

Covid-19 live updates, March 30: New World says it's still discounting as normal; Ardern focused on lowering alert level

March 30, 2020



Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announces the move to level four (Photo: Getty Images)

For all The Spinoff's latest coverage of Covid-19 see [here](#). Read Siouxsie Wiles's work [here](#). New Zealand is currently in alert level four. The country is [shut down](#), apart from [essential services](#). For

updated official government advice, see [here](#).

The Spinoff's coverage of the Covid-19 outbreak is funded by The Spinoff Members. To support this work, [join The Spinoff Members here](#).

On the live updates mid-morning shift: Alex Braae

9.50am: New stories today on The Spinoff

Petitions have been launched calling for much better pay for those essential workers who have to keep showing up during the lockdown, reports [Toby Manhire](#). Among the workers deemed essential during this period are supermarket workers, health workers including nurses and cleaners, emergency services and bus drivers.

And in a reflective essay, historian [Ayelet Zoran-Rosen](#) writes about how societies in the past have dealt with plagues and pandemics. Some of the measures taken have been pretty harsh, but some aren't in principle all that different from what we're doing today.

8.55am: Reserve Bank has another big Monday morning

For the third straight Monday, the Reserve Bank has announced major moves to combat the Covid-19 downturn. In an effort to put more liquidity into the corporate sector, they're launching a purchasing

programme of Corporate and Asset-Backed securities, calling it an Open Market Operation. Assistant Governor Christian Hawkesby said this facility “would provide another channel for banks to continue funding their corporate clients.” More details can be found in the [RBNZ’s media release](#).

8.30am: Horticulture fears fruit will rot on the vine

With lockdown restrictions coming right in the middle of the kiwifruit and apple harvest season, horticulture companies worry that some fruit won’t end up being picked, or be able to be packed. [Radio NZ](#) reports workforces in some kiwifruit packhouses have had to be cut in half to observe safe distance protocols, and tray volumes are way down as a result. It’s little different in the apple industry, with some estimating that more than 10% of this year’s crop won’t be picked. It’s a stark contrast to several weeks ago, when horticulture was held up as an [employment saviour](#) for those who had lost work in forestry and other primary industries.

8.15am: Foodstuffs NI CEO says its specials are still running

Supermarket giant Countdown’s [decision to suspend specials](#) during the lockdown looks set to draw continued scrutiny this week, after rival Foodstuffs North Island CEO Chris Quin confirmed that his chains are running

nearly as many discounts as they would normally. Quin, whose chains include New World and Pak n Save, told Newstalk ZB's Mike Hosking this morning that "hand on heart" there is no price gouging happening at Pak n Save and New World stores.

He said Foodstuffs have been monitoring the specials and prices of trolleys and there has only been a small increase since the lockdown, which he attributed to product shortages. "In a normal week we would have around 5000 specials in store in New World and last week we had around 4800 because some of our products are low or out of stock and we can't put a product on sale when it's out."

There have been [calls for a pricing probe](#) into supermarkets in recent days, and PM Jacinda Ardern has asked for a briefing on the matter.

Meanwhile, the PM also confirmed in the Newstalk ZB interview that supermarkets would stay open for Easter, in contrast to the regular holiday trading rules.

7.40am: PM says focus on moving parts of NZ to lower alert after four weeks

In an interview on RNZ's Morning Report, prime minister Jacinda Ardern has signalled that if the virus is contained, some regions of New Zealand could be able to relax the

current restrictions on movement and gathering. "My focus is on at the end of the four weeks, at least for some parts of the country, moving to a lower level of alert."

The response came off the back of questions about New Zealanders returning home, and on how long border restrictions might remain in place. Ardern singled out the tourism industry as being particularly exposed to the economic side of the crisis, and admitted that it was likely the border would remain highly restricted for a long time. "Unless you're a country with herd immunity... I think most countries in the world will be doing border restrictions," she told Morning Report's Susie Ferguson.

New Zealanders spend around \$35bn on tourism and travel, while inbound tourists spend around \$41bn here – so theoretically were a sizeable proportion of that demand to transfer to domestic tourism during the period of restricted travel, it would go some way to mitigating the economic fallout of the virus.

She also reiterated, again, her disappointment with the Australian government's continued exclusion of New Zealanders from its benefits. "It in my mind demonstrates why those benefits are so important right now," she said, "otherwise it incentivises people to go to work when they're sick."

7.15am: Facebook launches fact-checking initiative for NZ and Pacific

Facebook's regional policy head Mia Garlick has today announced that Facebook has expanded its third-party fact-checking initiative to cover New Zealand and the Pacific Islands. The social media giant will work with Australian Associated Press (AAP), who Garlick says "will independently [review content](#) and [rate its accuracy](#) so we can continue to reduce the spread of misinformation on our platforms."

The move is tied to what Garlick says is a three part strategy to "combat misinformation on Facebook and Instagram", noting that the company considers that critically important "during sensitive times such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the lead-up to the 2020 New Zealand General Election."

The three parts are, all per Facebook:

- **Remove content that violates its Community Standards:** "We want to make sure people see accurate information on the platform, and fake accounts are often behind harmful and misleading content and we work hard to keep them off Facebook."
- **Reduce misinformation rated as 'false':** "We want to strike a balance between enabling New Zealanders to express themselves and promoting a trusted environment. For content that doesn't violate our Community Standards or misinformation that

doesn't directly lead to physical harm, we contract AAP in New Zealand to review and rate the accuracy of content. We use various indicators, including [feedback](#) from people on Facebook, to predict whether articles, photos, and videos may be false and send this to our partners to review. When they rate a piece of content as 'false' — including false news and other types of viral misinformation, like memes or manipulated photos and videos — we will dramatically reduce its distribution on Facebook and Instagram.

- **Inform people when they see misinformation on Facebook's services:** "When a post is rated false by a fact-checker, we also add a strong 'false information' warning label over the content to notify people who still come across it, try to share it, or already have. We also show people [Related Articles](#) immediately below the post to help people stay informed with accurate, verified information from reputable sources."



7.10am: The Bulletin wrap-up of all New Zealand's key stories

[Taken from our essential daily 7am news roundup – sign up for that or The Spinoff's other newsletters here](#)

When will the Covid-19 lockdown across New Zealand end? Short answer – when it's actually safe to do so. Officially, the current state of level four restrictions will be in place for four weeks. But it's worth going into a bit more depth about how and why that could end up being longer.

Longer restrictions are already being talked about, with this [Newshub](#) piece being an example of that. It reported comments from PM Ardern which noted that the mechanisms in place could easily be extended. There could be regional lockdowns that continue, while other places may be able to open up again. It also noted that border restrictions are extremely unlikely to be lifted any time soon, given the virus appears to have spiralled out of control in many other countries, and it would simply be too dangerous to reopen before there's a vaccine. In Britain, one such country with a horrific and rapid rise in deaths, there are now government suggestions that the lockdown will be in place until June at least, reports the [Mirror](#).

The key point for New Zealand's domestic lockdowns will therefore be community transmission, and whether it has been stopped, according to this analysis from [Stuff's](#) Henry Cooke. **If it proves to actually be possible to eradicate Covid-19 from the country** – and there is a

chance of that happening – then we could see domestic life come close to returning to normal. According to the University of Otago’s Dr Michael Baker, who was quoted in the story, to be sure that was the case we’d basically need to be testing everyone with a fever to ensure that silent spread hadn’t been missed.

It won’t be until at least next week that we have a clearer picture of whether the lockdown is likely to be extended. That comes from an interview health minister David Clark gave [Q+A](#), in which he said that it would be about 10 days from the start of the lockdown before there was likely to be any bending of the curve on case rates, and for restrictions to be lifted would require a “significant” bend. He stressed that “we haven’t got into specific numbers,” and that tracking of cases would be crucial. But he also said that “it’s in our hands” to end the lockdown on time, provided everyone does their part.

Meanwhile **those breaking the lockdown rules are being told that they’re risking it being extended for everyone**. And after being inundated with calls about people breaking those rules, the police have now set up an [online system](#) by which people can be doxed in. There are very few situations where I’d encourage citizens to nark on each other for non-violent stuff, but this is certainly one of them, so if you know people are actively flouting the rules, report them.

New Zealand’s first death relating to Covid-19 has

been recorded. It was a woman in her 70s, on the West Coast, who was initially admitted to hospital for what was thought to be influenza, complicated by underlying health conditions. PM Ardern said it "brings home exactly why we are taking such strong measures to stop the spread of this virus. Left unchecked, it runs the risk of taking the lives of many more people." 21 staff at the hospital are now in self-isolation, after treating the woman with PPE suitable for influenza, rather than for Covid-19.

Further updates on current case numbers can be found in yesterday's [live updates page](#), but in brief: The total number is now 514, and there are seven '[significant clusters](#)' of cases around the country. Nine patients are currently in hospital, and an average of almost 1800 tests a day were processed over the last week. 56 patients have now recovered from their symptoms.

The Australian government is continuing to discriminate against New Zealand citizens who find themselves unemployed, reports [Radio NZ](#). The 650,000 NZers in Australia are barred from receiving a benefit, which has always been the case, but with mass unemployment about to hit the country has been thrown into the spotlight. A few people who are now in this position spoke to RNZ about their situation, with two laid off workers noting that up until they were made redundant (through no fault of their own) they had been hard-working taxpayers.

New Zealanders overseas continue to struggle to make it home, with options and transit routes dwindling. [One News](#) reported on the dozens of NZers still in Peru, many of which had been booked on a charter flight, but were then unable to connect through Sydney to get here. It goes both ways – there are some people from other countries stuck in New Zealand too. [Politik](#) this morning has reported on a plea for reciprocity from the British government, who have thousands of citizens currently stranded here.

Workers at one New World supermarket were told they won't be paid if they find themselves unable to work over the lockdown period, reported [Stuff](#) on Saturday. It quickly looked like spiralling into something of a PR disaster for the franchise over the weekend. However, on Sunday [One News](#) reported that policy would change, and that all vulnerable workers who had to self-isolate would continue to be paid. The Foodstuffs group (which includes New World, Pak'n'Save and Four Square) will also pay frontline staff a 10% bonus over the level four lockdown period – which could still result in some staff earning less than the living wage. Supermarkets are currently in a strong position financially, with a dramatic increase in their control over the consumer food supply market. Meanwhile, [petitions have been launched](#) calling for essential workers in a range of industries to be given 'danger pay' over this period.

6.40am: Australia finally bans boot camps

Australian prime minister Scott Morrison last night ordered something resembling [a full lockdown](#), as Australia limited gathering sizes in public spaces to two on the same day it recorded its 16th death from Covid-19. The rules are similar to New Zealand's level four, with today seeing the closure of outdoor gyms and skate parts, and the end of outdoor fitness boot camps – though you will still be able to meet outdoors with a personal trainer, according to Morrison. "People who are over 70, people with chronic illness over 60 and indigenous people over 50 are strongly advised to stay home," [reports The Guardian](#). As of this morning, Australia has [3,980 cases](#) of Covid-19.

I joined The Spinoff Members to support stories that might not otherwise get told.

Michael Gray, Spinoff Member

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The global total stands at 691,867, with the US, Italy, Spain and Germany the main centres now that China has largely stopped the virus' spread. There have been 146,000 recoveries, but over 32,000 deaths, over half in Italy and Spain, each of which remains under full lockdown. Italy recorded 779 deaths yesterday, a significant fall over the day prior. This is largely the result of Lombardy, the world's worst-hit region, seeing deaths

slow to 416 from 546.

New York has been described as the next Lombardy, and has currently recorded over 53,000 cases and 782 deaths, [according to](#) the New York Times. Its mayor Bill de Blasio [has warned](#) that it has just a week of medical supplies left. The US total currently stands at 125,000, up from 85,000 just two days ago. The CDC's Anthony Fauci [said yesterday](#) that the eventual US death toll was likely to top 100,000.

The virus' global spread continues with the Middle East passed 50,000 total infections, the vast majority in Iran, which has over 38,000. South Korea will impose mandatory 14 day quarantines for all travellers arriving from Wednesday, while China's recovery continues, with flights to Wuhan, and public transport within the city, resuming over the weekend.

[For yesterday's key developments within New Zealand read live updates from March 29](#)

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