



**REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
MINISTRY OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES**

P.O. Box 16 ~ Majuro ~ Marshall Islands ~ 96960

Tel. No. (692) 625-5327 Email: sechhs.rmi@gmail.com



September 7th, 2022

RE: Public Advisory-Travel to Covid-19 free Neighboring Islands.

At the present time, the Ministry of Health and Human services and the National Disaster Committee has responded to the introduction of Covid-19 into several neighboring islands communities. Travel to Covid-19 free islands is temporarily suspended.

- On 8/8/2022, community transmission of Covid-19 occurred on Majuro. This was followed by cases on Ebeye as well as presumptive cases (later confirmed) in several new neighboring islands with epi-linkages to Majuro (through air and sea travel in the week preceding 8/8/2022).
- The variant of Covid-19 introduced in the RMI has been confirmed through genomic sequencing to be Omicron BA.5. This is a highly transmissible strain (R0= 15) This means, an infected person has the potential to infect 15 other individuals. Current RMI mortality rate stands at .11% (17 deaths), which is very low compared to other countries in the region and around the world.
- Atolls and Islands with presumptive and later, confirmed cases, of Covid-19 required the mobilization of health personnel under the umbrella of the "Marshall Islands Medical Assistance Teams (MI-MAT)", which are composed of public health and clinical staff and are deployed using locally available resources (AMI- air bridge). Interventions included the distribution of Covid-19 test kits, PPE, therapeutics (e.g., *PaxLovid*) and the training of resident health assistants to be able to diagnose and manage cases of Covid-19.
- The strategy employed to limit mortality in the RMI is aggressive case finding via testing and identifying individuals at high risk of developing severe disease and putting them on effective therapeutics.
- A high proportion of residents in the neighboring islands (NI's) have also received Covid-19 vaccinations: These vaccinations play an important role in preventing severe disease. A new bivalent vaccine (booster for 12 years and above) will be offered in the NI's, which is highly effective in preventing Covid-19.

For Covid-19 free atolls, the MOHHS is in the process of visiting these islands with health teams, preposition diagnostic kits, PPE, therapeutics, and is actively working on capacity building with the local Health Assistants. A round of vaccinations for residents will also be carried out. After which, travel to the NI's under strict prerequisites aimed at delaying the introduction of Covid-19 into these communities will be allowed.

Pre-travel (Covid-19 free NI's)

1. **Proof of Covid-19 vaccination-** Primary series and boosted as eligible (per RMI Covid-19 vaccination recommendations)
2. **Negative rapid antigen test** at port of departure.

The MOHHS will indicate when a Covid-19 free island (NI) is ready for travel from Covid-19 affected areas. This is when an island is ready to effectively respond to an outbreak of Covid-19.

-----END-----