

ROADMAP TO SAFE RE-OPENING OF BORDERS

HEALTH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REDUCING RISK OF IMPORTATION, SPREAD & IMPACT OF COVID-19 IN VANUATU

Produced by: Ministry of Health with support of Health Technical Advisory Group
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Rationale

Despite the absence of local COVID-19 transmission in Vanuatu, the global pandemic has had extensive economic and social impacts as well as indirect effects on the health and well-being of the population. This Roadmap proposes a phased approach to enable the Government of Vanuatu to progressively ease border restrictions in the safest way possible. This should guide other sectors to develop their respective plans. Use of the health measures outlined will enable a cautious approach with the flexibility to adapt based on the evolving situation locally and internationally.

This Roadmap aligns with the *Health Sector Preparedness and Response Plan* (version 6.0). It builds on earlier work conducted by the Ministry of Health, including the assessment of *Vanuatu's Health Sector Readiness for Quarantine Free Travel* (Version 1, 29 January 2021).

Aim

This Roadmap defines health measures to reduce the risk of importation, spread and impact of COVID-19 during phased re-opening of international borders for quarantine-free entry. It also defines community vaccination coverage rates and health system readiness milestones that will guide progression (or regression) through the phases and considers the COVID-19 Alert Level.

Proposed 3-Phase Approach

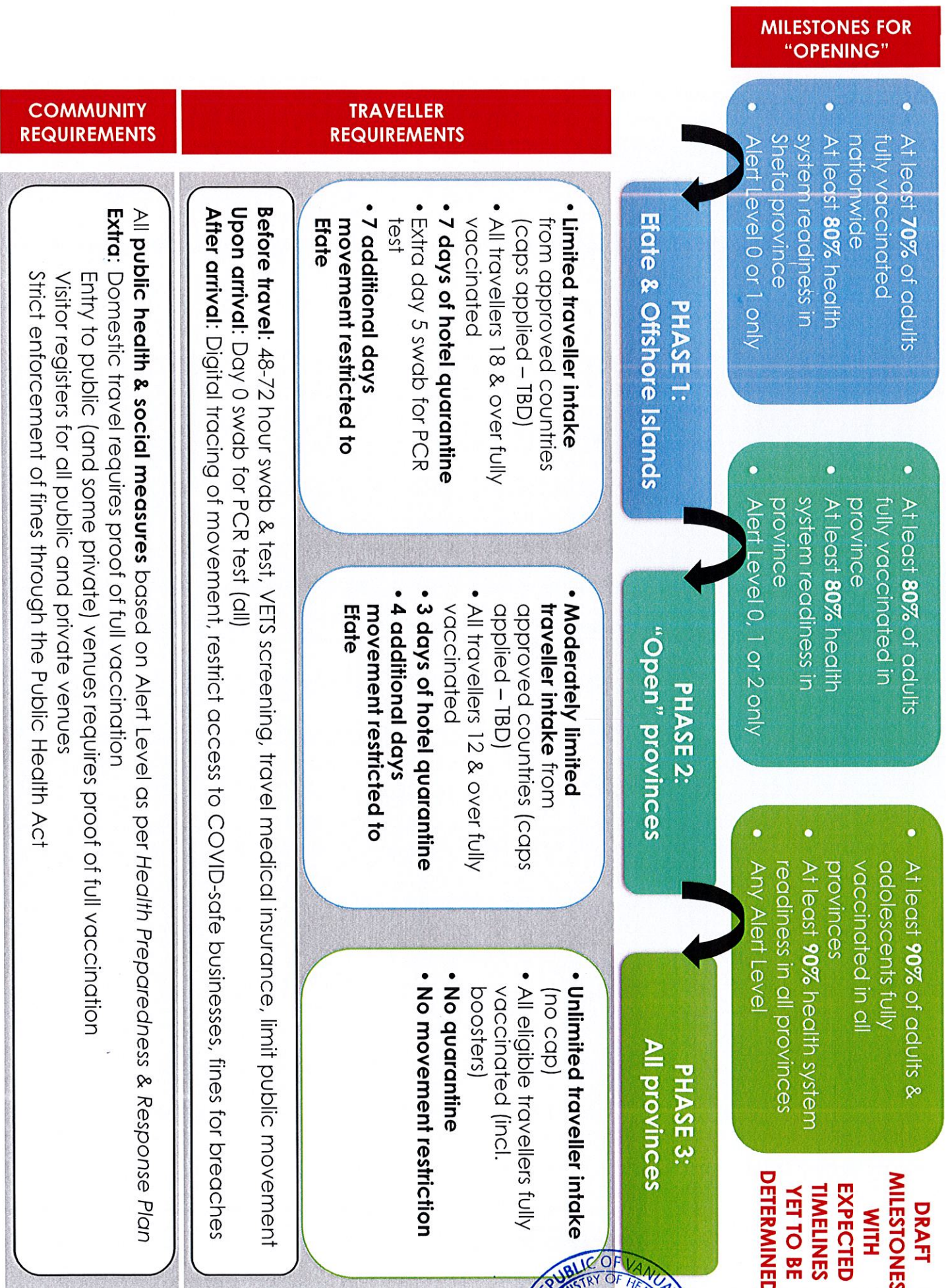
To date, Vanuatu has successfully applied a range of public health and social measures to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 (Annex 1). It is important to acknowledge that **any relaxation of measures carries with it an increased risk of importation, spread and/or impact of COVID-19**. As this risk increases, it is essential that readiness to respond to cases in the community increases. A phased approach to border opening is therefore proposed that gradually relaxes most measures, whilst increasing vaccine coverage and health systems readiness.

A summary of the proposed approach is shown in Figure 1, with further details provided in Annex 1. The expected timelines associated with the phases will be determined in 2022 based on an updated assessment of vaccination coverage and health system readiness.



Figure 1. Overview of proposed phased approach to safe border re-opening

VERSION 1.0



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Relative to the measures currently applied, variations by phase will include:

- Increasing traveller vaccination requirements to include ages under 18 years old
- Increasing the number of travellers allowed on planes and in quarantine facilities
- Reducing quarantine duration to 7 days, 3 days and then 0 days
- Restricting movement to Efate for 7 then 4 days after quarantine
- Reducing upon-arrival swabbing and testing requirements

Other requirements will be introduced, including:

- Recommended limitation in pre-travel public movement at travel origin
- Mandatory medical insurance for travellers
- Digital traveller movement registers
- Proof of vaccination to enable domestic travel and entry to venues
- Digital venue visitor registers

Modalities for implementing some of the measures are yet to be detailed. For instance, reduced-duration quarantine in Phase 1 and Phase 2 may be coordinated by quarantine facilities (hotels) with some adaption to enable hotel-based activities. Digital venue visitor registries may be developed and implemented with the support of the private sector.

Progressing through the phases

The milestones for progressing from one phase to the next are mainly assessed at provincial level based on:

- Community COVID-19 vaccination coverage rates
- Health systems readiness
- Vanuatu Outbreak Alert System Alert level

Figure 2. Proposed milestones to progress through the phases to opening

	Milestones to move to Phase 1	Milestones to move to Phase 2	Milestones to move to Phase 3
COVID-19 vaccination coverage*	At least 70% of adults fully vaccinated (39% of total population)	At least 80% of adults fully vaccinated in province (45% of total population)	At least 90% of adults and adolescents fully vaccinated in province (60% of total population)
Health system readiness	At least 80% in all capacity areas in Shefa	At least 80% in all capacity areas in province	At least 90% in all capacity areas in all provinces
Alert level	Level 0 or 1 only	Level 0, 1 or 2	Any Level
Area of application	Efate and Offshore Islands	Provinces that meet milestones	All provinces

It is anticipated that individual provinces will meet the milestones at different times. Therefore, provinces will sequentially "open" based on these milestones. Measures will be put in place to ensure that traveller intakes are strictly limited in those areas that are not yet "open" though modalities are yet to be determined as this will require multi-sector involvement.

a) Community COVID-19 vaccination coverage rates

Vaccination coverage nationally and in each province is also a key consideration for the safe opening of borders. These have been defined based on the ability to prevent severe disease, hospitalization and death so as to prevent health systems collapse, and are not expected to prevent community transmission of COVID-19.

At present, the key vaccination coverage indicator used is the rate for adults 18 years and over in all areas. The key indicator and milestones may change as the vaccination strategy changes, such as to represent the vaccination rate for those 12 and over. Current vaccination coverage rates are provided at <https://covid19.gov.vu/index.php/vaccination/information>

Figure 3. Coverage indicators and potential targets

Adults 18 & over	Total population	Adults + adolescents 12 & over	Total population
70%	39%	70%	46%
80%	45%	80%	53%
90%	50%	90%	60%

b) Health systems readiness

Capacity areas have been defined by the Ministry of Health that are considered as prerequisite for safe re-opening of international borders and the establishment of quarantine-free travel. These were detailed in the assessment of *Vanuatu's Health Sector Readiness for Quarantine Free Travel* and the updated *Health Sector Preparedness and Response Plan* (version 6). Annex 2 presents the capacity areas and current capacity although an updated assessment is required.

c) Vanuatu Outbreak Alert System Alert level

The COVID-19 situation in Vanuatu is a key consideration in border opening, as this can affect health systems readiness including capacity to deal with any additional cases that may arise from travellers. At present, an initial simple linkage to Alert Levels is proposed as detailed in Figure 1. The risk posed by individual travellers is relatively low in the situation where there is already ongoing community transmission (ie. Alert Level 3), therefore this is reflected in the criteria defined for the phased approach. Information on the current alert level is available on www.covid19.gov.vu. Measures required for each alert level may be subject to revision; for instance, if high vaccination rates are achieved the requirement to "Stay home except for essential personal movements" in Alert Level 2 and Alert Level 3 may not be necessary.

Pauses or reversion between phases

Criteria for pauses in this phased approach, or regression to a previous phase are:

- a) Increases to Alert Level 2 or Level 3 of the Vanuatu Outbreak Alert System
- b) Emergence of new COVID-19 variants of concern that significantly increase risk in Vanuatu
- c) Significant reductions in capacity for COVID-19 preparedness or response in key capacity areas, OR
- d) Occurrence reductions in capacity for preparedness and response, such as due to another emergency or natural disaster.

The decision to pause or resume the phased approach to safe re-opening of borders will be taken by the Minister of Health upon advice from the Health Emergency Advisory Group, with endorsement by the Council of Ministers.

It is also possible that there may be the need to progress backwards by reverting to a previous phase. This would be required in the event of widespread community transmission that is overwhelming the health system.

Enforcement

The legality of enforcing the measures under the Public Health Act [Cap 234] and associated amendments is yet to be determined. Enforcement of regulations including through fines and/or imprisonment must be considered for:

- Breaches by travellers of quarantine or test requirements
- Provision by travellers of inaccurate or misleading information
- Breaches by travellers of movement restrictions such as where travel is limited to Efate following quarantine
- Requirement for provision of proof of full vaccination to allow domestic travel or to allow venue entry for the general public
- Requirement for maintaining venue visitor registers for businesses
- Requirement for following COVID-safe protocols for businesses

Inputs by other sectors

This document defines health measures to be implemented in the phased approach, many of which are beyond the scope of work of the health sector and the Ministry of Health. It is anticipated that other sectors will contribute to enable safe re-opening of borders, such as by supporting the implementation of certain measures that include:

- Management of traveller 'streams', such as through red and green travel lanes (as initially outlined in the earlier document on *Operationalising quarantine-free travel in parallel with standard and variation quarantine*)
- Establishment of an integrated online traveller registration system that collects health and other information and facilitates communication with potential travellers
- Digital applications for tracking traveller movement or for venue visitor registration
- Community isolation centers in Alert levels 2 and 3 (as per health sector plans)



Figure 2. Overview of the risk mitigation measures current being applied and those proposed for Phases 1, 2 and 3. Relative risk is indicated by shading: lower (green), moderate (yellow), higher (red).

PRE-TRAVEL: to reduce rate of importation				
	CURRENT	PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3
Traveller vaccination status	All adult travellers required to be fully vaccinated	All adult travellers fully vaccinated	Travellers 12 & only fully vaccinated	All eligible travellers fully vaccinated (including boosters)
Negative PCR test result	Required 24-72 hours before travel	Required 24-72 hours before travel	Required 24-72 hours before travel	Required 24-72 hours before travel
VETs symptom and exposure history screening ⁺	Required	Required	Required	Required
Request to limit public movement at travel origin	Not required	7-days before travel	3-days before travel	Not required
Traveller origin (considers incidence, variants) [^]	All	Approved countries only [^]	Approved countries only [^]	All
Number of people per flight ⁺	Moderately limited (eg. 120)	Moderately limited (eg. 120)	Moderately limited (eg. 120)	Unlimited
Travel insurance (that covers COVID) ⁺	Not required	Required for non-citizens	Required of non-citizens	Required for non-citizens
UPON ARRIVAL: to increase likelihood of containment				
Quarantine duration	14-days in mandated hotel with government coordination	7-days in approved hotel with private coordination	3-days in approved hotel with private coordination	Not required
Number of people in quarantine [*]	450 per 2 weeks	450 per 1 week	450 per 1 week	Unlimited
Arrival swab for PCR testing	Day 0	Day 0	Day 0	Day 0



	CURRENT	PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3
AFTER ARRIVAL: to detect, slow and stop transmission				
Swab and PCR testing	Day 5 & 11	Days 5	Not required	Not required
Domestic movement restrictions for travellers ⁺	Not required / NA	7-days on Efate	4-days on Efate	Not required
Digital tracing of movement ⁺	Not required	Required at all times (TBD if for travellers only)	Required at all times (TBD if for travellers only)	Required at all times (TBD if for travellers only)
Restrict access to COVID-safe operators ⁺	Required only during Alert Levels 2 & 3	Required for travellers only for 7-days after quarantine	Required for travellers only for 4-days after quarantine	Required for travellers only (timeline TBD)
Venue-based registers for visitors (paper or digital) ⁺	Required only during Alert Levels 2 & 3	Required at all times (TBD if for everyone or just travellers)	Required at all times (TBD if for everyone or just travellers)	Required at all times (TBD if for everyone or just travellers)
Venue entry requires vaccine proof ⁺	Required only during Alert Levels 2 & 3	Required at all times for everyone	Required at all times for everyone	Required at all times for everyone
Domestic travel requires vaccine proof ⁺	Not required	Required at all times for everyone	Required at all times for everyone	Required at all times for everyone
Public Health Act for breaches of requirements	Not applied	Strictly applied	Strictly applied	Strictly applied

* Depends on available staff to process repatriates, facility-based measures, and number of facilities

[^] For non-citizens only

⁺ Implementation of these measures may need to be led by non-health sectors, including private sector



Annex 1. Overview of health system readiness

Overview of the readiness by province and overall in key capacity areas for COVID-19 preparedness and response (preliminary update in December 2021). % readiness is based on a detailed MOH/WHO assessment against standard criteria. Shading indicates overall readiness by component: low (red), moderate (yellow), high (green).

Component*	Shefa (estimate, to be confirmed)	Sanma	Penama	Malampa	Tafea	Torba	Overall
a) Incident management	94%						
b) Points of entry (POE)	100%						
c) Quarantine	96%						
d) Surveillance and contact tracing	85%						
e) Laboratory	92%						
f) Clinical management and health care services	72%						
g) Infection prevention and control	92%						
h) Risk communication and community engagement	92%						
i) Mental health and psycho-social support	100%						
j) Continuity of essential services	75%						

**ASSESSMENTS TO BE
COMPLETED IN Q1 2022
USING STANDARD TOOL
(VERSION 2)**

* Note: Vaccination has been removed as a capacity area, as the vaccination coverage rate is already considered as a trigger for progressing through phases.

