

Briefing

Trans-Tasman Quarantine-Free Travel (QFT): Health advice on lifting the pause on QFT from New South Wales and Queensland

Date due to MO:	7 July 2021	Action required by:	7 July 2021
Security level:	IN CONFIDENCE	Health Report number:	20211575
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)
Maree Roberts	Deputy Chief Executive 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 Withdrawn | |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 lifting the pause on QFT from New South Wales and Queensland

Security level: IN CONFIDENCE **Date:** 7 July 2021

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

Purpose of report

1. This report provides my advice that the current pause on QFT from New South Wales and Queensland continues.

Summary

2. On Saturday 26 June 2021, you decided to pause QFT from Australia for an initial period of three days. A notice was subsequently issued excluding QFT for travellers who had been in Australia on or after 10:30pm Saturday 26 June 2021 (New Zealand Standard Time (NZST)).
3. From 11:59pm Sunday 4 July 2021 (NZST), QFT from Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), Victoria and South Australia resumed.
4. QFT travel is due to recommence from Western Australia and the Northern Territory from 11:59pm Friday 9 July 2021 (NZST). Managed return flights from New South Wales and Queensland are due to commence at the same time.

Latest case information from New South Wales and Queensland

New South Wales

5. The outbreak in New South Wales is continuing to grow with 255 locally acquired cases associated with the Bondi cluster, an increase of 18 new cases in the 24 hours prior to 8pm Tuesday 6 July 2021. Of the new cases, 16 are linked to existing cases. There are a total of nine cases associated with a domestic flight that flew from the Gold Coast to Sydney on Saturday 26 June 2021. On Monday 5 July 2021, New South Wales reported five new cases associated with this cluster. New South Wales has extended its lockdown until Friday 16 July 2021.

Queensland

6. There have been four clusters of cases recently in Queensland. On Tuesday 6 July 2021, Queensland reported one additional locally-acquired case associated with an international

aircrew member who acquired their infection whilst in hotel quarantine and tested positive on Sunday 20 June 2021 after being in the community for 24 hours. Queensland has reported a total of 24 community cases in this cluster, with other potential case linkages under investigation.

Health advice

7. Based on the information available at 4pm Wednesday 7 July 2021 (NZST) the risk to New Zealand appears to be low overall, noting that the risk varies considerably by State or Territory and New South Wales and Queensland currently present a higher risk.
8. **I consider that a precautionary approach should continue to be taken for New South Wales and Queensland and recommend that QFT remain paused. I recommend a further review of QFT from Queensland take place on Friday 9 July 2021. I recommend a further review of New South Wales take place on Wednesday 14 July 2021.**
9. Continuing the pause on QFT from New South Wales and Queensland will allow further information to be gathered to gain a better understanding of the outbreaks. The continued QFT pause does not impact any decision to allow green zone managed return flights from 11:59pm Friday 9 July 2021 (NZST), which will be subject to additional public health mitigations.
10. I note that you have already decided that all travellers from Australia must provide evidence of a negative a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) COVID-19 test taken within three days of departure.

Managed return flights

Public health requirements for managed returns from New South Wales and Queensland

11. I recommend that passengers on a managed return flight must:
 - a. have a negative PCR test within 72 hours of departure (or certification from a medical practitioner)
 - b. have not been in a location of interest in the past 14 days
 - c. not be symptomatic at the time of travel
 - d. not be a close contact of an identified case, and
 - e. not be awaiting the results of a COVID-19 test.

Impact on travellers

12. If you agree with my recommendation, QFT from New South Wales and Queensland will continue to be temporarily paused. Travellers will be required to either follow the health advice in their jurisdiction for the duration of the pause or return to New Zealand on a green zone managed return flight, if available.

Further review

13. I will provide you with a further review of QFT from Queensland on Friday 9 July 2021 and a further review of New South Wales on Wednesday 14 July 2021.

Consultation

14. Before any decision on a section 11 Order under the COVID-19 Public Health Response Act 2020, you must consult the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Minister of Transport. You may also consult other relevant Ministers.¹

Recommendations

We recommend you:

- a) **Note** that on Saturday 26 June 2021 you decided to pause quarantine-free travel (QFT) from Australia from 10:30pm Saturday 26 June 2021 (New Zealand Standard Time (NZST)).
- b) **Note** that on Tuesday 29 June 2021, you agreed to recommence QFT from the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria, effective from 11:59pm Sunday 4 July 2021 (NZST).
- c) **Note** that on Monday 5 July 2021, you agreed to recommence QFT from the Northern Territory and Western Australia and commence managed flights from New South Wales and Queensland from 11:59pm Friday 9 July 2021 (NZST).
- d) **Note** that the public health risk assessment undertaken on Wednesday 7 July 2021 recommends that the pause on QFT for New South Wales and Queensland should remain in place.
- e) **Agree** that QFT travel from New South Wales and Queensland remains paused. Yes/No
- f) **Agree** that a further review of QFT travel from Queensland will be provided to you on Friday 9 July 2021. Yes/No
- g) **Agree** that a further review of QFT travel from New South Wales will be provided to you on Wednesday 14 July 2021. Yes/No
- h) **Note** that you have previously decided that all QFT travellers from Australia provide evidence of a negative Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) COVID-19 test taken within three days of departure.
- i) **Agree** that travellers on managed return flights from New South Wales and Queensland are subject to the following public health measures:
- a. have a negative PCR test within 72 hours of departure (or certification from a medical practitioner) Yes/No
 - b. have not been at a location of interest in the past 14 days Yes/No
 - c. not be symptomatic at the time of travel Yes/No
 - d. not be a close contact of an identified case Yes/No
 - e. not be awaiting the results of a COVID-19 test Yes/No

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

- k) **Note** that the Parliamentary Counsel Office will prepare the required amendments to the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Exemptions and Conditions for Quarantine-free Travel) Notice 2021 for your signature.
- l) **Agree** to forward this advice to the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, **Yes** **No**, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Transport for consultation.


Dr Ashley Bloomfield
Director-General of Health
Te Tumu Whakarae mō te Hauora
Date:


Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

Date: 7/7/2021

Trans-Tasman Quarantine-Free Travel (QFT): Health advice on lifting the pause of QFT from New South Wales and Queensland

Background

1. On Tuesday 22 June 2021, the Government announced a pause on quarantine-free travel from New South Wales from 11:59pm Saturday 26 June 2021 (NZST). On Thursday 24 June 2021, the Government announced an extension to the pause. On Saturday 26 June 2021, the Government announced a pause on quarantine-free travel from all ports in Australian states and territories from 10:30pm Saturday 26 June 2021 (NZST).
2. From 11:59pm Sunday 4 July 2021 (NZST), QFT resumed from Tasmania, ACT, Victoria and South Australia with the following conditions:
 - a. Passengers must meet all eligibility requirements captured in the baseline pre-departure questions, including that they have not been in a current location of interest in the past 14 days;
 - b. Passengers must have not been in a state from which the New Zealand Government does not currently allow QFT; and
 - c. Passengers must have evidence of a negative PCR COVID-19 test taken within 72 hours of travel. This condition does not apply to anyone who has been in Australia for less than 72 hours.
3. QFT from Western Australia and the Northern Territory is due to resume from 11:59pm Friday 9 July 2021 (NZST) for people who have not previously been in Queensland or New South Wales on or after 10:30pm Saturday 26 June 2021 (NZST). Managed return flights for people ordinarily resident in New Zealand are due to commence from New South Wales and Queensland at the same time.
4. The existing condition remains in place in relation to locations of interest. This means that anyone that has been at a location of interest anywhere in Australia cannot travel to New Zealand within 14 days of exposure, regardless of whether they have evidence of a negative pre-departure test (anyone already in New Zealand who has been in a location of interest is subject to a Section 70 notice).

Latest case information for New South Wales and Queensland

New South Wales

5. The outbreak in New South Wales is continuing to grow. On Monday 5 July, New South Wales reported five new cases associated with this cluster. There are currently 255 locally acquired cases associated with the Bondi cluster, an increase of 18 new cases in the 24 hours prior to 8pm Tuesday 6 July 2021 (NZST). Of these 18 new cases, 16 are linked to existing cases.

6. The cluster was first reported in New South Wales on Wednesday 16 June 2021 and was associated with a person who likely acquired their infection as an international airport transport driver. Genomic testing has shown the case has the Delta variant of concern, however, the genomic sequence for this case does not match the Victorian Delta variant outbreak. The source of infection for this case is still under investigation. New South Wales has extended their lockdown by a further week.
7. Settings of exposure that have resulted in several cases include a shopping centre in Bondi Junction, a birthday party, a food wholesaler, at least two schools, an aged care facility and a domestic flight.

Queensland

8. Four clusters have been identified to date in Queensland.

Four Points Brisbane Quarantine Hotel (aka Portuguese restaurant/Greek community centre cluster)

9. On Tuesday 6 July 2021, Queensland reported one additional locally acquired case associated with an international aircrew member who acquired their infection whilst in hotel quarantine. The individual tested positive on Sunday 20 June 2021 after being in the community for 24 hours.
10. Queensland has reported a total of 25 community cases in this cluster, with other potential case linkages under investigation. There are 3,334 contacts in total associated with all cases in this cluster. Of these 2,670 close contacts (**66 percent**) have been tested and 664 (**43 percent**) other contacts have been tested.

Novatel Hotel – Newmont Tanami Mine – Prince Charles Hospital

11. There are a total of eight cases associated with this cluster. The first case returned a positive test on Friday 11 June 2021. Six cases were infectious while in the community. The most recent case identified returned a positive test result on Friday 2 July 2021.
12. All miners who arrived from the Northern Territory have been tested. Of other contacts identified with these cases, 85 percent of close contacts and 75 percent of other contacts have been tested.

Brisbane International Airport Workers

13. There are a total of two cases associated with this cluster. Both cases tested positive on Tuesday 29 June 2021. Both cases were infectious while in the community. There are 591 contacts in total associated with all cases in this cluster. Of these 414 (78 percent) close contacts have been tested and 38 (**64 percent**) other contacts have been tested.

Virgin Airlines Flight Attendant

14. There is only one case associated with this cluster. The case tested positive on Monday 28 June 2021. The case was infectious in the community for one day. There are 240 close contacts, of which 153 (64 percent) have returned negative results.

Australian testing data

15. The table below outlines current COVID-19 testing data for New South Wales and Queensland.

Australian COVID-19 testing summary data: Tuesday 6 July 2021

	National (total)	NSW	Queensland
Past 24 hours			
Tests	95,697	32,321	22,218
Last 7 Days			
Tests	916,120	394,118	150,381
Rate per 100,000 population	3,613	4,874	2,953
Percent testing positivity	<0.1%	<0.1%	<0.1%
Cumulative total			
Total tests	21,450,495	7,250,386	3,019,495
Percent testing Positivity	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%

16. While testing rates for Queensland are good s 9(2)(g)(i)

Ongoing risk assessment is underway

17. We will continue to review the situation regularly, based on the most recent information and intelligence from Australian health officials. Any additional locally acquired cases will be notified immediately.

Health Assessment

18. Where information is available, the following has been considered:
- potential source of COVID-19 infection e.g. setting or occupation of relevance
 - timeframes over which contacts were infectious in the community before isolation
 - locations of interest while infectious in the community
 - comprehensiveness of testing and testing results
 - any other relevant considerations, such as COVID-19 strain, vaccination status, the response from individual states and territories.
19. This information is set out in the health assessment, attached as Annex 1.
20. You are also receiving ongoing advice about the risks associated with COVID-19. In accordance with section 9(2) of the COVID-19 Public Health Response Act 2020 (the 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

Quarantine-free travel

21. I consider that, given continued appearance of cases in New South Wales and insufficient data to provide sufficient assurance for Queensland, **a precautionary approach should continue to be taken and recommend that QFT from New South Wales and Queensland continue to be paused.**

22. **I recommend a further review of Queensland on Friday 9 July 2021.** Continuing the pause on QFT from Queensland for a further 48 hours will allow time for Queensland to obtain more testing results from close and other contacts and to gain a better understanding of the outbreaks.
23. As New South Wales has extended its lockdown until Friday 16 July, **I recommend the next review of New South Wales is provided to you on Wednesday 14 July.**

Managed return flights

24. You announced that green zone managed return flights from New South Wales and Queensland would commence for eligible travellers from 11:59pm Friday 9 July 2021 (NZST). I propose that managed return flights should be subject to public health measures to reduce the risk from passengers on these flights.

Public health requirements for managed return flights

25. I recommend that passengers on a managed return flight must:
- have a negative PCR test within 72 hours of departure (or certification from a medical practitioner)
 - have not been in a location of interest in the past 14 days
 - not be symptomatic at the time of travel
 - not be a close contact of an identified case, and
 - not be awaiting the results of a COVID-19 test.
26. These measures should lower the risk of COVID-19 spreading to New Zealand.

Information for managed return travellers

27. I also recommend the following information is clearly communicated to travellers from New South Wales and Queensland:
- Ensure you have the correct PCR pre-departure test documentation showing a negative result – otherwise you may be required to enter managed isolation for 14 days
 - Limit exposure to large gatherings and the number of people you are in contact with for 48 hours before returning to New Zealand (minimise your potential exposure)
 - Monitor your health closely for any COVID-19 symptoms for 14 days after arrival in New Zealand
 - If symptoms appear, contact Healthline for further advice, get tested and isolate until advised otherwise (even if your most recent COVID-19 test was negative)
 - Diligently keep contact tracing records using the COVID Tracer App or another form of diary.

New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990

28. The exemption discretion must be exercised consistently with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 (NZBORA).
29. The restrictions on citizens' rights to return for the duration of the pause needs to be necessary for public health reasons and proportionate to the risk each state/territory poses

to public health. At this time, the pause in QFT from New South Wales and Queensland is intended only as a temporary measure allowing officials appropriate time to gather further information regarding the outbreak, and to consider proportionate public health measures in response. As there are managed return options from 11:59pm Friday 9 July 2021, whereby citizens can still enter New Zealand on green flights despite QFT remaining paused, the overall response will be a justified limit on the right to return.

s 9(2)(h)

30.

31.

32. The decisions to resume QFT flights from Western Australia and the Northern Territory and commence managed return flights from New South Wales and Queensland will be implemented via an amendment to the QFT Exemption Notice that will be sent to you for signing from PCO.

33. This notice can come into force on the day on which it is signed but must be published in the New Zealand Gazette. On Friday 9 July 2021, you will need to return the signed notice directly to Parliamentary Counsel Office who will arrange for it to be published.

34. Further review and advice on resuming QFT from Queensland will be provided to you on Friday 9 July 2021 and advice for resuming QFT from New South Wales will be provided to you on Wednesday 14 July 2021.

ENDS.

Annex 1: Health Assessment Questions

Withheld under section 6(a) of the Act, if the release would be likely to prejudice the international relations of the Government of New Zealand.

PROACTIVELY RELEASED