

Briefing

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

Date due to MO: 29 June 2021 **Action required by:** 29 June 2021

Security level: IN CONFIDENCE **Health Report number:** 20211508

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	Te Tumu Whakarae mō te Hauora Director-General of Health	s 9(2)(a)
Sue Gordon	Deputy Chief Executive COVID-19 Health System Response	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 Withdrawn | |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 continuation of pause of QFT from Australia

Security level: IN CONFIDENCE **Date:** 29 June 2021

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

Purpose of report

1. This report provides my advice on the possible continuation of the pause of quarantine-free travel (QFT) from Australia to New Zealand as of 29 June 2021.

Summary

2. On 26 June 2021, you decided to pause QFT from Australia for an initial period of 3 days and a notice was subsequently issued excluding QFT for travellers who had been in Australia on or after 10:30pm on 26 June 2021 (New Zealand Standard Time (NZST)).

Latest case information

3. The situation in Australia materially deteriorated on Sunday 27 June, with multiple outbreaks across several states and territories in differing stages of containment. Outbreaks of varying sizes have been reported in five jurisdictions, namely New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland, Victoria, and Western Australia.
 - a. The outbreak in New South Wales is continuing to grow with 130 locally acquired cases now reported, an increase of 18 new cases in the past 24 hours. In response to the outbreak, New South Wales has extended the lockdown to wider Sydney, including the Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Wollongong and Shell Harbour for 14 days. Anyone who has left Sydney since 21 June 2021 has been advised to stay at home and observe similar restrictions to those still in Sydney.
 - b. In the Northern Territory, a positive case has been detected in the Tanami Gold Mine. The case spent a night at a managed isolation facility in Brisbane and was in an adjacent room to a person that was unknown to be a case at the time. The Northern Territory case is considered to have been infectious for 5-6 days while at the mine. Over 1,650 close contacts have been identified, including 950 who left the mine prior to the case being identified. Seven cases have now been linked with this outbreak: five in the Northern Territory and two cases interstate. Further contact tracing is underway.
 - c. Queensland has identified 9 cases associated with an international aircrew member, who acquired their infection whilst in hotel quarantine and tested positive on 20 June 2021 after being in the community for 24 hours. Queensland has also reported a

positive case associated with the NT outbreak, who was infectious in the community for 24 hours. Contact tracing is underway.

- d. Western Australia has reported two local cases associated with the Sydney outbreak. Restrictions have been imposed for the Perth and Peel regions, including the mandatory wearing of masks indoors and on public transport. 182 miners associated with the NT mine have arrived in Western Australia and contact tracing is underway.
- e. Two cases were identified in Victoria that are associated with the Sydney outbreak and are now in isolation. 60 close contacts have been identified with their workplace, with all returning negative results. No additional cases were reported in the past 24 hours and the spread of COVID-19 appears to be contained. Seven miners associated with the NT mine have returned to Victoria and are currently isolating and undergoing testing.
- f. No community cases have been reported in three jurisdictions, namely Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Tasmania.

Health advice

4. Based on the information available on 29 June 2021 the risk to New Zealand appears to be medium overall, noting that the risk varies considerable by State or Territory. I consider that **a precautionary approach should continue to be taken and recommend that QFT from New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia continue to be paused, with a review on 6 July 2021.**
5. Continuing the pause on QFT from these jurisdictions will allow outstanding test results to be returned and give New Zealand time to assess logical next steps.
6. In respect of the remaining Australian states and jurisdictions, I consider that the spread of COVID-19 cases appears to have been contained at this point, there is robust surveillance, testing and contact tracing to detect and manage cases, and adequate border controls are in place to prevent the import and spread of new cases. I therefore advise that **QFT from the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria could recommence any time from 11:59pm on 4 July 2021 provided that:**
 - a. **travellers have not previously been in New South Wales, Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia on or after 10:30pm on 26 June 2021 (New Zealand Standard Time (NZST)); and**
 - b. **travellers provide evidence of a negative COVID-19 test, taken within three days of departure.**
7. I further propose that should QFT from these States and Territories recommence, clear communications should be provided to passengers reinforcing:
 - a. the current public health measures in place,
 - b. the requirement to wear face coverings on the aircraft and at the airport,
 - c. the requirement to make a health declaration,
 - d. that passengers may be subject to random temperature checks.
 - e. the importance of downloading the COVID tracer app, and
 - f. the requirement to self-isolate and be tested immediately if they have any symptoms of illness.

8. These measures should minimise the risk of COVID-19 spreading to New Zealand.
Recommencing QFT from the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria
9. QFT from Australia has been enabled by the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order (No 2) 2020 (the Air Border Order) which allows the Minister for COVID-19 response to issue an exemption from quarantine and isolation requirements for travellers who arrive in New Zealand on an aircraft undertaking a QFT flight.
10. If you agree to recommence QFT from the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria, you need to revoke the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order (No 2) Amendment Order (No 5) 2021, which will re-designate Australia as a QFT place, and amend the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Exemptions and Conditions for Quarantine-free Travel) Notice 2021 and replace it with a new exemption notice.
11. 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.

Impact on travellers

12. If you agree with my recommendation, QFT from New South Wales, Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia will continue to be temporarily suspended and travellers will be required to shelter in place for the duration of the pause. If a traveller needs to return to New Zealand urgently, they will need to secure a flight and a place in the Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ) system.
13. Travellers from the remaining states and territories would become eligible again to undertake QFT to New Zealand, provided they have returned a negative COVID-19 test, taken within three days of departure, and have not previously been in New South Wales, Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia on or after 10:30pm on 26 June 2021 (New Zealand Standard Time (NZST)). If they have been in a location of interest before this date, they will not be able to travel to New Zealand for 14 days since they were last in that location of interest or, if they have already travelled to New Zealand and subsequently find they were at a newly-identified location of interest be subject to the conditions of the section 70 Notice and will be required to get tested and isolate or quarantine.

Further review

14. Further review and advice on the COVID-19 situation in New South Wales will be provided on 6 July 2021. This briefing will also contain advice on the COVID-19 situation in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

Consultation

15. Before any decision to recommencement QFT from the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria, you must consult the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Minister of Transport. You may consult other relevant Ministers.¹

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

Recommendations

We recommend you:

- a) **Note** that on 26 June 2021 you decided to pause QFT from Australia from 10:30pm on 26 June 2021 (New Zealand time). **Noted**
- b) **Note** that locally acquired cases have been reported in New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland, and Western Australia and that contact tracing is underway. **Noted**
- c) **Note** that two locally acquired cases were reported in Victoria associated with the Bondi/Westfield outbreak, however, the spread of COVID-19 in Victoria appears to be contained. **Noted**
- d) **Note** that no locally acquired cases have been reported in the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Tasmania. **Noted**
- e) **Agree** that, based on information available on 29 June 2021, QFT should continue to be paused from New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia, with a review on 6 July 2021. **Yes/No**
- f) **Agree** that based on information and public health advice available on 29 June 2021 QFT from the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria can recommence any time from 11:59pm on 4 July 2021 (NZST) for travellers who:
- (i) have not previously been in ~~New South Wales~~, Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia on or after 10:30pm on 26 June 2021; ~~and~~ or New South Wales on or after 11:59pm on 22 June 2021; and **Yes/No**
 - (ii) have provided evidence of a negative COVID-19 test, taken within three days of departure. **Yes/No**
- g) **Note** that if you agree to recommence QFT from the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria, the Parliamentary Counsel Office will prepare the required amendments to the Air Border Order and the revised exemption notice for your signature. **Noted**
- h) **Agree** to forward this advice to the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Transport for consultation. **Yes/No**



Dr Ashley Bloomfield

Director-General of Health

Te Tumu Whakarae mō te Hauora

Date: 29/06/2021



Hon Chris Hipkins

Minister for COVID-19 Response

Date: 29/6/2021

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

Background

1. On 26 June 2021, you decided to pause QFT from Australia for an initial period of 3 days and a notice was subsequently issued excluding QFT for travellers who had been in Australia on or after 10:30pm on 26 June 2021 (NZST).

Latest case information

Latest case information

2. The situation in Australia materially deteriorated on Sunday 27 June, with multiple outbreaks across several states and territories in differing stages of containment. Outbreaks of varying sizes have been reported in five jurisdictions, namely New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland, Victoria, and Western Australia.

New South Wales

- a. There are now 130 cases associated with the Sydney 'Bondi/Westfield' outbreak, with an increase of 18 new locally acquired cases in the past 24 hours.
- b. On 16 June 2021, a positive case was identified as part of routine border surveillance testing. The case was symptomatic from 13 June 2021 and is considered infectious as of 11 June 2021. The case is of the 'Delta' variant (B.1.617.2 variant of concern) and transports international flight crew between a managed isolation facility and the airport.
- c. In response to the outbreak, New South Wales has extended the lockdown to wider Sydney, including the Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Wollongong and Shell Harbour for 14 days. Anyone who left Sydney since 21 June 2021 has been advised to stay at home and observe similar restrictions to those still in Sydney.
- d. An assessment completed on 24 June 2021 recommended that the public health risk from Sydney to be medium. The initial 72-hour pause was extended for a further period of 12 days until 6 July 2021.

Northern Territory

- a. A positive case has been detected at the Tanami Gold Mine, which is located 350km North West of Alice Springs. The case spent a night (9 hours) at a managed isolation facility in Brisbane on 17/18 June 2021, and was in an adjacent room to a person that was an unknown case at the time, who was detected on 20 June 2021 (and was infected by another returnee who was in the facility from 10 to 12 June 2021).
- b. The Northern Territory case was asymptomatic (except for a mild headache) and is considered to have been infectious for 5-6 days while at the gold mine (from 19 to 25 June 2021 (inclusive)). 700 close contacts on the site have been identified, with 100

of these deemed close contacts plus. In addition, 950 close contacts have left the mine and are scattered throughout Australia. Two close contacts who returned to New Zealand are in isolation – one has returned a negative test, test results for the other miner are pending.

- c. Seven cases have now been linked to the Newmont Tanami gold mine cluster. Five cases are in the Northern Territory and two cases are located interstate. In response to the outbreak, the North Territory Government imposed a lockdown across the Greater Darwin area until 1:00pm on 2 July 2021. This includes the Darwin, Palmerston and Litchfield Council areas, and Wagait and Belyuen Shires.

Queensland

- d. On 19 June 2021, an aircrew member was released from a government quarantine facility following a negative Day 12 test on 17 June 2021. They had a further test on 19 June 2021, as part of routine international aircrew surveillance, which returned a positive result with a low Ct value. The case is considered to have acquired their infection whilst in hotel quarantine and has been genomically linked to another international aircrew member with the Alpha variant quarantining in the same hotel quarantine facility. Eight additional cases are associated with this outbreak, which has been referred to as the Brisbane Metropolitan outbreak.
- e. On 27 June 2021, a positive case was reported in Queensland associated with the NT outbreak. The miner returned from working in the Northern Territory, transited through Brisbane airport on 25 June 2021 and travelled to the Sunshine Coast. The miner is considered infectious in the community for around a day. A second case associated with the NT mine was reported on 28 June 2021. Contact tracing is underway.
- f. On 29 June 2021, restrictions were introduced for people living in South East Queensland on household gatherings and a two-square metre rule for licensed venues.

Victoria

- a. Two cases have been identified in Victoria that are associated with the Sydney outbreak. One case travelled to Sydney for two days, arriving back in Victoria on 20 June 2021. This case was present at an exposure event attended by a previously identified case. The second case is a co-worker of the case who travelled to Sydney. 60 close contacts have been identified with their workplace, with all returning negative results. No additional cases were reported in the past 24 hours and the spread of COVID-19 appears to be contained.
- b. Seven miners associated with the NT mine have returned to Victoria. They are all undergoing testing.

Western Australia

- a. On 27 June 2021, Western Australia reported one community case associated with the Sydney outbreak. The case was potentially infectious while in the community for three days, from 22 to 24 June, during which time she visited several locations of interest. A second case, who attended the same gym as the initial case, has also caught the virus. Contract tracing is continuing.

- b. Restrictions have been imposed for the Perth and Peel regions until 12:01am on 3 July 2021, including the mandatory wearing of masks indoors and on public transport.
- c. 182 miners associated with the NT mine have arrived in Western Australia and contact tracing is underway.

Other Australian States and Territories

- a. The Australian Capital Territory has not identified any cases of COVID-19.
- b. South Australia has not identified any cases of COVID-19. 29 miners associated with the NT mine have returned to South Australia and all have returned a negative COVID-19 test. Despite not having any identified cases, as a precautionary measure the South Australian government has introduced a range of restrictions from 11:59pm on 28 June 2021, including mask wearing for high-risk settings, limits private gatherings, and a two-square metre rule for licensed venues. These restrictions will be in place for at least seven days.
- c. Tasmania has not identified any cases of COVID-19. Three miners associated with the NT mine have returned to Tasmania. Two have returned negative COVID-19 tests, and test results for the third miner are pending.

Ongoing risk assessment is underway

3. Noting the remaining uncertainty with respect to Australia, we will continue to review the situation daily, based on the most recent information and intelligence from Australian health officials.
4. Further case information, including contact tracing, locations of interest and testing volumes are expected to be updated daily. Any additional locally acquired cases will be notified immediately.

Health Assessment

5. Where information is available, the following has been considered:
 - a. Potential source of COVID-19 infection e.g. setting or occupation of relevance
 - b. Timeframes over which contacts were infectious in the community before isolation
 - c. Locations of interest while infectious in the community
 - d. Comprehensiveness of testing and testing results, e.g. RT-PCR Ct value(s), serology
 - e. Any other relevant considerations, such as COVID-19 strain, vaccination status, the response from individual states and territories.
6. This information is set out in the health assessment, attached as Annex 1.
7. You are also receiving ongoing advice about the risks associated with COVID-19. In accordance with section 9(2) of the COVID-19 Act, you may have regard to that advice without it being repeated here. COVID-19 is a highly infectious disease which may be spread by people who are not showing symptoms. This supports significant intervention measures for those at heightened risk of contracting or spreading COVID-19.

Health advice

8. Based on the information available on 29 June 2021 the risk to New Zealand appears to be medium overall, noting that the risk varies considerable by State or Territory. I consider that **a precautionary approach should continue to be taken and recommend that QFT from New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia continue to be paused, with a review on 6 July 2021.**
9. Continuing the pause on QFT from these jurisdictions will allow outstanding test results to be returned and give New Zealand time to assess logical next steps.
10. In respect of the remaining Australian states and jurisdictions, I consider that the spread of COVID-19 cases appears to have been contained at this point, there is robust surveillance, testing and contact tracing to detect and manage cases, and adequate border controls are in place to prevent the import and spread of new cases. I therefore advise that **QFT from the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria could recommence any time from 11:59pm on 4 July 2021 provided that:**
 - a. **travellers have not previously been in New South Wales, Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia on or after 10:30pm on 26 June 2021 (New Zealand Standard Time (NZST)); and**
 - b. **travellers provide evidence of a negative COVID-19 test, taken within three days of departure.**
11. I further propose that should QFT from these States and Territories recommence, clear communications should be provided to passengers reinforcing:
 - a. the current public health measures in place,
 - b. the requirement to wear face coverings on the aircraft and at the airport,
 - c. the requirement to make a health declaration,
 - d. that passengers may be subject to random temperature checks.
 - e. the importance of downloading the COVID tracer app, and
 - f. the requirement to self-isolate and be tested immediately if they have any symptoms of illness.
12. These measures should minimise the risk of COVID-19 spreading to New Zealand.

New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990

13. The exemption discretion must be exercised consistently with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 (NZBORA).
14. The discretion to grant or rescind 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.
15. New Zealand citizens have the right to enter New Zealand. A continuation of a pause in QFT would limit the realisation of that right by citizens currently offshore in Australia.

16. The greatest threat to the health of people in New Zealand continues to be from the introduction of COVID-19 cases at the border. That risk continues to be present with the emergence of new Covid-19 variants. The continuation of the pause in QFT from Australia will further this important objective of preventing the introduction of COVID-19 to New Zealand, pending further clarification of the risk this outbreak poses to people in New Zealand.
17. Citizens forced to remain in New South Wales, the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia will have their right to enter New Zealand limited for the duration of the pause. At this time, the pause in QFT is intended only as a further temporary measure allowing officials appropriate time to gather further information regarding the outbreak, and to consider proportionate public health measures in response. A continuation of the pause in QFT also affords officials time to consider and prepare for the likely impact on MIQ facilities in New Zealand if travellers are permitted to resume travel but required to enter MIQ on re-entry.
18. 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 be 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

19. Preventing the introduction and spread of COVID-19 in New Zealand will protect vulnerable New Zealanders, including Māori and Pacific communities who have been historically disproportionately impacted by a widespread epidemic.
20. There will be social and economic impacts from the continued pause of QFT from Australia, but this is expected to be limited compared to an introduction of COVID-19 into New Zealand and the potential for increased Alert Levels and the resulting economic and social costs.

Next steps

21. Further review and advice on QFT from New South Wales, the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia will be provided on 6 July 2021.

ENDS.

Annex 1: health Assessment Questions

Annex 1 has been withheld under section 6(b)(i) of the Act.

s 6(b)(i)

