

# Briefing

## Risk-based approach to managing in-MIF transmission

<b>Date due to MO:</b>	1 April 2021	<b>Action required by:</b>	N/A
<b>Security level:</b>	IN CONFIDENCE	<b>Health Report number:</b>	20210782
<b>To:</b>	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister for COVID-19 Response		

### Contact for telephone discussion

Name	Position	Telephone
<b>Dr Ashley Bloomfield</b>	Director-General of Health	s 9(2)(a)
<b>Sue Gordon</b>	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 Withdrawn |  |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:

# Risk-based approach to managing in-MIF transmission

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**Security level:** IN CONFIDENCE

**Date:** 1 April 2021

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

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## Purpose of report

1. This report responds to your request for further information on the risk-based approach to the management of potential in-Managed Isolation Facility (MIF) transmission.

## Summary

2. This briefing details a process the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) has developed – in consultation with the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) and the Auckland Regional Public Health Service (ARPHS) – to ensure prompt detection, investigation, and management of potential in-MIF transmission events.
3. A range of risk mitigations have been previously implemented to manage in-MIF transmission events, including strengthening the post-departure Wellbeing Check process and implementing post-departure isolation/testing. These mitigations are summarised in paragraphs 20 – 27.
4. The process detailed in this briefing supports a risk-based approach to determining the appropriate range of risk mitigations required in the management of in-MIF transmission events.
5. A suite of risk mitigations, that have been successfully applied previously already, exists and will be drawn upon in the management of future in-MIF transmission events. A bespoke management plan is required for each event in response to particular circumstances and the range of public health considerations that inform decision-making in every discrete in-MIF transmission event.

## Recommendations

We recommend you:

- a) **Note** that there are a range of risk mitigations that have been implemented in previous instances of in-MIF transmission to successfully reduce the risk of onward transmission of COVID-19 to the community, and which will continue to be drawn upon as appropriate to manage any future instances of in-MIF transmission. **Yes/No**

b) **Note** that the in-MIF transmission investigation process has been developed ☒ **Yes/** ☐ **No** to ensure:

- Rapid individual case investigation and contact tracing, and to manage immediate risks associated with the case;
- Prompt initiation of in-MIF transmission case investigation as appropriate;
- Early identification and implementation of the range of public health risk mitigations, using a risk-based approach;
- Streamlined and coordinated incident management and reporting; and
- Implementation of further interventions to prevent and manage any additional potential in-facility transmission.

c) **Agree** that future in-MIF transmission events will be managed using this process, with mitigations – including the requirement for post-departure isolation and testing, to be selected and implemented using a risk-based approach. ☒ **Yes/** ☐ **No**



Sue Gordon  
Deputy Chief Executive

**COVID-19 Health System Response**

Date:



Hon Chris Hipkins  
Minister for COVID-19 Response

Date: 7/4/2021

# Risk-based approach to managing in-MIF transmission

## Background

1. In HR20210465/2021-2426 MBIE and the Ministry provided you with advice on additional post-MIF measures to minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19 from returnees to the community, including amendments to the post-departure wellbeing check process to support an increased response rate. This report also explored the feasibility of requiring returnees to undergo testing on day 5 post-departure from MIF.
2. Day 12 testing is undertaken as a 'clearance' test to identify anyone who has a long incubation. This test provides reasonable assurance that people exiting the MIF do not have COVID-19. The post-MIF Wellbeing Check is designed to provide further assurance that departees are symptom free. In addition, it supports the identification of any undetected in-facility transmission.
3. Post-departure day 5 testing and/or isolation are key mitigation tools that can be used to reduce the risk of onward transmission of COVID-19 from an MIF into the community within an incident response context.
4. You requested a risk-based approach be applied to the implementation of post-departure testing/isolation. The purpose of this briefing is to inform you of the process we have developed to promptly detect, investigate, and manage potential in-MIF transmission – the in-MIF transmission investigation process.
5. A suite of risk mitigations has been successfully implemented in the past to manage in-MIF transmission events (refer to paragraphs 20 – 27). A combination of these mitigations is required to appropriately manage in-MIF transmission events and reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading to the community. This includes applying a risk-based approach to requiring post-departure isolation and testing as an incident management tool, as used successfully in both the Pullman and Grande Mercure Auckland in-MIF transmission incidents.
6. Whilst we already have a suite of previously utilised risk mitigations at our disposal, the in-MIF transmission investigation process will provide a systematised and formalised approach to ensure:
  - Rapid individual case investigation and contact tracing associated with all people diagnosed with COVID-19 as a result of in-MIF transmission, to manage immediate risks associated with the case.
  - Prompt initiation of in-MIF transmission investigation where there are defined features of a case that indicate possible in-MIF transmission (see Figure 1 for further details regarding considerations that may indicate potential in-MIF transmission).
  - Early identification and implementation of the range of public health risk mitigations for staff and returnees, which are both proportionate to the risk posed by the incident, as well as appropriate to the specific circumstances of the incident.

- Streamlined and coordinated incident management and reporting via the Ministry's Incident Management Team (IMT), with the support of the MIQ Technical Advisory Group (TAG)
  - Implementation of additional risk-based interventions to manage any additional potential in-facility transmission.
7. This process will allow for the systematic implementation of a risk-based approach to managing in-MIF transmission events.

## **The in-MIF transmission investigation process**

### **Daily reviews of post-day 3 positive results will be assessed against in-MIF transmission assessment criteria**

8. Note that the complete in-MIF transmission investigation pathway is included in **Appendix 1**.
9. All cases of COVID-19 identified in the facilities are investigated and immediate control measures implemented, including moving the case to a quarantine facility, and identification and management of close contacts.
10. The Institute of Environmental Science and Research (ESR) undertakes daily reviews of all post-day 3 positive result identified in MIFs and report these to the Ministry of Health and the relevant Public Health Units (PHUs). All three parties will consider the draft assessment criteria in Figure 1 to determine whether an in-MIF transmission investigation should be initiated.
11. Note that the criteria detailed in **Figure 1** is in draft and will be further refined and formalised with the PHUs by the end of April 2021.

### **The Ministry's IMT is notified of any potential in-MIF transmission event**

12. If the assessment criteria for initiating an in-MIF transmission investigation is met, the Ministry's Incident Controller will be notified and an in-MIF transmission case investigation will be initiated, led by the relevant PHU.
13. Note that depending on the size, scale, and apparent risk of the event, the function of the IMT in the in-MIF transmission investigation process will vary. The Incident Controller will determine whether a full IMT is required, however, at a minimum, the IMT will perform a coordination function and operate as the central point for information gathering and reporting.

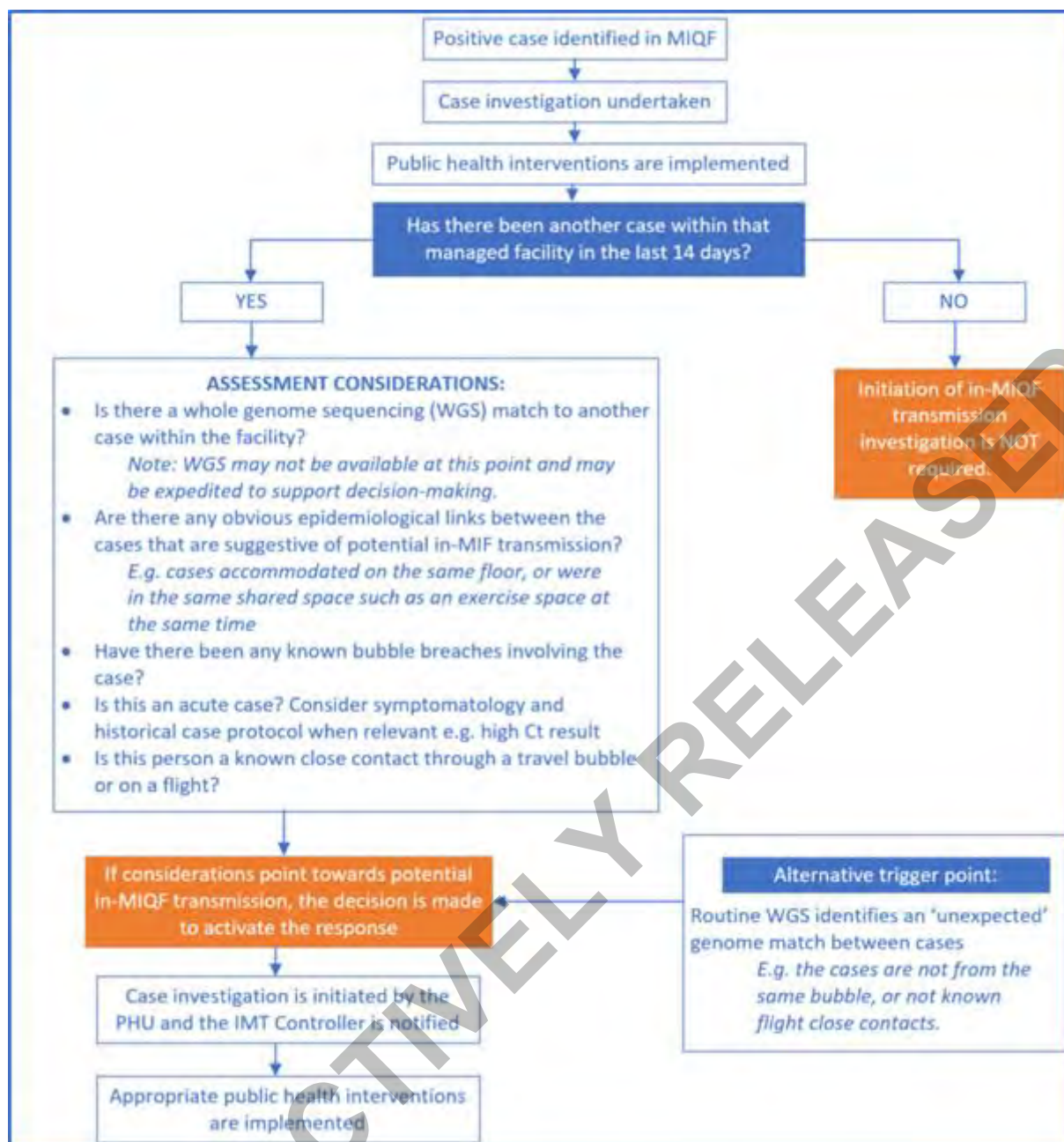


Figure 1: Draft assessment criteria for initiating an in-MIF transmission investigation

The MIQ TAG will support the investigation and consideration of risk mitigations early in the process

14. The MIQ TAG will be convened to support the investigation and consider the suite of actions available to manage the incident and mitigate the risk of onward transmission to the community. In addition to Ministry and MBIE officials, the MIQ TAG membership will include representatives from the relevant PHU. Additional technical experts will be included as appropriate (e.g. ventilation engineers).
15. A range of risk mitigations have been successfully applied in previous instances of in-MIF transmission, such as the Pullman and Grand Mercure Auckland incidents. These mitigations can be categorised into three groups:
  - Risk mitigations for staff at the facility;

- Risk mitigations for returnees that are still at the facility; and
  - Risk mitigations for returnees that have left the facility and entered the community.
16. There are a range of risk profiles and considerations for each of the three groups listed above which will drive the selection of appropriate risk mitigations. This includes the mechanism of in-MIF transmission (including whether it is known or unknown), and the size, scale and number of potential exposure events for other returnees and/or staff.
17. Accordingly, a risk-based management plan is required, which reflects the specific circumstances surrounding the in-MIF transmission event.
18. The MIQ TAG will consider the suite of risk mitigations that are appropriate for the risk profile of each of the three groups and will recommend a range of actions to the PHU that:
- a. respond to circumstance-specific risks, and
  - b. are targeted towards staff and/or specific returnees based on their risk of exposure.
19. A summary of the suite of risk mitigations for each group that have previously been implemented is provided below.

*Risk mitigations for staff at the facility*

20. Staff in MIFs undergo regular surveillance testing on a fortnightly basis. As an immediate incident response tool following identification of potential in-MIF transmission, staff at the facility can be re-tested to identify any possible returnee to staff transmission events. Based on the case investigation, the relevant PHU will consider the exposure risk of different staff members in determining which staff members require additional testing, and when.
21. The relevant PHU may also increase the frequency of regular staff surveillance testing from fortnightly to weekly until 14 days after the last case was identified in the facility. This mitigation was implemented recently at the Grand Mercure Auckland in response to the in-MIF transmission event identified there in March 2021.

*Risk mitigations for returnees still at the facility*

22. Returnees that are identified as close contacts may be required to extend their stay at the MIQF. Through the case investigation, the relevant PHU will determine which returnees require an extension of stay, and for how long, based on their risk of exposure.
23. With consideration of returnees' exposure risk as identified in the case investigation, some returnees may be required to undergo additional testing during their stay in the facility. The relevant PHU will make this determination in light of the timing of potential exposure, as well as any extensions of stay that are required of returnees.
24. There may also be facility-specific operational actions that are identified and implemented by the relevant PHU with the support of MBIE, in order to reduce the risk of further in-MIF transmission while investigations are ongoing. This could include closing down the exercise or smoking area in the facility for a specific period of time, or discontinuing the use of transport to off-site exercise areas where applicable.

25. Post-departure management plans can be implemented for returnees upon exiting the facility. This can include post-MIF isolation and testing for identified contacts of the case(s). Further detail regarding the implementation of post-MIF testing as an incident management tool is provided below in paragraphs 28 – 30.

*Risk mitigations for returnees that have left the facility*

26. If returnees have already left the MIF but are subsequently identified via the case investigation as having been at risk of potential exposure during their stay, they will be managed according to their identified contact category. Post-departure testing and isolation may be required as an incident management tool.
27. All other departees from MIF will complete a post-MIF Wellbeing Check within the first seven days of their departure.

**Implementation of Post MIF testing as an incident management tool.**

28. The implementation of testing and isolation for those that have been potentially exposed to COVID-19 within a facility can be implemented as an incident management tool immediately. The existing approach has been applied in the instances of the Pullman and Grand Mercure cases, and was successful in containing any potential onwards spread.
29. The efficiency of the process would be improved with enhancements to National Border Solution to support the identification of affected individuals, and to integrate with the National Contact Tracing Solution for necessary management of these MIF departees.
30. These system enhancements will need to be delivered against other priority programmes, including vaccinations. It is anticipated that these system enhancements could be implemented in mid-May 2021.

**Next steps**

31. We will refine and finalise the assessment criteria for initiation of an in-MIF transmission event with the relevant PHUs.
32. Subject to your agreement, we will implement the in-MIF transmission investigation process in the management of future instances of potential in-MIF transmission.

**ENDS.**



# Appendix 1

