

General practice in the Coromandel – stretched thin, but committed to COVID-19 fight



Zahra

Shahtahmasebi

zshahtahmasebi@nzdoctor.co.nz

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Thames GP Martin Mikaere says general practice teams in the Coromandel are stretched thin responding to the latest COVID-19 outbreak

General practices in the Coromandel Peninsula have been working hard to continue swabbing and delivering the COVID-19 vaccine throughout the latest lockdown.

The teams are “stretched thin” but are committed to getting the job done, says Thames GP and Hauraki PHO clinical director Martin Mikaere.

Based at Te Korowai Hauora o Hauraki, Dr Mikaere says the day after the lockdown announcement was made on 17 August, he got his practice ready to deal with an increase in swabbing, and the rest of his team travelled to the Coromandel township to help out there.

It soon became apparent they needed a lot more help, so Dr Mikaere, along with further staff from the Waikato DHB, headed down too.

PERLs to help out

Yesterday it was announced the Ministry of Health was to extend funding for the Pandemic Emergency Roving Locums service.

In a media release today, the New Zealand Rural General Practice Network says, as funding is limited, the aim for remaining funds will be to support Coromandel and rural Auckland practices that are bearing the brunt of the COVID-19 response.

The recent outbreak has highlighted the vulnerability of rural areas and their practices, says network chief executive Grant Davidson, who welcomes the ministry's decision.

"Practices in the Coromandel now have to ramp up to achieve testing levels that will contain further spread of the virus," Dr Davidson says. "We are working with the PHOs in that area to monitor workload issues and provide support where possible."

Anxiety on the rise

Dr Mikaere says anxiety has been on the rise amongst locals after the first detected community case was reported to have travelled to the Coromandel over the weekend.

"But it has also acted to turn people both pro-swabbing and vaccination who were uncertain before. And having us here has also helped calm people down.

"So far there's been no positives, but also this is the Delta variant, so who knows?"

Pop-up swabbing

He appreciates the support of Waikato DHB, which has provided the pop-up swabbing station with two marquees to keep them safe from the elements amid changeable weather.

Pop-up swabbing has been running next door to the Coromandel Family Health Centre, which has created an efficient system. "They drive in one way, get swabbed, then go through to the medical centre and get their vaccination," says Dr Mikaere.

He adds Te Korowai Hauora o Hauraki was the first one to go mobile during the last lockdown and has a van fully decked out for swabbing and vaccinating.

Since the lockdown was announced, he has noticed an increase in traffic on the roads heading to the Coromandel as he has driven back home to Thames each night.

"People have been streaming through, and there's been a lot more Aucklanders in town, but we just have to get on with it.

"It would be nice to see a bit of appreciation instead of just coming down to stay in a beach house for seven days and adding more work for us."