



PRESS RELEASE

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Balimo hospital continues COVID-19 screening

Many people in Papua New Guinea have quickly forgotten about the COVID-19 global pandemic because, so far, it has not affected PNG like many other countries. We are fortunate in not having one recorded death. The government's quick actions to close the borders, and lock down the nation have helped to suppress this deadly disease.

But now is not the time to forget and become complacent. Global COVID-19 infections continue to rise. Recent outbreaks in Melbourne, Australia serve as a timely reminder about how quickly the disease can re-appear and spread. Those outbreaks were caused by large family gatherings and the failure of security staff to use personal protection equipment.

Here in Papua New Guinea many family members live together closely and so health workers in Balimo last week remained on high alert, with visitors and patients to the hospital screened by members of the PNG Sustainable Development Program's Aerial Health Patrols WASH program.

All 1325 outpatients and visitors entering the hospital grounds washed their hands with soap at the gate, and went through an outdoors triage process. 768 bars of soap were distributed to family groups, 98 groups received hand-washing demonstrations, and 25 groups learnt about personal infection control (hand washing and social distancing) and were given a set of informative COVID-19 brochures which can be viewed on SDP's Facebook page.

Mr. Ray Krai, the AHP Health Services Superintendent said: *"we are happy that lots of people are benefiting from these services and want to remind everyone that washing your hands frequently, staying 1.5 metres apart, and wearing a mask when sick, all help to prevent the spread of this disease."*

When the PNG lockdown was first announced, the AHP redeployed to the Balimo Hospital and in collaboration with the Provincial COVID-19 Taskforce, established and has continued to manage a Respiratory Illness Triage facility there. After special exemption from the SOE Controller, an AHP patrol team continued services out to remote communities delivering COVID-19 awareness, hand washing demonstrations, soap, reusable face masks, tippy taps, urgently required drugs and medical equipment, PPE, health worker training, food and clinical services.



SDP-AHP midwife, Maria Rumints at one of the hand washing stations in Balimo.



Tippy Tap demonstrations at Nomad Health Centre.

These patrol services are designed to complement and supplement existing government or church health services. Currently, the AHP partnership visits 18 airstrip communities on a regular basis staying on the ground for four days. Next month, a third team will be launched with more communities added to the schedule.