

Blog one

After the wounds are healed and the full extent of the devastation is realised in Samoa, the public health risk continues to be very real for the people living on the island, with issues such as a clean and plentiful supply of water, housing and sanitation taking a lot longer to rectify.

That's what health protection officer Hans Buik, is dealing with [in Samoa](#) at the moment, with a team of other public health specialists.

The following from Hans, goes a small way to explaining some of the next steps being taken by relief workers from far and wide to assist the residents of Samoa a few weeks down the track:

"Our role here in Samoa is to provide public health advice directly to displaced people and identify wider public health needs in these areas.

These people and their families were hit by the tsunami and have moved inland with the little belongings which they were able to recover; many without any form of insurance.

We report to Claire Mills and Nick Hewer-Hewitt with information on aspects such as waste disposal, adequacy of water supply, mosquito control, food safety, general hygiene, water treatment and other public health related issues in these new communities.

We advise the community directly and refer various cases to other organisations when required.

One example would be where we identify a new relocated family where medical attention is needed. This could be by way of lost medication to infections etc. In this case, we will liaise directly with the mobile medical clinics and nurses to arrange follow-up.

The scope of our work is very broad and not clearly defined.

However, priority is placed on immediate risk to health. We will be coordinating four teams of environmental health officers to cover the affected areas. These teams will include Samoan EHOs and others.

At this time, we'll be able to provide some supplies like mosquito nets and water containers when required to 400 affected families.

Other needs will be assessed at the time of the visit and referred to other agencies for follow-up.

There are many organisations involved here like the Samoan Water Authority, Ministry of Health, Red Cross, UNICEF, Oxfam, the New Zealand Dental Foundation, National Health Service, and many more.

I'm sure you can appreciate the logistics of keeping everyone in the loop of what each is doing.

That probably very broadly defines the work we are involved with over here.

I'm here with Sioele Takataka, a health protection officer from ARPHS. We have found our feet and have a great team of people to work with over here.

See ya back in NZ.

Thanks a lot,

Hans

P.S There is a lot of tragedy here and all the support and kind words are truly appreciated."

DAY ONE

Sioeli Takataka from the Auckland Regional Public Health Service and myself flew into Samoa on a late flight from Auckland arriving in Apia at 12.15am on 8 October, with just a couple of hours spare to get tetanus jabs and pack for the trip.

We were picked up at the airport and then taken to Apia for a few hours of sleep at a hotel which we

will be staying at for the duration of our stay.

A briefing was given upon arrival at the response headquarters at the Ministry of Health offices and we were then taken to the tsunami-affected areas accompanied by the Samoan Ministry of Health and NZ Defence Force.

The lower eastern coast and the southern coast have been the most affected. The extent of damage was clear as major debris and collapsed buildings were evident all along these areas.

Pockets of untouched areas were also evident. Some due to sheltering from nearby islands on the lower eastern side and some protection in areas where land was a little more elevated.

The trauma was evident on people's faces as they searched through rubble and debris for building materials and personal belongings. Many new graves were brightly decorated with Samoan decorations and grieving persons alongside.

The sad fact is that a large number of those dead are children and the elderly who were not able to reach safety in time.

Saleapaga, on the south coast was badly hit by the tsunami and the majority of the population now live inland in makeshift accommodation; almost none have any intent on returning to the coast. We will assess and update these community needs in relation to public health.

Hans

The following initial pictures were taken as we travelled along the coast:



Saleapaga (south coast) was badly hit by the tsunami.



Lolamanu Village (south coast) was also badly hit with all beachfront resorts completely wiped out.



Lolamanu Village and resort



Patasi Village – damage to vessels and other structures on the coast.



Ruminants of a fale (house) on the coast.

Will send some more photos soon....