

# CNMI ISLAND REPORT

*17 June 2020 version*

## **CNMI COVID-19 UPDATE STATISTICS (17 June 2020)**

Confirmed Infected: 30 individuals all on Saipan; Tinian and Rota have had no confirmed cases  
13 recovered cases

*Recent confirmed cases are coming in as passengers on Guam flights*

Community Testing Initiative: Saipan (7,155); Rota (556); and Tinian (458)

This program was suspended on 12 June 2020.

Deaths: 2

*For the entire US, the CNMI has the second lowest COVID-19 infection rate*

The CNMI took an isolationist approach for controlling the spread of COVID-19. The Government stopped all direct international passenger air traffic to Saipan on 1 April and all inter-island passenger air traffic between islands (Saipan, Tinian, and Rota) on 2 April. Cargo and emergency air traffic was allowed to continue uninterrupted. Because Saipan's economy is based on Asian tourists, our economy suddenly disappeared. Hotels, restaurants, the IPI Casino, and other related businesses closed. Kanoa Resort and Pacific Islands Club remains open as quarantine facilities. Dine-in eating at business establishments was prohibited.

Unrelated to, and prior to the arrival of COVID-19, the CNMI government was facing a \$65M shortfall in operating funds and had announced it will have to furlough a significant portion of its' 3,500 employees (excluding independent agencies). On 17 June, it was reported that approximately 500 employees have received furlough notices. The IPI casino is facing serious lawsuits over unpaid bills and non-remittances to the Community Benefit Fund, reported to be approximately \$37M. The COVID-19 pandemic just intensified a pre-existing financial disaster.

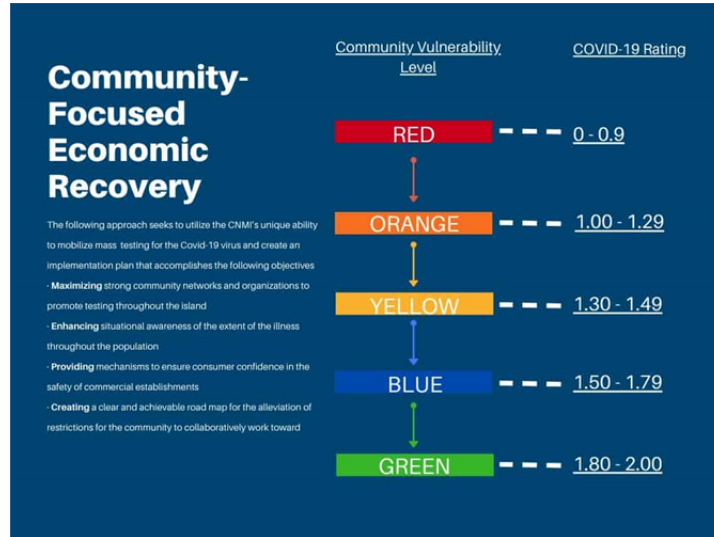
The first CNMI-wide curfew was implemented on 30 March. No one was allowed to be out in public from 7:00 pm until 6:00 am, all boat ramps except one were closed, and no vessels were allowed to go beyond the reef line, public beaches and parks were closed. This initial action devastated the fishing community as all our local fish markets closed due to fishers not being able to fish. Although demand for fresh fish from residents remained high and sales to restaurants were non-existent, there was no product coming to the markets.

From this point forward, the government started slowly relaxing the social restrictions keeping fishers from fishing. On 3 April, public beaches were opened for individual use and shoreline fishing from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm.

The Governor was hearing concerns expressed by the residents over constrained times for fishing. A petition was presented to the Governor requesting an expansion of fishing opportunities. He responded by decreasing the curfew hours from 10:00 pm to 5:00 am on 2 May. This allowed limited night spear-fishing and the pelagic trollers were able to leave for fishing before sunrise. Local fish markets are starting to reopen with limited fish offerings.

Passenger air traffic from Guam to Saipan started up again on 2 May, while inter-island travel between Saipan, Tinian, and Rota commenced on 22 May 2020.

Government offices shut-down on March 16th and re-opened half a day starting on May 17th and started full days on May 24th.



### Community Vulnerability Level dropped to **YELLOW** – 25 May

New directives further decreased the curfew hours to 11 pm to 5 am. Additionally, restaurants are allowed to open for dine-in, however customers cannot exceed 25% occupancy and the BEH must certify the restaurant COVID-19 compliant. Other allowable businesses can now stay open until 9 pm (used to be 6 pm) with a 50% occupancy ceiling, and all public beaches are open for fishing activities from 5 am to 11 pm.

### Community Vulnerability Level dropped to **BLUE** – 15 June

Curfew was further diminished to 12 midnight to 4 am. Restaurants/bars can now offer dine-in services at 50% occupancy and it has been reported that 90% of our restaurants have re-opened. Other businesses can be open from 5 am till 11 pm with 75% occupancy; churches can open with 50% occupancy.

Hotels, tour operators and tourism industry are not allowed to be fully operational yet. The CNMI Government is tentative planning to re-open our tourism markets on 15 July with certain COVID-19 related mitigation measures that include perhaps 5-7 days quarantine. Presently, there appears to be no tourist related demand for travel to the CNMI.

Currently, the fishing industry is starting to return to normalcy. Trollers and bottomfishers are pretty much free to fish whenever they want provided they don't return to the docks between mid-night and 4:00 am. Commercial spearfishing activities remain hampered by the midnight to 0400 curfew. Approximately 90% of the commercial reef fish sold in local markets pre-pandemic were speared by night-time fishers.

Local fresh fish markets have reopened and sales are brisk to local residents. However, without the tourism market, overall sales have not reached pre-pandemic levels.

The CARES Act allocated \$1M to the CNMI to address economic impacts caused to the fishers and fishing communities by the COVID-19 virus. The DFW Director is heading the Task Force in developing a Spend Plan that would provide guidance for the distribution of funds to the NMI fishing community.