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## Covid 19 coronavirus: Major concerns as Pasifika, Māori make up 90 per cent of Auckland cluster

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Bernie O'Donnell, Chair of the Manukau Urban Maori Authority helps out at the food bank run out Nga Whare Waatea marae in Favona, and explains the changes necessitated by COVID-19. Video / Dean Purcell



By: **Michael Neilson**

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Health professionals are "very concerned" of a major outbreak in the Pasifika community with data showing they make up

'Very upset' Covid-infected student slams government officials, says she was never made to work while sick



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That initial outbreak was largely Pākehā between the ages of 30 and 50, many of whom were returning to New Zealand from other countries, or people linked to them.

The latest data is of particular concern given University of Auckland Covid-19 research found Pasifika and Māori were over twice as likely to die from the virus as Pākehā.

Nine new confirmed cases of Covid-19 were reported today, all from the Auckland cluster.

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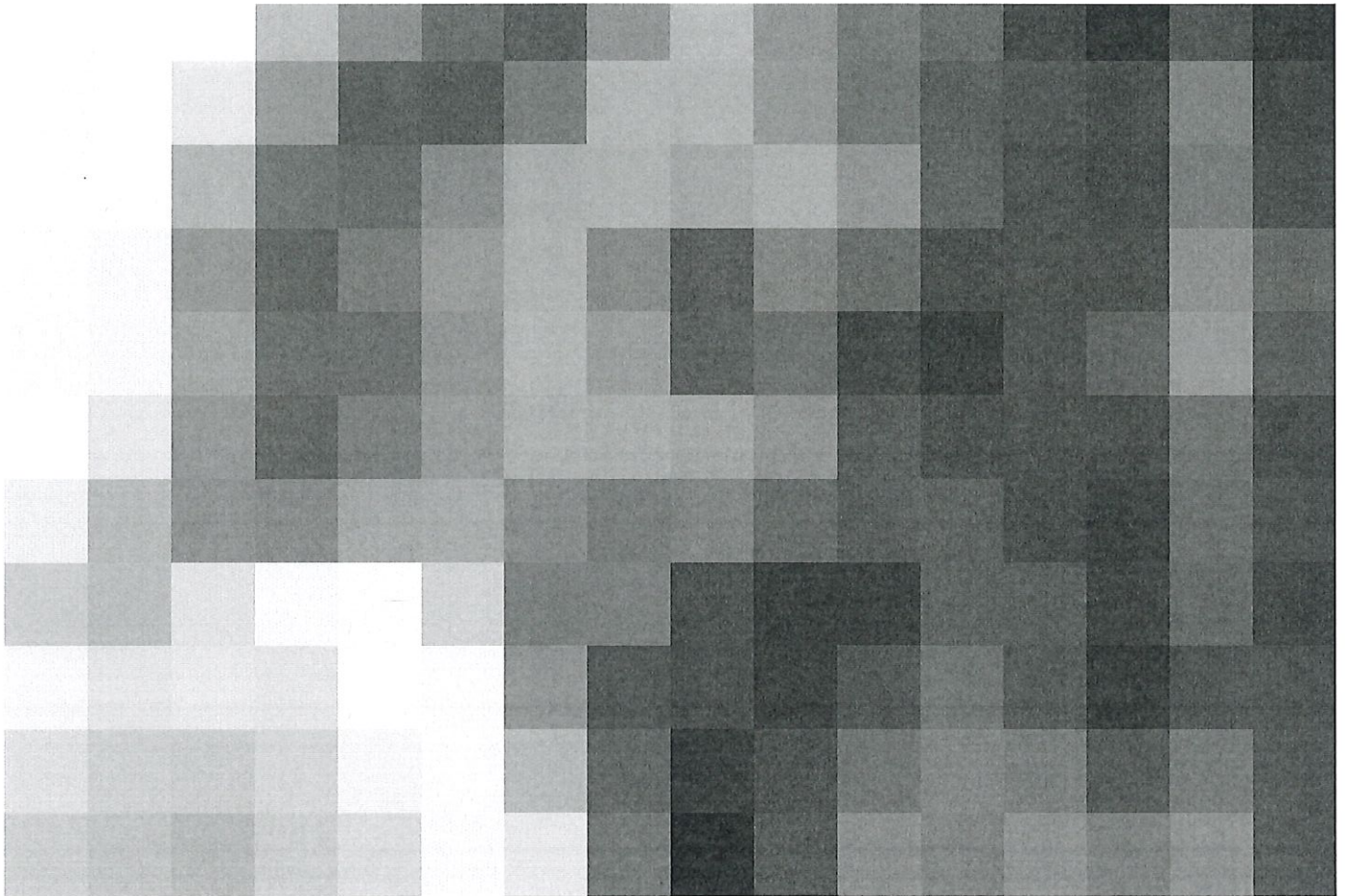


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Dr Collin Tukuitonga, Associate Dean (Pacific) and Associate Professor of Public Health at the University of Auckland. Photo / Natalie Slade

Pacific health leader Dr Collin Tukuitonga said the data was "very concerning".

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"Clearly the virus and outbreak is centred and found a home in the Pacific community, families and networks, with a number of schools, universities and workplaces also affected.

"Socioeconomic issues including crowded housing, poverty, healthcare access and higher prevalence of comorbid conditions like diabetes and respiratory illnesses mean this  g could easily get out of hand."

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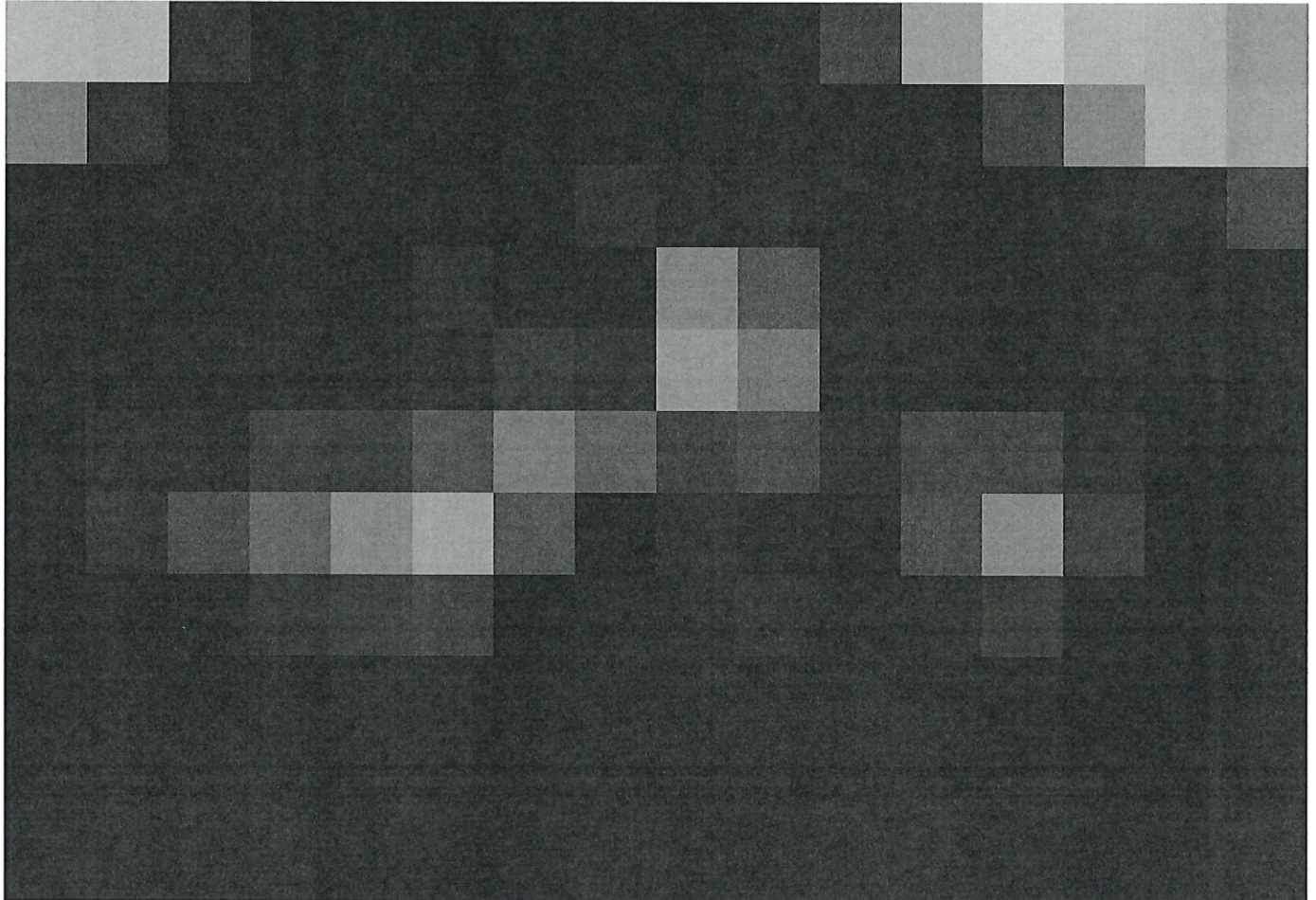
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Bernie O'Donnell, Chair of the Manukau Urban Maori Authority at Nga Whare Waatea marae in Favona. Photo / Dean Purcell

Tukuitonga, Associate Dean (Pacific) and Associate Professor of Public Health at the University of Auckland along with member of the Te Rōpū Whakakaupapa Urutā - National Māori Pandemic group, had been calling on the Ministry of Health to release specific ethnicity data for this outbreak.

While there had been criticism that it had unfairly targeted the community, Tukuitonga said it was important the ethnicity of the cluster was known given the huge health risks.

"With the first wave, we were under-represented. But this second wave, the majority are Pacific.

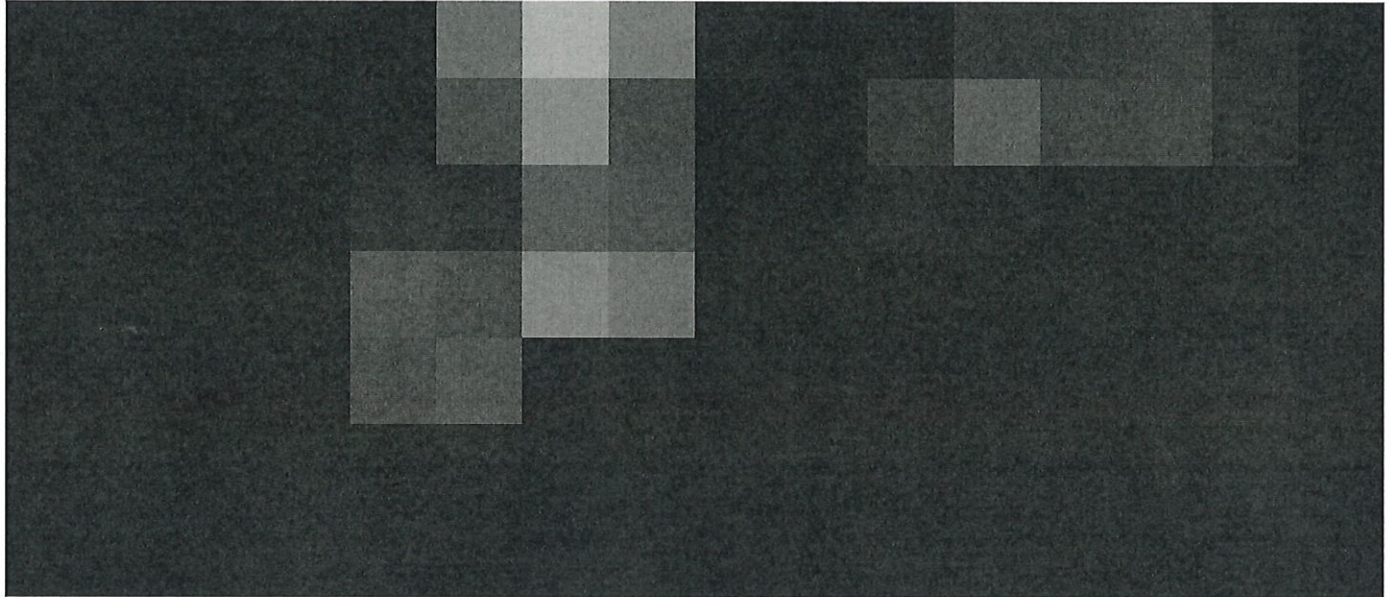
"The Pacific community needs to understand that this time, it's different. Once you hear that - you can get quite [serious] about it," he said.

"It just takes one highly infected person who goes to church or a function and that person alone can infect hundreds."

He wanted the Ministry to release as much information as it could specifically regarding this cluster, including testing rates, age, gender and geographic location.

'Very upset' Covid-infected student slams government officials, says she was never made to work while sick





A volunteer helping at the food bank at Nga Whare Waatea marae in Favona. Photo / Dean Purcell

Māori and Pasifika have the highest rates of testing, but despite this, the index family had been subjected to "nasty" comments on social media, Tukuitonga said.

Director general of health Dr Ashley Bloomfield has repeatedly condemned any such backlash against those who contract Covid-19.

He noted though this was a "very different" kind of outbreak, and urged Pacific and Māori to continue to get tested if they experienced any symptoms.

"We had much lower rates of infection amongst Pacific and Māori in that outbreak but the highest rates of testing in those groups.

"So those were the groups who were actually coming forward, as they are this time, to be tested."

Manukau Urban Māori Authority chair Bernie O'Donnell said a "confederation" of marae, and Māori and Pasifika health organisations had joined forces to coordinate a response to the latest outbreak and lockdown social and economic impacts.

They were working closely with the Counties Manukau District Health Board and Ministry of Health to relay information and assist with providing support to vulnerable whānau, and encourage things like Covid-19 testing.

"If we don't work together our people get missed."

The first outbreak provided a lot of learnings, and O'Donnell said so far there had been a "tremendous" response and support from the health authorities.

"In the community there are a lot of vulnerable people, struggling to make ends meet, so things like waiting hours to get tested is quite low down the list of immediate priorities.

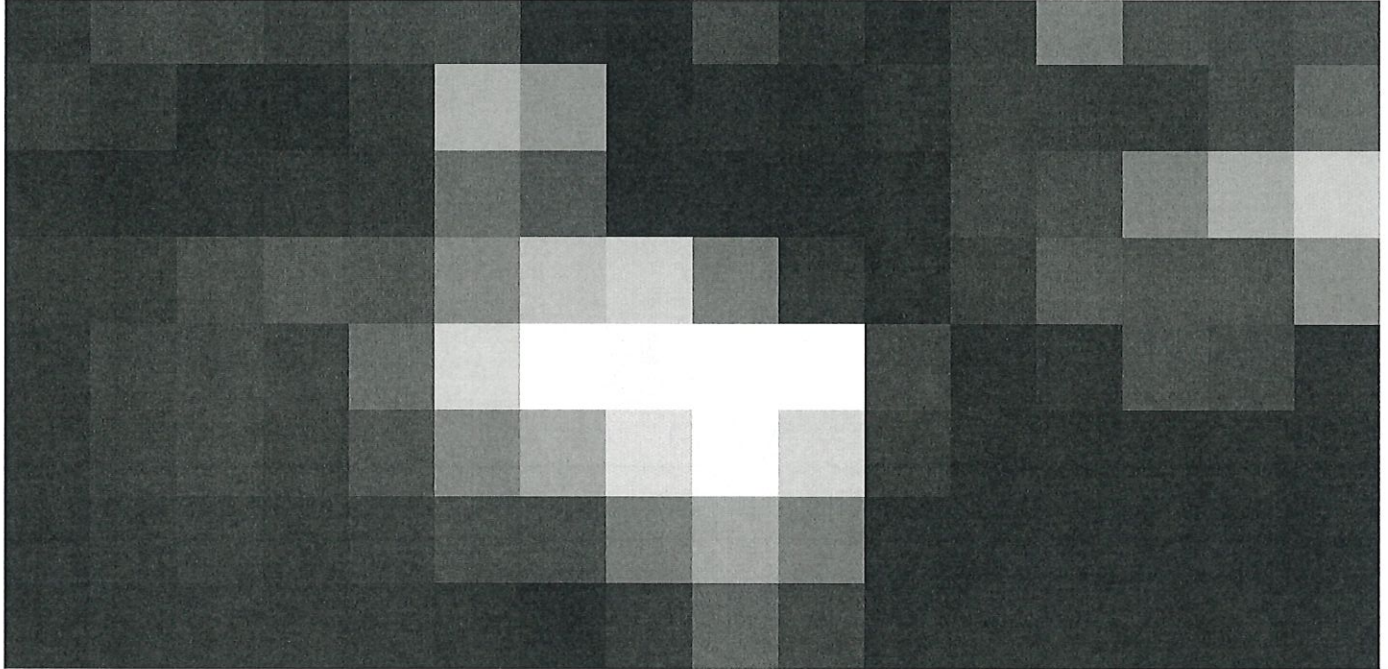
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Bernie O'Donnell, Chair of the Manukau Urban Maori Authority helping out at the food bank. Photo / Dean Purcell

Over the weekend, Reverend Victor Pouesi said he had urged up to 300 people at his congregation who attended church on Sunday to get tested after members of another family who attend that church had been confirmed as having Covid-19.

One of that family's members is understood to work with the initial family of four who contracted Covid-19.

Members of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa, Māngere East Puaseisei were out in force at the church grounds after a pop-up testing station was set up specifically for members.

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