

Briefing

Health Advice on Quarantine-Free Entry to New Zealand from the Cook Islands

Date due to MO: 12 January 2021 **Action required by:** 13 January 2021

Security level: IN CONFIDENCE **Health Report number:** 2021004

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

Copy to: Hon Andrew Little, Minister of Health

Contact for telephone discussion

Name	Position	Telephone
Dr Ashley Bloomfield	Director-General of Health	s 9(2)(a)
Caroline Flora	Acting Deputy Director-General	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 Withdrawn | |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:

Health Advice on Quarantine-Free Entry to New Zealand from the Cook Islands

Security level: IN CONFIDENCE **Date:** 12 January 2021

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

Background

1. Cabinet agreed in December 2020 [CAB-20-MIN-0515] that work to enable two-way quarantine-free travel from the Cook Islands to New Zealand should be undertaken by officials.
2. Cabinet also authorised the Minister for COVID-19 Response, informed by the Director-General of Health's advice [CBC-20-MIN-0143], to decide on a commencement date for one-way quarantine-free travel from the Cook Islands.
3. A briefing *Quarantine-Free Travel Entry to New Zealand from the Cook Islands* has been provided confirming the operational readiness of Air New Zealand, Auckland International Airport and agencies.
4. This briefing provides advice on whether the health conditions in the Cook Islands support the commencement of one-way quarantine-free travel from the Cook Islands.

One-way quarantine-free entry from the Cook Islands

5. In November 2020 officials (Ministry of Health, Immigration New Zealand and New Zealand Customs Service) visited the Cook Islands to undertake a joint readiness and assurance assessment for two-way quarantine-free travel.
6. The assessment recommended that further preparedness work on both sides, including to support the Cook Islands health system, to ensure robust capacity and capability, before commencement of two-way quarantine-free travel could be begin.
7. While officials did not evaluate the Cooks Island's COVID-free declaration during the visit, their recommendation noted that there was a very low risk of transmission of COVID-19 from the Cook Islands to New Zealand, making one-way quarantine-free travel safe to commence.
8. Since the assessment in November, the Ministry of Health has continued to monitor the situation in the Cook Islands and can confirm that there has been no material change in the public health status. In my view, one-way quarantine-free travel from the Cook Islands to New Zealand is safe to commence.

Exemption from the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order (No 2) 2020 to enable one-way quarantine-free travel from the Cook Islands

9. Legislative and operational preparation continues for the eventual commencement of two-way travel between the Cook Islands and New Zealand, and the process for amending

the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order (No 2) 2020 is underway and likely to be completed by 31 January 2021.

10. To enable one-way quarantine-free travel from the Cook Islands to occur in the interim, an exemption needs to be granted from the Order.
11. On 22 December 2020 we provided you with the Briefing *Exemption from the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order (No 2) 2020 to enable one-way quarantine-free travel from the Cook Islands* [HR 20202277] confirming that the exemption meets the purpose of the COVID-19 Public Health Response Act 2020 and seeking your approval to grant the exemption. The attached Exemption Notice has been updated to reflect the proposed commencement date for one-way quarantine free travel and to take account of recent amendments that were made to the Air Border Order. To confirm they meet the health conditions for operating quarantine-free flights, the Notice also refers to the proposed aircraft for this route.

Health requirements associated with one-way quarantine-free travel

12. Officials have been working to ensure that New Zealand's domestic systems are ready for operationalising quarantine-free travel from the Cook Islands to New Zealand.
13. Under the proposed arrangements for quarantine-free travel normal immigration requirements would apply, with passengers continuing to be subject to non-COVID-19 customs, aviation and maritime security as well as biosecurity screening. Additional health measures would be introduced that focus on COVID-19, providing assurance that quarantine-free travel is as low risk as possible.
14. An essential layer of assurance includes ensuring that passengers are in good health when travelling from the Cook Islands. Passengers will be required to meet certain eligibility criteria and health requirements. They will be asked to confirm that in the past 14 days they have not travelled outside New Zealand or the Cook Islands; been diagnosed with COVID-19; or awaiting the results of a COVID-19 test. Passengers will also be asked to declare they are not currently experiencing any loss of smell or symptoms of COVID-19: namely coughing; fever; difficulty breathing; sneezing and a runny nose; and a sore throat.

Travellers returning to the Cook Islands

15. Currently all persons are prevented from entering the Cook Islands unless they meet specified entry criteria (namely Cook Island citizens or permanent residents, work permit holders or resident permit holders) or are provided an exemption (in writing) by the Cook Islands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration. Travellers must also provide a negative COVID-19 test result, taken within 96 hours of departure from Auckland airport, complete exit health clearance and have spent at least the last 14 days in New Zealand prior to entry into the Cook Islands. To further mitigate the any risk of possible transmission, all persons travelling to the Cook Islands will be required to complete a pre-departure health declaration. Random temperature checking will also occur.

Equity

16. Pacific Island countries are experiencing significant economic and health impacts from the isolation caused by the global pandemic. Concern was raised by Cook Islands Prime Minister Mark Brown late last year about the impact New Zealand's closed border has had on Cook Islanders seeking non-urgent medical treatment in New Zealand, with some

instances where citizens were avoiding seeking non-urgent care to avoid the 14 day isolation period.

17. Commencement of one-way quarantine-free travel from the Cook Island would provide some support for the country's health, economic and social wellbeing as we work towards two-way quarantine-free travel.

Next steps

18. The Ministry has continued to work with the Cook Islands on strengthening its health capabilities and contingency plans. We will report back to you in mid-February on progress towards two-way quarantine-free travel, including issues such as the emergence of new strains of COVID-19.

Recommendations

We recommend you:

- a) **Note** that I consider that the risk of transmission of COVID-19 from the Cook Islands remains very low, and that one-way quarantine-free entry from the Cook Islands to New Zealand would be safe to commence. **Noted**
- b) **Note** that to enable quarantine-free air travel from the Cook Islands an exemption under the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order (No 2) 2020 needs to be granted that exempts passengers from having to undertake 14 days of managed isolation when they arrive in New Zealand. **Noted**
- c) **Sign** the attached Exemption Notice which grants an exemption from clauses 8(2A), 8(3), 8(3A) and 8(4) of the Air Border Order to passengers travelling by air from the Cook Islands to New Zealand. **Yes/No**



Dr Ashley Bloomfield
Director-General of Health

Date:



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

Date: 13/01/2021

Gazette notice

Exemption of persons from clause 8 of the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order (No 2) 2020

1. Pursuant to clause 26 of the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order (No 2) 2020 ("Order"), I, Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister for COVID-19 Response, having taken into account the advice of the Director-General of Health, hereby declare that persons:
 - a. arriving in New Zealand as a passenger on an Airbus A320 or A321 aircraft operated by Air New Zealand Limited;
 - b. who have travelled non-stop from the Cook Islands to New Zealand; and
 - c. who satisfy the quarantine-free entry criteria as defined in clause 2;

are exempt from clause 8(2A), 8(3), 8(3A) and 8(4) of the Order.

2. The *quarantine-free entry criteria* are that:

- the person has been in the Cook Islands and/or New Zealand for at least 14 consecutive days immediately prior to travelling to New Zealand;
- they have maintained physical distancing (to the greatest extent practicable) from any person, at the airport at which they arrive, who did not arrive from the Cook Islands;
- they have worn a face covering while in the airport at which they arrived in New Zealand; and
- on arrival into New Zealand, there are no reasonable grounds (as determined by a suitably qualified health practitioner) to suspect that the person may have COVID-19.

For the purpose of this exemption, **face covering** means a covering of any type that covers the nose and mouth of a person.

For the purpose of this exemption, **physical distancing**, from other persons, means remaining at least 2 metres away from them.

This exemption will commence at 11.59pm on 20 January 2021. This exemption expires at 11.59pm on 31 March 2021.

Dated at Wellington this [13th](#) day of January 2021.



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response