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## **COVID-19 SITUATION REPORT: POHNPEI STATE, FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA RODNEY ITAKI**

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### ABSTRACT:

The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) instituted travel ban for in bound passengers coming into the country since March 2020 as a measure of preventing COVID-19 entering the country. The FSM was COVID-19 free until January 2021 when the country reported its first imported case. COVID-19 vaccination has commenced and is ongoing. This brief report presents a situation update and summary of the present situation in the country.

**Keywords:** Federated States of Micronesia, Pohnpei State, COVID-19, coronavirus pandemic.

### INTRODUCTION:

On March 15 2020 Governor of Guam Lou Guerrero announced that three individuals on Guam were tested positive for COVID-19. Two of the cases flew in from Manila, Philippines on a United Flight on the morning of March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2020 and one of the cases had no travel history. In response to the positive cases identified in Guam, the government of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) declared a public health emergency and instituted travel restrictions following the country's COVID-19 contingency plan [1]. The FSM is accessible by plane via Guam or via Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. It has been nearly 12 months since travel ban was introduced by the government of FSM. No inbound passengers are allowed into FSM. Only outbound passengers are permitted. United

Airlines is the only airline company currently flying into the FSM moving cargo into and out of the FSM. This brief report will provide some update on the COVID-19 situation in the State of Pohnpei, FSM. Pohnpei is one of four states that constitute FSM. The other three states are Chuuk, Kosrae and Yap.

### Response and preparedness since February

**2020:** Travel restrictions have been in place since March 2020 [1]. In October 2020 the Pohnpei State government extended the restrictions to February 2021 [2]. This means that no person will be granted entry into Pohnpei until February 2021 when this restriction will be reviewed by the state government. Stakeholder engagement is ongoing and the FSM government is working with the World Health

Organization (WHO) and United States Center for Disease Control (CDC) providing situation report to the department of health for ongoing preparations [3, 4]. Public awareness, surveillance and testing are ongoing [3, 4]. The government of China donated 10 self contained isolation units that have been installed at a COVID-19 designated treatment site and will be used for treatment and monitoring of any person that is tested positive for COVID-19 [5].

**Challenges:** Pohnpei State does not have the infrastructure and finance to mount an adequate response to COVID-19. Therefore FSM government has been supported by the United States government to help prepare and improve existing infrastructure. There are 18 doctors working at the state hospital, 11 of whom are above 40 years of age so these physicians are high risk for COVID-19. The high burden of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and chronic obstructive airway diseases in FSM also pose a major threat to the population.

**How will Pohnpei deal with COVID-19 in 2021?** The strategy for Pohnpei is travel restrictions and vaccination. This decision has been influenced by the state's lack of infrastructure and human resource capacity to deal with COVID-19. The FSM government started its COVID-19 vaccination campaign on December 31<sup>st</sup> 2020 when it received the first

1600 doses of the Moderna Vaccine [6] and is still continuing. The priority groups are healthcare workers, frontline border and security personal and high risk segments of the population such as those with pre-existing chronic medical conditions (e.g. diabetes, hypertension, chronic lung diseases). The FSM recorded its first case of COVID-19 on January 7<sup>th</sup> 2021 [7]. The case was a crew of a sea vessel returning from the Philippines. However, upon further testing and investigation, the case was deemed an historical case and WHO declared the FSM COVID-19 free [8]. There have been no other positive cases. Surveillance and other public health measures for COVID-19 are ongoing.

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