health and Human Services:

- Certification of COVID-19 as an Unavoidable Public Health Emergency is maintained.
- Belau National Hospital (BNH) Emergency Operations Plan remains activated;
- Public Health Emergency Operations Plan (PHEOP) remains activated;
- MHHS EOC remains activated to coordinate COVID-19 response;
- MHHS COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan remains activated and to be revised as necessary;
- MHHS maintains quarantine and isolation measures as authorized by relevant MHHS Directives and Rules & Regulations for Isolation and Quarantine of Contagious Diseases as appropriate;
- Mandate proper facemask wearing in all clinics, hospital wards, and Community Health Centers (CHC);
- Mandate physical distancing of at least three (3) feet in all medical facilities;
- BNH chronic disease clinics and elective surgeries shall be maintained with addition of virtual clinics and infection control measures;
- MHHS clinic hours to be staggered with regular cleaning and disinfecting to be maintained;
- Maintain enforcement of no-tobacco use regulations in MHHS facilities and grounds;
- BNH in-patient visiting hours remain suspended;
- All admitted patients to only be allowed one (1) caretaker at any given time;
- High-risk individuals including 55 years and older or persons with underlying conditions are discouraged from visiting BNH unless seeking medical care or coming in for appointments;
- Prohibit loitering at all MHHS facilities;
- MHHS personnel to undergo COVID-19 testing as needed and to remain at home and isolate if they are sick unless otherwise instructed by supervisor;
- Maintain MHHS COVID-19 Hotline and risk communication activities;
- Maintain health screening, surveillance, and monitoring at all BNH and CHC points of entry as appropriate;
- Maintain COVID-19 testing, clinics, and vaccination efforts to cover as many Palau residents as possible, including boosters; and

Section 1.1 Private clinics:

- Mandate proper facemask wearing in all medical facilities;
- Mandate physical distancing of at least three (3) feet in all medical facilities;
- Implement screening, surveillance and monitoring outside the clinic/entry points;
- Conduct COVID-19 testing and referrals for patients to BNH COVID-19 clinic as necessary;
- Maintain/mandate vaccination (including boosters) for all employees;
- Prohibit loitering at premises;
- Discourage vulnerable populations from visiting unless for medical attention;
- Employees to stay home and isolate if they are sick; and
- Promote employee wellness; and

Section 2. Public Health Measures.

Worksites, restaurants, businesses:

- Maintain regular operating hours;
- Mandate proper facemask wearing for large indoor gatherings with 50 people or more;
- Recommend proper facemask wearing in all indoor facilities and at large outdoor gatherings if physical distancing cannot be maintained, particularly among vulnerable populations (unvaccinated, children under 5 years of age, the elderly, individuals with underlying medical conditions);
- Recommend physical distancing of at least three (3) feet among vulnerable populations (unvaccinated, children under 5 years of age, the elderly, individuals with underlying medical conditions);
- Engage in virtual meetings whenever possible;
- Maintain engineering and environmental controls including barriers, regular cleaning and disinfecting, and adequate ventilation in establishments;
- Monitor employees and patrons and disallow entry of sick people;
- Employers provide adequate sick leave for employees to remain home/isolate if they test positive for COVID-19 or are sick;
- Utilize your own pen and other stationery supplies;
- Maintain proper food safety practices;
- Implement pandemic-safe certification measures (if certified);
- Encourage employees and patrons to continue practicing preventive measures including proper hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette; and

Schools and child-care centers:

- Maintain face-to-face learning in schools and/or provide online learning as appropriate;
- Mandate proper facemask wearing in all indoor facilities;
- Recommend proper facemask wearing at large outdoor gatherings if physical distancing cannot be maintained, particularly among vulnerable populations (unvaccinated, children under 5 years of age, the elderly, individuals with underlying medical conditions);
- Recommend physical distancing of at least three (3) feet among vulnerable populations (unvaccinated, children under 5 years of age, the elderly, individuals with underlying medical conditions)
- Ensure distance/online learning capacity and preparation for virtual classes;
- Develop a continuity of operations/contingency plan for when a child, student, or staff member tests positive for COVID-19;
- Develop or update a plan with MHHS to identify, isolate, and conduct case tracing, as appropriate in the event of a positive case in schools and child-care centers;
- Teach, promote and implement proper hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, and other relevant preventive measures as appropriate or recommended by Public Health;
- Students and school staff must remain at home/isolate if they test positive for COVID-19 or are sick, and to call healthcare provider for advice as necessary;
- Maintain regular cleaning and disinfecting of objects and surfaces; and

Public parks, gyms, and other recreational areas

- Maintain regular operations;
- Mandate proper facemask wearing for large indoor gatherings with 50 people or more;
- Recommend proper facemask wearing in all indoor facilities and at large outdoor gatherings if physical distancing cannot be maintained, particularly among vulnerable populations (unvaccinated, children under 5 years of age, the elderly, individuals with underlying medical conditions);

- Recommend physical distancing of at least three (3) feet among vulnerable populations (unvaccinated, children under 5 years of age, the elderly, individuals with underlying medical conditions);
- Promote proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette;
- Enforce strict no-alcohol consumption in public places;
- Maintain engineering and environmental controls including barriers, regular cleaning and disinfecting, and adequate ventilation in facilities; and

Organized activities including sporting, social, religious, and cultural events:

- Mandate proper facemask wearing for large indoor gatherings with 50 people or more;
- Recommend proper facemask wearing in all indoor facilities and at large outdoor gatherings if physical distancing cannot be maintained, particularly among vulnerable populations (unvaccinated, children under 5 years of age, the elderly, individuals with underlying medical conditions);
- Recommend physical distancing of at least three (3) feet among vulnerable populations (unvaccinated, children under 5 years of age, the elderly, individuals with underlying medical conditions);
- Stay home/isolate and avoid attending events if you are positive for COVID-19 or are sick;
- Promote proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette;
- Regular cleaning and disinfecting of event spaces;
- Maintain proper food safety practices;
- Avoid sharing materials and other items, i.e., water containers, eating utensils; and

General measures:

- Mandate proper facemask wearing in all schools, medical facilities, and large indoor gatherings with 50 people or more;
- Recommend proper facemask wearing in all indoor facilities and at large outdoor gatherings if physical distancing cannot be maintained, particularly among vulnerable populations (unvaccinated, children under 5 years of age, the elderly, individuals with underlying medical conditions);
- Recommend physical distancing of at least three (3) feet among vulnerable populations (unvaccinated, children under 5 years of age, the elderly, individuals with underlying medical conditions);
- Isolate and get tested for COVID-19 if you are experiencing symptoms; if you test positive, follow isolation and quarantine procedures from Public Health;
- Avoid close contact with others who are sick;
- Practice proper hand hygiene of at least 20 seconds with soap and water or with 70% alcohol-based sanitizer;
- Practice cough and sneezing etiquette by covering mouth and nose with disposable tissue or shirt sleeve;
- Spit bottles (olbaol) must have cover, should not be shared and disposed of properly;
- Phones and other handheld devices should be regularly disinfected and should not be shared; • Exercise self-care;
- Encourage agencies responsible for elderly care to maintain practice of relevant preventive measures to limit the risk of infection of the elderly;
- Maintain quarantine and testing requirements for all travelers in accordance with relevant MHHS directives and regulations;
- Encourage general public to seek COVID-19 testing and necessary treatment at BNH/Community Health Centers or contact the BNH Emergency Room if they exhibit COVID-19 symptoms;

- Encourage all eligible individuals in the community to receive full COVID-19 vaccination (including boosters);
- Encourage all in the community to observe all MHHS alerts, advisories, information releases, and technical guidance; and
- Maintain MHHS collaboration with relevant government and community partners to execute and implement all necessary COVID-19 prevention and containment measures in the community.

Section 3. Effective date and term.

This directive supersedes and replaces MHHS Directive 24-22, which was issued on February 18, 2022. Unless cancelled, revoked, or re-issued, this directive shall remain in effect for 30 days from the date of issuance until April 20, 2022.

Issued this 21st day of March at the Ministry of Health and Human Services in Koror, Republic of Palau.



Sherilynn Madraisau
Director of Public Health
Ministry of Health and Human Services