

Briefing paper (Supplementary to other EMT briefing paper on current state of preparedness)

COVID related issues with EMT deployment

Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs) and other forms of Health responders will potentially be required to respond between Pacific countries and from near neighbours (Australia and New Zealand) during the next 18-24 months for a variety of reasons including:

- Clinical and Public Health response to overwhelming case load of COVID patients and related continuity of other health services (Reproductive and Paediatric Health services, NCDs etc)
- Other disease outbreaks
- Cyclone response
- Other disasters (Earthquake, Tsunami, Volcanic eruption, flooding etc)

There are several potential barriers to the deployment of EMTs and other Health response teams during COVID that need to be resolved, particularly before the next Cyclone system. As noted during recent discussions in the Caribbean pre-Hurricane season, countries must set up clear protocols regarding the following:

- Clear messaging to local populations sheltering from storms to stay in family groups, but practice physical distancing with others outside your immediate family even when in cyclone shelters
- Consideration of designating that only EMTs from countries and states that have low community transmission will be accepted for the short and medium term
- Pre-deployment testing for COVID to decrease the risk of introducing the disease through responders
- Designating reasonable protocols that will apply to limit EMT and other response teams interaction with the general population for the first 5-7 days (and then repeat testing the team to ensure negative testing). This should not limit care, but care should be provided while wearing PPE.
- Response teams should be self-sufficient in PPE and other needs if they are to offer to respond.

Economic Recovery Support by Health to local Businesses

Health Ministries could call upon the services of emergency health response training groups in Australia to support them to better work with local Pacific Businesses in educating business owners in COVID Safe re-opening. This has the potential to speed up the safe reopening of the local economy with strong Public Health support. Experiences from Queensland has shown that effective training with Businesses using simple language and explanation of Public Health processes, and adaptation of generic protocols to the specifics of each site and type of business restores confidence and helps maintain Public Health practices at the local business level far more effectively than simply posting information on websites. This potential role of the Ministries of Health to support other Ministries and local businesses in each Pacific country to help economic recovery while maintaining COVID safety is worthy of further discussion.