

FSM Information Services

Message from the President

On the Occasion of the Return & COVID-19 Status of the MV Chief Mailo & Her Crew

Facebook Link: <https://fb.watch/2Xmn7zyMT9/>

YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/gJsfg7m-UMc>

My fellow Micronesian citizens,

For more than one year, we have been blessed to be a COVID-19 free country, living mostly normal lives while the rest of the World have not. Today, I address you to provide an update on the recent and alarming news that has reached many of you regarding our Nation's first positive case of COVID-19. I will first provide you information on the decisions I have made, updates on this COVID-19 case, and then I will update you on what we're doing to keep you and your loved ones safe, including our vaccine distribution efforts.

On December 23rd, 2020, I accepted the recommendation from the FSM National COVID-19 Task Force to inform a National Government ship, the MV Chief Mailo, to return from the Republic of the Philippines after spending more than one year there for drydock repairs. The Chief Mailo left the Philippines on December 24th, and arrived in the FSM on January 4th, 2021, where it has remained in Pohnpei State's lagoon under 24/7 surveillance.

The Chief Mailo is undergoing the same protocols and procedures we applied to the Caroline Voyager when it successfully left Japan for Pohnpei last November. Prior to leaving the Philippines, the crew of the Chief Mailo underwent multiple COVID-19 tests in September, October, and December. All test results were negative at that time.

I authorized the Chief Mailo to return home to the FSM because the Government was faced with two choices. The ship's crew were already at the minimum operation requirement, and some of the crew were saying that they would leave the ship to either stay in the Philippines or see their families stranded in Guam. The crew was rightfully fearful of increasing numbers of pirates in the region, which contributed to their views. So, I could either abandon the ship the National Government uses to serve the State of Chuuk, and leave its crew and the 12-year-old boy from Polowat outside of our care, or I could bring them home. Based on the information provided to me, in particular the

repeated negative COVID-19 test results, I chose to bring them home. I could not abandon our citizens, and I could not abandon a 12-year-old child, as they were exposed to far more danger than our citizens stranded in Guam, Hawaii, China, Japan, and elsewhere. I take full responsibility for this choice.

Before I discuss anything else, I will address many of the rumors and false information that is being spread. Chuuk State did not reject receiving the Chief Mailo. Chuuk State did, however, ask the National Task Force if the Chief Mailo could go somewhere more prepared for COVID-19.

Upon arrival in Pohnpei, the Chief Mailo had twelve crew tested for COVID-19 on January 6th, 2021. Only ONE person tested positive for COVID-19. All crew are on the ship. No one has jumped into the ocean or otherwise left the ship. The ship is monitored every minute of every day by both National and State law enforcement.

The team of four testers from Pohnpei State wore a full complement of PPE. The team of four testers did not visit their families, drink sakau, or otherwise act irresponsibly. The team of four testers, after confirming the positive test on one individual, voluntarily and willingly went straight into quarantine at the Emergency Medical Unit in Dekehtik. They have all been tested for COVID-19 and their results were negative.

The individual on the Chief Mailo who tested positive for COVID-19 is isolated in the dispensary area. He was tested twice using a nasal swab PCR test, which our National and State medical experts advise is very sensitive and almost certainly correct. The test kits and machines we have in the FSM are the same quality and standard you will find in California or Canberra. This coming Thursday, January 14th, the individual and the rest of the crew will be tested again. The crew will be tested in two different ways: the first is through another nasal swab PCR test, which will confirm if the person is currently infected with COVID-19. The second is a blood test to check for antibodies, which will help us understand if an individual was infected in the past, and then recovered.

The Chief Mailo and its crew are receiving food and other provisions through safe, no-contact methods. The 12-year-old boy, who was the sole survivor after drifting from Polowat to the Philippines, and the rest of the crew, are safe and report that they feel fine. No one on the ship, including the individual with COVID-19, is reporting any symptoms at this time. No one on the ship has reported any symptoms of any illness since they began their physical isolation on the ship, which began on September 22nd, 2020, in the Philippines.

During this sensitive time, it is important that citizens receive their information from trustworthy sources. The only sources you should receive your information from are the Risk Communication Committees from the National and State COVID-19 Task Forces, the National and State Public Information Offices, and State Public Radio Stations.

The FSM National and Pohnpei State Governments are collaborating effectively, and I wish to take this opportunity to extend my sincere appreciation to Governor Oliver and Pohnpei State's Task Force and First Responders, for their diligence, hard work, cooperation, and vigilance.

Both FSM National and Pohnpei State Governments confirm that our first COVID-19 case is considered an imported border case. The individual with COVID-19 on the Chief Mailo does not present any immediate risk of the virus spreading to the broader Micronesian community in Pohnpei. In the event that on-the-ground isolation becomes necessary, the Medical Monitoring Area in Dekehtik has 12 isolation units standing by.

For this reason, citizens across the Nation should remain calm. Do not panic because the situation is contained. We remain in what we call COVID-CONDITION 4, which means that schools, churches, and businesses of all kinds are still open. Wearing a mask and practicing physical distancing is encouraged, but not mandatory.

In the event that COVID-19 ever reaches our shores and our communities, the National Government will enforce a Social Distancing Decree for the affected State. In the event COVID-19 ever reaches any land in the FSM, I will give another video address describing what this means for you and for your families.

As you know, in a medical emergency, human resources such as doctors, nurses, public health officers and first line responders, etc. play critical role in our overall response. At this point, Pohnpei is currently facing personnel shortage in these areas. I have directed the Department of Health and Social Affairs to provide human resource support to Pohnpei State from within and outside its current staff to Pohnpei State during this challenging time. In the meantime, the FSM National Government is providing Pohnpei State support in areas such as law enforcement and financial assistance. All Pohnpeian residents can expect their National Government to fully support any and all requests the Pohnpei State Government makes in combatting COVID-19.

Despite the sad news about the FSM's first case of COVID-19, there is good news regarding our vaccine distribution strategy.

On December 28th, the FSM received the first 1,600 doses of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, and on January 9th, 2021, the FSM National Government received 8,200 additional doses. We receive the COVID-19 vaccines at the same proportion and timeliness as any of the U.S. States and Territories. We are advised by our partners from the United States of America that weekly shipments will continue until such a time that we are able to reach our vaccination target. In my capacity as President of the Federated States of Micronesia, while all FSM States will receive the vaccine I am ordering that Pohnpei State receive enough of the amount we currently have to ensure that all Tier 1 and Tier 2 individuals receive it at the nearest opportunity. This includes all frontline workers, including healthcare workers and public safety workers, individuals with illnesses like diabetes and other diseases, and essential personnel. With respect to the crew of Chief Mailo, I'm directing the FSM Department of Health and Social Affairs to work with Pohnpei State to make sure the eligible crew members are vaccinated, if medically necessary.

This week of January 11th to January 15th, the FSM National Government will be shipping COVID-19 vaccine to Yap State, Chuuk State, and Kosrae State.

It is the National Government's goal that we will achieve a 100% vaccination rate, which will be the safe foundation for when we can repatriate our citizens stranded abroad. Per World Health Organization and U.S. CDC Guidelines, the vaccine will be available for citizens 18 years old and up. Our vaccination target is achievable, and we will be aggressive in achieving it as quickly as possible. The National and State Task Forces will release information on how you and your loved ones can get the vaccine after we complete the initial vaccination of all National and State frontline responders.

I took my first dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine on December 31st, 2020, which I put out as a video on January 4th, 2021. The vaccine is safe, although citizens should know that some people who take it have small side effects. For me, I did not feel any pain, nor did I feel sick. The FSM Immunization Program Manager, Carter Apaisam, reported pain at the injection site for approximately one day. We are aware that some citizens may also feel tired or have minor flu-like symptoms for one day or two after receiving the vaccine. I am told that if I have any side effects that my second dose will be more powerful than the first. I will let you know what happens after I receive it.

My fellow Micronesian citizens,

The crew of the Chief Mailo are, like you and me, citizens of Micronesia. We are all Micronesian first, and Yapese, Chuukese, Pohnpeian, and Kosraean second. We must care for them just as we care for each other. We must stand strongly in solidarity with one another, especially in these extraordinary times.

We must also remember that Micronesia is a resilient country, and we as Micronesians are a resilient people. We can, and we will, overcome the challenges presented to us today by the COVID-19 Pandemic. The FSM's case of COVID-19 is isolated on the Chief Mailo. All protocols and procedures are being followed. Our National and State Task Forces, through their vigilance, have taken actions over the past year to ensure our safety from the virus today. Let us all work together now to take actions today for our Nation's prosperity tomorrow.

God bless you, and God bless the Federated States of Micronesia.