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Government officials declare state of national emergency in New Zealand amid COVID-19 pandemic

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Watch: Director of Civil Defence Emergency Management Sarah Stuart Black speaks on Wednesday.

Government officials have declared a state of national emergency in New Zealand amid the COVID-19 pandemic, giving authorities more powers to be used "when

necessary".

A state of national emergency was declared at 12:21pm by the Minister of Civil Defence Peeni Henare under the Civil Defence Emergency Act 2002, Director of Civil Defence Emergency Management Sarah Stuart Black said on Wednesday.

"The state of national emergency has been declared because of unprecedented nature of this global pandemic and to ensure the Government has the powers it needs to slow the spread of COVID-19 and reduce its impact."

Stuart Black said the declaration will allow her to direct and coordinate personnel, material and other resources, to ensure they can be made available during the crisis.

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"It also provides access to powers to would not normally be available, but would be needed to support the delivery and timely response to COVID-19," she told reporters at the Beehive in Wellington, alongside Director-General of Health Dr Ashley Bloomfield.

"We expect the Civil Defence Emergency Management powers to be used when necessary and to slow the spread of COVID-19, reduce its impact, and manage the consequences."

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The Government will have the powers of requisition, and Stuart Black said an example of this would be the conservation and supply of fuel and other essential supplies.

The Government will also be able to close roads, prohibit and regulate traffic, stop activities that might contribute to the emergency, and exclude people from certain

places.

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"This declaration of a state of national emergency ensures that we have all of the legislative means possible, all of the enforcement powers, all of the tools that we need at our disposal to combat the spread of COVID-19," Stuart Black said.

"These powers work as a complementary component to the powers that the Director-General of Health has... This is an enhancement of the current COVID-19 response arrangements and this is just one part of that response."

The state of national emergency applies to all of New Zealand, including the Chatham Islands, Stewart Island, and other offshore islands.

"I'd like to reinforce the critical importance of everyone doing their part to make sure that we can save lives and beat COVID-19... each of you has a role in helping to save a life," Stuart Black added.

She said between 6-7pm on Wednesday night a national emergency mobile alert will be sent to all New Zealanders as a reminder of the country going into lockdown at midnight.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said we need "all the tools at our disposal" to ensure everyone reduces contact.

"Failure of anyone to play their part in coming days will put the lives of others at risk, and there will be no tolerance for that," she said.

"We do not expect to use the full extent of these measures but, as with everything we have done in response to COVID-19, we plan, we prepare, we have in place everything we need to get through.

"For now, I ask that New Zealanders do their part. Stay home, break the chain, save lives."

- Newshub

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