

Briefing

Trans-Tasman Quarantine-Free Travel (QFT): Health advice on potential recommencement of QFT from Western Australia

Date due to MO:	27 April 2021	Action required by:	27 April 2021
Security level:	IN CONFIDENCE	Health Report number:	20211011
To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister for COVID-19 Response		
Copy to:	Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister Hon Grant Robertson, Deputy Prime Minister Hon Nanaia Mahuta, Minister of Foreign Affairs Hon Michael Wood, Minister of Transport		

Contact for telephone discussion

Name	Position	Telephone
Dr Ashley Bloomfield	Director-General of Health	s 9(2)(a)
Maree Roberts	Deputy Director-General, System Strategy and Policy	s 9(2)(a)

Minister's office to complete:

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Approved | <input type="checkbox"/> Decline | <input type="checkbox"/> Noted |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Needs change | <input type="checkbox"/> Seen | <input type="checkbox"/> Overtaken by events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> See Minister's Notes | <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn | |

Comment:

Trans-Tasman Quarantine-Free Travel (QFT): Health advice on potential recommencement of QFT from Western Australia

Security level: IN CONFIDENCE **Date:** 27 April 2021

To: Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister for COVID-19 Response

Purpose of report

1. This report provides my advice on the possible recommencement of quarantine-free travel (QFT) flights from Western Australia to New Zealand.

Summary

2. On 23 April 2021, Ministers decided to pause QFT from Western Australia and a Notice was subsequently issued excluding QFT for travellers who had been in Western Australia on or after 11.30pm on 23 April 2021 (New Zealand time). Advice was provided on 26 April 2021 recommending a continuation of the pause until a further review on 27 April 2021.

Latest case information

3. Since the initial notification of a locally acquired case of COVID-19, there are now three cases associated with the April 2021 Perth Cluster.
4. Case A was released from Mercure hotel quarantine in Perth on 17 April following a negative Day 12 test on 15 April. Between the 17 and 21 April, Case A stayed with a friend and visited several public locations in the Perth and Peel region. Case A then travelled from Perth to Melbourne on 21 April on Qantas flight QF778.
5. Case A was advised during their travel to Melbourne that they had been identified as a close contact of a case in Mercure hotel quarantine facility. Case A wore a mask on the flight and was picked up by their spouse in Melbourne and went straight home. Case A self-isolated away from their family while waiting for a COVID-19 test, which came back positive on 23 April.
6. After being released from quarantine, Case A stayed with a friend (Case B), who accompanied them to various locations of interest. On 23 April, Case B returned a positive COVID-19 test result, which had a high Ct value potentially indicating that they were early in their infection.

7. Western Australia have described that the third case (Case C) as a diner at a restaurant, at the same time where Cases A and B. Case C started to develop symptoms on 23 April and returned a positive result on 25 April.
8. All close contacts of these cases (as well as casual plus contacts) have been asked to self-isolated for 14 days and be tested. One person who recently travelled to New Zealand from Australia was in Western Australia during the relevant time period and was at a location of interest at the same time as Case A. They are considered to be very low-risk given the size of the location but have been asked to self-isolate and undergo testing.

Health Advice

9. My view is that the risk to New Zealand is low.
10. Based on information available at 11am, 27 April 2021, **I recommend that QFT be recommenced from Western Australia 11.59pm, 27 April 2021 (New Zealand time) for travellers who have not been identified as close contacts. For those identified as close contacts, they would need to complete 14 days of self-isolation or provide evidence of a negative COVID-19 test before departure for New Zealand. In addition, all close or casual contacts will need to complete all locally required health responses, including completion of self-isolation or testing.**
11. The April 2021 Perth Cluster appears to be contained and the post-lockdown transition response measures that the Western Australia government has introduced will provide an additional layer of assurance. These include mandatory mask wearing in public, while at work and on public transport unless exemptions apply; 20-person limit for private indoor and outdoor gatherings as well as bar, restaurants and cafes; and no visitors to aged and disability care facilities and hospitals, except for compassionate reasons and advocacy. The measures will be in place until 12:01am on Saturday, 1 May 2021.

Recommencing QFT

12. QFT from Australia has been enabled under the COVID-19 Public Health Response Act 2020 (the Act) by an exemption under the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order (No 2) 2020 (the Air Border Order) and the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Isolation and Quarantine) Order 2020 (Isolation and Quarantine Order) for travellers from Australia who meet certain eligibility conditions.
13. Recommencing QFT would entail revoking the current Exemption Notice excluding QFT for travellers who had been in the Western Australia on or after 11.30pm on 23 April 2021 (New Zealand time) with a new Exemption Notice [with the measures outlined above.]
14. Before any decision on recommencement of QFT, you must consult the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Transport. Other relevant Ministers may also be consulted¹.

¹ CAB-21-MIN-0101 and cl 26(3A)(a), Air Border Order.

15. When deciding whether to grant or modify an exemption and what (if any) conditions to impose you must take into account my advice provided above, on the public health implications.

Consideration of an Exemption

16. In considering an exemption, you must be satisfied that the exemption is necessary and desirable in order to promote the purposes of the Act or the Air Border Order, and that the exemption is not broader than necessary to address the matters giving rise to the exemption.

Exemption Notice

17. If you agree with recommencement of QFT from Western Australia, an amendment needs to be made to the exemption under the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Exemption for Quarantine-free Travel) Notice 2021 (the Notice) to remove the current exclusion of people who have been in Western Australia on or after 11.30pm 23 April 2021 (New Zealand time) and this Notice is attached to this report for your signature. The Notice will come into force at 11:59pm on Tuesday, 27 April 2021.
18. The consequence of recommencement of QFT from Western Australia will be that travellers from Western Australia, excluding people who have been in a location of interest, will be able to travel to New Zealand quarantine-free so long as general QFT eligibility requirements are met.
19. QFT from Western Australia, with the additional eligibility requirements, will remain in place until officials are confident that there are no further cases of COVID-19 in Western Australia, where further advice will be provided.

Recommendations

We recommend you:

- a) **Note** that as at 11am, 27 April 2021, the April 2021 Perth Cluster has had three associated cases (two locally acquired cases notified in Western Australia and one related locally acquired case notified in Victoria). **Noted**
- b) **Note** that advice was provided to you on 23 April 2021 to pause QFT from Western Australia and that pause has been in place since 11.30pm 23 April 2021 (New Zealand time). **Noted**
- c) **Note** that on 26 April 2021 you agreed to a recommendation to continue the pause until additional test results and further advice could be provided on 27 April 2021. **Noted**
- d) **Note** my advice that, based on information available at 11am, 27 April 2021, **I recommend that QFT be recommenced from Western Australia 11.59pm, 27 April 2021 (New Zealand time) for travellers who have not been identified as close contacts. For those identified as close contacts, they would need to complete 14 days of self-isolation or provide evidence of a negative COVID-19 test before departure for New Zealand.** **Yes/No**

- e) **Note** my recommendation that in addition to the above requirement, **all close or casual contacts will need to complete all locally-imposed health requirements, including completion of self-isolation periods or testing requirements.** **Noted**
- f) **Agree** to forward this advice to the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Transport for consultation. **Yes/No**
- g) **Note** that if you agree, we will provide a new COVID-19 Public Health response (Exemption for Quarantine-free Travel) Notice (No 3) 2021, which will give effect to the recommendations above and come into force at 11:59pm on 27 April 2021 (New Zealand time). **Noted**



Dr Ashley Bloomfield
Director-General of Health
Date: 27/04/2021

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Health
Date:

Trans-Tasman Quarantine-Free Travel (QFT): Health advice on potential recommencement of QFT from Western Australia

Background

1. Two-way QFT between New Zealand and Australia began on 19 April 2021. New Zealand and Australia have opened their respective borders on a unilateral basis. In the event of case(s) of COVID-19, decisions on continuation, pauses or suspension are considered independently.
2. New Zealand's response(s) are guided by the Response Framework agreed by Cabinet [CAB-21-MIN-0101]. It is linked to our Elimination Strategy and guided by the policy objectives of keeping COVID-19 out of New Zealand, keeping QFT open and operating if safe, and minimising the impact of any disruption to travellers and operators.

Initial New Zealand response

3. New Zealand was first notified of a locally acquired case in Western Australia at 2.45pm on 23 April 2021.
4. On 23 April 2021 you were provided advice that there was a low risk to New Zealand and it was recommended that there be a pause in QFT from Western Australia.
5. You agreed, in consultation with the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Transport to a pause of QFT for travellers from Western Australia.
6. On 26 April 2021 a continuation of the pause was recommended until 27 April 2021, when further test information would be available and further advice provided.

Latest case information and health assessment

7. Western Australia announced a 3-day lockdown late on 23 April to start at 12:01am on Saturday 24 April (Australia time) until 0001 hrs 27 April 2021 (Australia time) for the cities of Perth and Peel. The lockdown was lifted as scheduled. Public health measures such as mandatory mask use and gathering size limits (20 maximum) have been instituted until 12.01am, 1 May 2021.
8. Since the first notification of a locally acquired case on 23 April 2021, an additional two other cases associated with the April 2021 Perth Cluster have been notified.

9. Where information is available, the following has been considered:

	Yes	No	Insufficient information	Comment
Has the source been identified?	Yes			<p>Case A arrived in Perth from Shanghai and completed managed isolation at the Mercure hotel quarantine facility.</p> <p>It is believed that Case A contracted COVID-19 from another guest at the facility, who was staying in close proximity. An investigation is currently underway to identify how the in-facility transmission occurred. Testing of workers and other guests on the same floor has occurred and all results negative.</p>
Has the timeframe while infectious in the community been established?	Yes			<p>Yes – period of infectiousness from 17th – 24th April.</p> <p>Case A was released from the Mercure hotel quarantine facility in Perth on 17 April, following a negative Day 12 test on 15 April. Between 17 and 21 April, Case A visited several public locations in the Perth and Peel regions of Western Australia. Case A then travelled to Melbourne on Qantas flight QF778.</p> <p>While travelling to Melbourne, Case A was identified as a close contact of a case in the Mercure hotel quarantine facility. Case A wore a mask on the flight and was picked up by their spouse and went straight home. Case A self-isolated from their family while waiting for a COVID-19 test.</p> <p>After being released from quarantine, Case A stayed with a friend (Case B), who accompanied them to various locations of interest. On 23 April, Case B returned a positive COVID-19 test result, which had a high Ct value</p>

				<p>potentially indicating that they were early in their infection.</p> <p>On 18 April, Case C was dining at the Kardinia Kitchen Inn and sat near Cases A and B. Case C started to develop symptoms on 23 April and returned a positive result on 24 April.</p>
<p>Have the locations of interest while the case was infectious in the community been confirmed?</p>	Yes			<p>WA health authorities have identified several locations of interest, including restaurants and tourist attractions, in the Perth and Peel regions that were visited by Cases A and B. Case A also took a flight to Melbourne (Qantas QF778), and all passengers and crew have been considered close contacts.</p> <p>Authorities have identified locations of interest associated with Case C, including an early learning childcare centre.</p>
<p>Do we know the number of close contacts and have their results?</p>				<p>Authorities have identified 339 contacts of Cases A and B in the Perth and Peel region. Of these, 71 have been deemed as close contacts.</p> <p>There were 265 passengers and crew on the flight from Perth to Melbourne, all of whom have been classified as close contacts, with 166 persons returning a negative result so far.</p>
<p>Do we know the number of casual contacts and have their results?</p>	Yes			<p>See above regarding numbers</p> <p>Casual contacts have been advised to get tested and stay in isolation under a negative result is returned</p>
<p>Are we comfortable that there is sufficient testing underway in the community?</p>	Yes			<p>On Sunday, 25 April, 13,027 tests were undertaken in Western Australia and 12,680 tests in Victoria.</p>

Do testing results indicate other reasons for concern (e.g. RT-PCR Ct value(s), serology)?	No			B117 variant. Case B was identified early in infection. No details on CT of case C.
Are we certain that no one is able to travel to NZ under QFT from the affected state or territory?	Yes			Direct flights from Western Australia to New Zealand have been cancelled. While there has been limited travel from Western Australia to other Australian states and territories, people who have been in the Perth and Peel regions since 17 April have been required to self-isolate for 14 days.
Has the state of territory decided to extend lockdown or impose additional restrictions/conditions?	No			On 26 April, the Western Australia Government announced that the Perth and Peel lockdown will end from 12.01am, Tuesday 27 April and a post-lockdown transition will be in place until 12.01am, Saturday 1 May. A number of response measures are associated with the transition period, including mandatory mask wearing in public, while at work and on public transport unless exemptions apply; 20-person limit for private indoor and outdoor gatherings as well as bar, restaurants and cafes; and no visitors to aged and disability care facilities and hospitals, except for compassionate reasons and advocacy.

10. All close contacts of these cases have been asked to self-isolate for 14 days and be tested. Casual contacts who were at specified locations of interest have been asked to self-isolate until a negative test taken 5 days after exposure to infection. One person who recently travelled to New Zealand from Australia was in Western Australia during the relevant time period and was at a location of interest at the same time as Case A. They are considered to be very low-risk given the size of the location but have been asked to self-isolate and undergo testing (more results will be available on Tuesday, 27 April 2021). A further person has self-identified today as a casual contact and is currently being assessed.

Health Advice

11. My advice is that the risk to New Zealand is low.

12. Based on the information available at 11am, 27 April 2021, **I recommend that QFT be recommenced from Western Australia 11.59pm, 27 April 2021 (New Zealand time) for travellers who have not been identified as close contacts or have been at a location of interest. For those identified as close contacts, they would need to complete 14 days of self-isolation or provide evidence of a negative COVID-19 test before departure for New Zealand. In addition, all close or casual contacts will need to complete all locally required health responses, including completion of self-isolation or testing.**
13. The April 2021 Perth Cluster appears to be contained. Testing rates of identified close contacts, casual contacts and general community have been high and the risk of there being undetected community transmission is unlikely. The public health measures instituted by Western Australia provides additional assurance.

Statutory power to grant an exemption

14. The Exemption Notice, which was made under the Air Border Order, exempts certain people who arrive in New Zealand on a quarantine-free travel flight from the requirements for
- a. a confirmed allocation to enter a managed isolation or quarantine facility; and
 - b. isolation or quarantine on arrival.
15. Recommencing QFT would entail revocation of the current exemption, to remove the condition that travellers must not have been in Western Australia on or from 11.30pm 23 April 2021 (New Zealand time).
16. You may exempt any person or class of person from the requirement to comply with any provision of the Air Border Order and Isolation and Quarantine Order if you are satisfied that:
- a. the exemption is necessary and desirable in order to promote the purposes of the Act or Air Border Order; and
 - b. the extent of the exemption is not broader than is reasonably necessary to address the matters giving rise to the exemption.
17. When deciding whether to grant or modify an exemption and what (if any) conditions to impose you must take into account my advice provided above, on the public health implications.
18. You must also consult the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Transport before any decision on recommencement of QFT. Other relevant Ministers may also be consulted [CAB-21-MIN-0101].

Matters of which you must be satisfied before granting an exemption

Promotion of the purposes of the Act and the Air Border Order

19. Section 4 outlines the Act's purpose as supporting a public health response to COVID-19 that:
- a. prevents, and limits the risk of, the outbreak or spread of COVID-19 (taking into account the infectious nature and potential for asymptomatic transmission of COVID-19); and

- b. avoids, mitigates, or remedies the actual or potential adverse effects of the COVID-19 outbreak (whether direct or indirect); and
 - c. is co-ordinated, orderly, and proportionate; and
 - d. allows social, economic, and other factors to be taken into account where it is relevant to do so; and
 - e. is economically sustainable and allows for the recovery of managed isolation and quarantine facility (MIQF) costs; and
 - f. has enforceable measures, in addition to the relevant voluntary measures and public health and other guidance that also support that response.
20. The purpose of the Air Border Order is “to prevent, and limit the risk of, the outbreak or spread of COVID-19 by imposing certain requirements on persons arriving in New Zealand by air (including medical examination and testing for COVID-19, and commencement of isolation and quarantining, as soon as is practicable after arriving in New Zealand).”
21. The proposed recommencement of QFT from Western Australia will mean travellers from Australia [all states and territories] who meet the general eligibility requirements, [and the x additional measure TBC until [date] or to be reviewed by [date]] will not be subject to managed isolation or quarantine.
22. The recommencement of QFT will largely re-enable social, cultural and economic between New Zealand and Australia.

New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990

23. The exemption discretion must be exercised consistently with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 (NZBORA).
24. The discretion to grant exemptions should be viewed in light of the restrictions imposed on other arrivals to New Zealand under the Air Border Order and Isolation and Quarantine Order. If the exemption power is not exercised in line with the purpose of the Act this could have the effect of making managed isolation restrictions on others appear arbitrary and not proportionate to the public health risk.
25. New Zealand citizens have the right to enter New Zealand. The recommencement of QFT would allow the realisation of that right by most citizens currently offshore in Western Australia.
26. The continuation of the pause for a smaller group of citizens that do not meet the exemption requirement is a risk based, proportionate and temporary measure.
27. When assessing the proportionality of a pause it is also relevant to note that the Government has been transparent with advice to the public that for the purposes of QFT, New Zealand citizens departing the country do so at their own risk. Bearing in mind the advice that New Zealanders going to Australia should prepared for the possibility of a pause, being required to shelter in place for a brief period should not cause significant hardship, especially given the social rights enjoyed by New Zealand citizens in Australia (e.g. reciprocal health care).

Equity

28. The recommencement of QFT will allow most New Zealand citizens, residents and visa holders who have been in Western Australia on or after 11.30pm 23 April 2021 (New Zealand time) to return to New Zealand.

Exemption Notice

29. The attached COVID-19 Public Health (Exemption for Quarantine-free Travel) Notice (No 3) 2021 will modify the current exemption for travellers from Australia (including Western Australia) from isolation and quarantine on arrival by only excluding travellers who have been at a location of interest and have not yet self-isolated for 14 days or those that have been in a location of interest and cannot provide evidence of a negative COVID-19 test before departure for New Zealand. The Notice will be in force until revoked.

Next steps

30. If you sign the attached Notice, QFT will recommence from Australia (all states and territories, including Western Australia) for travellers who meet the required eligibility requirements, from 11.59pm, 27 April 2021 (New Zealand time).
31. Agencies, through the National Leadership Response Team (NLRT) and the Response Framework will operationalise the recommencement.

ENDS.