

Briefing

Daily Saliva Testing Option for Workers in Quarantine Facilities in Auckland

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

Contact for telephone discussion

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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 Withdrawn | |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:

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


Purpose of report


1. This briefing responds to your request for further information on the accelerated roll-out of saliva testing to Managed Isolation and Quarantine Facility (MIQF) workers at the Novotel Ibis Ellerslie and the Holiday Inn Auckland Airport, and the recommendation that workers at these facilities and Jet Park Auckland will have the option to undertake daily saliva testing on a temporary basis while these facilities experience a high occupancy of COVID-19 cases. A table summarising the various workstreams for saliva testing is attached (Appendix One).

Recommendations

We recommend you:

- a) **Note** that workers at the three Managed Isolation and Quarantine Facilities housing community cases of COVID-19 in Auckland will have the option of daily saliva testing from 7 September 2021.
- b) **Note** that on 8 September you will receive a report on a timeline for amending the Required Testing Order to make daily surveillance mandatory at Quarantine Facilities in certain circumstances.


Bridget White
Deputy Chief Executive
COVID-19 Health System Response
Directorate
Date: 5/09/21


Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister, COVID-19 Response
Date: 7/9/2021

My expectation is that ALL workers in quarantine facilities should be moved to a daily testing cycle and stay on that cycle. This should be made mandatory under the Order.
ALL workers in isolation facilities should be moved to at least a weekly cycle, preferably a 2-3 day cycle. This should also be in the Order.
This work needs to be expedited.

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Context

2. Phased roll out of saliva testing for border workers began on 11 August 2021, when an amendment to the Required Testing Order (RTO) came into force. The Ministry of Health has been working with the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) on the roll out (HR20211764 refers).
3. Saliva testing is currently available to workers at MIQFs in Wellington, Hamilton, Rotorua and the Jet Park in Auckland. Workers in Canterbury MIQFs have been invited to opt-into the saliva testing regime and will be able to provide saliva samples across the six facilities over this week and next. These workers can opt-in to regular saliva testing, which entails a minimum of two tests at least two days apart in any seven-day period, instead of a combined oropharyngeal / bilateral anterior nasal swab or a nasopharyngeal swab every 7 or 14 days. Workers can also choose to give a saliva sample more than twice in seven days if it suits and provides them with additional reassurance.
4. On 30 August 2021, the MIQ Technical Advisory Group (TAG) explored different risk mitigation measures for the Auckland Quarantine Facilities which are currently managing COVID-19 cases from the community. These are Jet Park Auckland and the two new Quarantine Facilities - Novotel Ibis Ellerslie and Holiday Inn Auckland Airport. On 31 August 2021, after receiving feedback from ESR, the MIQ TAG recommended that daily saliva testing be strongly encouraged for workers at these facilities.
5. The three MIQFS have been identified as high-risk because:
 - a. The number of COVID-19 cases at peak infectiousness that are being managed at these facilities increases the viral load on site and impacts the ability of ventilation systems (and other measures in place e.g. HEPA filters) to safely disperse aerosolised virus. This may result in increased risk of staff exposure to virus in hallways after doors have been opened.
 - b. The two new Quarantine Facilities have staff who might not have cared for COVID-19 cases before as these facilities were previously managed isolation facilities that housed returnees who had not tested positive for COVID-19. In addition, Jet Park Auckland has been operating at capacity, which means that new staff have likely been brought on to assist with caring for these cases.
6. This recommendation was supported by the Saliva Testing Clinical Governance Group on 1 September 2021. They also recommended that workers be able to immediately switch to saliva testing without a final nasopharyngeal swab to finish their current testing cycle.

Daily saliva testing offered at the 3 MIQFs managing community cases from 7 September 2021

7. The Ministry of Health and MBIE are accelerating roll out of saliva testing for workers at the two new Quarantine Facilities. Jet Park Auckland already provides saliva testing in the twice weekly format.

8. MBIE has advised all staff at the three facilities of the changes. On Monday 6 September their staff will be invited to opt into daily saliva testing. The New Zealand Defence Force, Police and AvSec are also aware of the roll out. The Ministry and Asia Pacific Healthcare Group (the Ministry's contracted saliva testing provider) will be onsite at the three MIQFs from Tuesday 7 September to engage with workers and carry out testing.

Daily saliva testing when on site will be strongly recommended to MIQF workers at the 3 Auckland MIQFs

9. The TAG has strongly encouraged that daily saliva testing become mandatory. Initially, while amendments to the Required Testing Order (RTO) are in development, daily saliva testing will be strongly recommended to these workers.
10. Daily saliva testing provides an added degree of assurance to staff who are supporting our COVID-19 cases and caring for them in these facilities. It also enables the virus to be detected earlier, cases to be detected early and the chain of transmission to be reduced.
11. To make this increased surveillance testing mandatory, an amendment to the RTO is required. The Ministry is exploring how to make this public health tool, daily saliva testing, available at times when there are surge events and high numbers of COVID-19 cases.

Equity

12. There is a higher proportion of Māori and Pacific individuals working at our borders compared to the general population. Any changes to the testing regime will therefore have a greater impact on this workforce. The equity issues relating to mandatory saliva testing will be addressed in a 8 September report back to you regarding amendments to the RTO.

Next steps

13. The Ministry will report back to you on 8 September with a timeline for implementing a proposed amendment to the RTO to enable mandatory daily saliva testing on a temporary basis for workers at Quarantine Facilities that are experiencing a high occupancy of cases.

ENDS

APPENDIX ONE: SALIVA TESTING WORKSTREAMS

Border Workforce Testing	<p>(a) Saliva Testing National Rollout - phased approach (began 11 August 2021). Project team continues to engage across sectors, with key Agency leads and workers across the country to support the roll out. Take up of saliva testing is increasing and compliance is good.</p> <p>(b) Accelerated roll out of saliva testing to the Holiday Inn and Novotel (2 new sites) in Auckland from 7 September as part of the Border Workforce Saliva Testing programme. Saliva testing already available at Jet Park Auckland. Daily saliva testing will be encouraged at all three sites.</p> <p>(c) Investigating and preparing advice on a mandatory daily saliva testing requirement under the RTO.</p>
Increasing Testing Capacity and Capability	An Expression of Interest process underway to consider wider range of providers to roll out testing surveillance to support surge/contingency planning.
Reconnecting New Zealand	<p>Programme in place for saliva testing of returnees in MIQF on Days 3/6/9.</p> <p>Trial point of arrival testing/Rapid Antigen Testing and investigate the application of these modalities in the context of ports and other settings.</p>
Improving <u>surveillance</u> testing of workers in higher risk settings, including essential workforce	<p>(a) Voluntary systematic testing of DHB staff who work with COVID-19 patients (in progress).</p> <p>(b) Mandatory testing of essential workers crossing alert level boundaries (in progress).</p>
Clinical Oversight and Governance	<p>COVID-19 Testing Technical Advisory Group</p> <p>Saliva Testing Clinical Governance Group.</p>