



Cabinet

Minute of Decision

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COVID-19 Resurgence: Second Review of Alert Level Settings in Response to Further Auckland Community Cases

Portfolio **COVID-19 Response**

On 11 March 2021, Cabinet:

- 1 **noted** that at 6:00am on Sunday, 7 March 2021, Auckland was moved to Alert Level 2 and the rest of New Zealand moved to Alert Level 1;
- 2 **noted** the current February Auckland cluster comprises 15 positive community cases, all of whom are currently either recovered (14) or quarantined (1);
- 3 **noted** that based on the evidence available to date, the Ministry of Health considers there is no evidence of community transmission and the cluster is under control;
- 4 **noted** the updated advice from the Director-General of Health on the current situation;
- 5 **agreed** that Auckland move to Alert Level 1 and the rest of the country remain at Alert Level 1, with effect from midday on Friday, 12 March 2021;
- 6 **agreed** that the current requirement for face coverings on public transport throughout New Zealand is an appropriate measure in response to the level of public health risk and it be continued in the Order giving effect to the decision in paragraph 5 above with the same exemptions as are in the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Alert Level Requirements) Order (No 4) 2021;
- 7 **agreed** that once a decision is made to change Alert Levels, officials provide advance notice to international partners including (but not restricted to): Australia, the Cook Islands, and Niue; and those foreign diplomatic and consular staff based in, or accredited to, New Zealand;
- 8 **agreed** that Cabinet's decision be communicated by the Prime Minister.

Martin Bell
for Secretary of the Cabinet

Office of the Minister for COVID-19 Response

Cabinet

COVID-19 RESURGENCE: SECOND REVIEW OF ALERT LEVEL SETTINGS IN RESPONSE TO FEBRUARY AUCKLAND COMMUNITY CASES

Proposal

- 1 This paper reviews the Alert Level settings following the decrease in Alert Levels on 7 March in response to the February Auckland cluster. The paper seeks agreement to one of the following options:
 - 1.1 Option A: Maintain current settings with Auckland at Alert Level 2 and the rest of the country at Alert Level 1; or
 - 1.2 Option B: Move Auckland to Alert Level 1 along with the rest of the country at Alert Level 1 (recommended).

Summary

- 2 The February Auckland cluster comprises 15 positive community cases outside MIQ since 13 February. All of the cases are either in a quarantine facility (1) or recovered (14). All the cases are genomically linked. Of all the contacts associated with the cluster, 99 percent have now been tested.
- 3 The paper presents two options:
 - 3.1 Option A: Maintain current settings with Auckland at Alert Level 2 and the rest of the country at Alert Level 1 for a further period of seven days; or
 - 3.2 Option B: Move Auckland to Alert Level 1 along with the rest of the country at Alert Level 1.
- 4 The move to Alert Level 1 in Option B could come into effect at either:
 - 4.1 11:59pm Thursday 11 March; or
 - 4.2 11:59pm on Friday 12 March.
- 5 The Director-General of Health considers the current outbreak is well contained and his interim recommendation at the time of writing this paper is Option B. In terms of timing, he initially advised a move to Alert Level 1 at 6:00am on Saturday 13 March to give a full 14 day cycle of the virus since the additional case was discovered on 27 February 2021. However, based on the available evidence as at 9:30am Thursday 11 March 2021, that the gym contacts have all now returned negative tests, his interim advice is that there is no additional public health risk in bringing that time forward to 11:59pm Thursday 11 March.

Introduction

- 6 This paper has four main parts:

- 6.1 a summary of the eight factors we use to make Alert Level decisions;
- 6.2 a situation report against the four health factors including the interim advice of the Director-General;
- 6.3 options for changes to Alert Levels in Auckland and the rest of the country; and
- 6.4 an assessment of the options against the four non-health factors.

How we make Alert Level decisions

- 7 Cabinet has previously agreed to use eight factors to guide decisions on the appropriate Alert Level settings for New Zealand:
 - 7.1 the Director-General of Health's satisfaction on four health matters:
 - 7.1.1 trends in the transmission of the virus, including his confidence in the data and having regard to the risk assessment levels agreed by Cabinet;
 - 7.1.2 the capacity and capability of our testing and contact tracing systems;
 - 7.1.3 the effectiveness of our self-isolation, quarantine and border measures; and
 - 7.1.4 the capacity in the health system more generally to move to the new Alert Level;
 - 7.2 evidence of the effects of the measures on the economy and society more broadly;
 - 7.3 evidence of the impacts of the measures for at risk populations in particular;
 - 7.4 public attitudes towards the measures and the extent to which people and businesses understand, accept, and abide by them; and
 - 7.5 our ability to operationalise the restrictions, including satisfactory implementation planning [CAB-20-MIN-0199; CAB-20-MIN-0387 refer].
- 8 In line with our resurgence plan, in determining what measures and controls should be in place after the immediate response phase, we are particularly interested in:
 - 8.1 the connection of cases to a known source at the border;
 - 8.2 the number of cases and close contacts; and
 - 8.3 the geographic spread of cases, including across regions.

The current response

- 9 On Sunday 14 February Auckland was moved to Alert Level 3 and the rest of the country to Alert Level 2. Boundaries were established to restrict movement in and out of the Auckland region [CAB-21-MIN-0020 refers].
- 10 Following a move back to Alert Level 2 in Auckland and Alert Level 1 for the rest of the country, two positive cases were reported on 27 February – Cases M and N [CAB-21-MIN-0025 refers]. Initially there was no known genomic link to the cluster's index cases (though this was later established). These cases precipitated Auckland going back to Alert Level 3 at 6:00am on 28 February, and the rest of the country to Alert Level 1 [CAB-21-MIN-0041 refers].
- 11 At 6:00am on Sunday 7 March, Auckland was moved to Alert Level 2 and the rest of New Zealand to Alert Level 1 [CAB-21-MIN-0041 refers].

Situation report

- 12 The current February Auckland cluster comprises 15 positive community cases. All of the cases are either recovered (14) or quarantined (1). All the cases are genomically linked.
- 13 Following the move to Alert Level 2 on 7 March there were some test results outstanding from casual plus contacts of Case M who may have been exposed at the gym he visited on 26 February 2021. All of those contacts who require testing have now returned negative test results with the exception of one person who refused the test but is in self-isolation and is being supported with an individual care plan. Casual-plus contacts are not subject to day 12 testing.
- 14 Day 12 tests are due for 15 close or close-plus contacts over the next few days and are being followed up. Results are expected on Friday 12 March. The outstanding contacts relate to the Kmart exposure event and are being managed by the Ministry of Health and Auckland Regional Public Health Service (ARPHS). The Director-General does not consider it is absolutely necessary for all close contacts to return their day 12 test result in order for Alert Level restrictions to be lifted, as these contacts are already self-isolating.
- 15 Of all the contacts in the February cluster, 99 percent have now completed their testing and isolation requirements. The remaining contacts have been closed through a public health determination by the Director of Public Health.
- 16 On Sunday 7 March an Air NZ crew member returned a positive test result during routine surveillance testing. This case regularly works on a route between Auckland and Tokyo. They are being managed as a border-related case and are in a quarantine facility. The Case followed all protocols as an air crew member. Contact tracing is currently underway to identify locations of interest and contacts but the case had minimal exposure events and so far all close contacts have tested negative. There are currently no MIF cases identified in New Zealand who have been on flights that the Case worked on.
- 17 The most likely working hypothesis of the case's exposure to infection is while in Japan, however other sources of infection cannot be ruled out.

Director-General of Health's interim assessment against the health factors

Trends in transmission

- 18 The current outbreak appears to be well contained given the data we have so far, especially the negative results for all close contacts. Although there are a small number of outstanding day 12 tests from close contacts, these will be available on Friday 12 March (ahead of the recommended move to Alert Level 1).

Testing rates and contact tracing

- 19 Testing has continued to be at a high level in recent weeks. On 10 March 2021, 6,448 tests were processed, bringing the weekly total of tests processed over the previous 7 days (4-10 March) to more than 50,000.
- 20 From 28 February 2021 (when Auckland most recently went to Alert Level 3) to 9 March 2021, 19,141 test results were returned within Counties Manukau DHB which includes the South Auckland region. Across all DHBs, there have been 67,549 test results returned between 28 February 2021 to 9 March 2021.

Table 1: Test results for all contacts by contact type (as at 8:30am 10 March)

Contact Type	Initial Testing Result	Day 12 Testing Result
All Contacts		
Close + Contacts	88/88 (88 negative)	75/88 (75 negative, 11 outstanding, 2 no further action required)
Close Contacts	179/183 (no outstanding, 11 positive, 168 negative, 2 exempt, 2 no further action required (1 low risk exposure and 1 missed day 5 testing but tested positive at day 12))	160/170 (1 positive, 159 negative, 4 outstanding, 6 no further action required (infants))
Casual + Contacts (treated as close contacts)	1930/1967 (1930 negative, 22 exempt, 15 no further action required)	1938/1945 (1938 negative, 7 no further action required)
Casual + Contacts	3708/3776 (3 positive, 3705 negative, 3 exempt, 1 refused, 64 no further action required)	N/A
Key Exempt contacts are those people exempt from testing, including children. Contacts with no result from initial testing may include those where a test has been taken but not yet processed, no test has been taken yet, and a test has been refused. All contacts in this category are being actively followed up via welfare checks. Contacts with no result from Day 12 tests include those where day 12 has not yet been reached, noting that period for day 12 from exposure continues until 12 March. These results are expected to be returned on Friday 12 March.		

- 21 Regular wastewater testing continues in Auckland. In the most recent testing reported on Thursday 11 March the only site that showed positive results (on 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 March) were from the site near the Jet Park managed quarantine

facility. Wastewater testing was also undertaken at sites in New Plymouth, Hamilton, Rotorua and Christchurch. Wastewater testing at these sites has not revealed any evidence of COVID-19 in these locations. Results from samples taken on 7, 8 and 9 March will be reported on the afternoon of Thursday 11 March.

- 22 Current contact tracing capacity is sufficient to manage 350 cases per day.
- 23 There are approximately 2.74 million registered NZ COVID Tracer app users, as of 10:00 am on 10 March 2021. Just over 970,000 poster scans were notified since midday on 9 March. Just over 1,268,000 devices had Bluetooth active.

Effectiveness of our self-isolation, quarantine and border measures

- 24 Auckland Regional Public Health have been managing all positive cases closely and is comfortable that requirements are being observed. Clear guidance has been provided to those who have been tested to remain in isolation until they receive a negative test result.

Health system capacity generally

- 25 There is currently one person in hospital with COVID-19 (a border case). While hospitals are currently operating a high capacity, DHBs have plans in place to manage a surge in demand associated with new outbreaks.
- 26 There are good stocks of personal protective equipment, swabs and other test consumables.
- 27 Counties Manukau DHB and Auckland Regional Public Health Service (ARPHS) report that the current outbreak has placed a heavy demand on testing, contact tracing and case management services and that they have stretched capacity. They also note that this pressure is further compounded by the forthcoming additional requirements for testing MIQ workers and vaccine rollout.

Options

- 28 I have identified two options for Cabinet to consider, dependant on the situation as reported at the time Cabinet meets, that I consider are appropriate measures in response to the level of public health risk:
 - 28.1 Option A: Maintain current settings with Auckland at Alert Level 2 and the rest of the country at Alert Level 1; or
 - 28.2 Option B: Move Auckland to Alert Level 1 along with the rest of the country at Alert Level 1.
- 29 The critical question is how long we should wait before moving down Alert Levels. Central to this is when the last known case was infectious and our confidence that all the contacts that person had in that time are being isolated and checked on. It appears that the UK variant (which genome sequencing confirms these cases are) has “a longer tail” meaning infections may not

emerge until later, hence the slower move down Alert Levels for the Auckland region.

- 30 Based on information to date, the situation suggests a single cluster of connected cases in a region, with no evidence of wider spread in the region and no cases in other regions. This suggests Auckland should move to Alert Level 1 along with the rest of the country.
- 31 I also recommend face coverings should be retained on public transport to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 between passengers where physical distancing is difficult, with the same exemptions as we have currently.

Option A

- 32 Under this option Auckland stays at Alert Level 2 and the rest of the country at Alert Level 1. This option makes sense if we are not confident there is no risk of undetected transmission in the Auckland region.
- 33 In light of the Director-General's advice, I do not consider this to be the case and therefore do not recommend this option.

Option B

- 34 This option allows Auckland to move down to join the rest of the country at Alert Level 1. I consider this a proportionate response to the risk following the measures taken to date because, at the time of writing this paper:
- 34.1 as at 11 March no new positive cases have been identified in the community since 28 February 2021; and
- 34.2 I am confident we have identified the perimeter of the outbreak and that the cluster is contained, and that we can manage the tail through identifying, testing and isolating any contacts.
- 35 The rest of New Zealand remaining at Alert Level 1 reflects our confidence it is very unlikely there are undetected cases in the community outside of Auckland both generally and connected to the current cluster.

Trade-offs and choices

- 36 Option A maintains the precautionary approach currently in place with Auckland on a higher Alert Level to give us more time to fully determine whether the outbreak has been contained. Option B has a lower economic and social cost. However, it is riskier if the cluster is not under control which would require going back up Alert Levels with associated economic and social costs.
- 37 Given the lack of community transmission and rate of testing to date, Option B has been recommended by the Director-General in his interim advice.

Timing of when a move to Alert Level 1 comes into effect

- 38 The change to Alert Level could come into effect at either:
- 38.1 11:59pm on Thursday 11 March; or

38.2 11:59pm on Friday 12 March.

- 39 Options for timing are discussed below informed by the assessment of the options against the non- health measures that follows.

Assessment of the proposed measures against the non-health factors

- 40 I have assessed the proposed measures against the non-health factors agreed by Cabinet, as set out below.

Economic impacts from Alert Levels

- 41 There is considerable uncertainty about the magnitude of the impact of the Alert Level restrictions. Treasury last formally estimated the impacts of the Alert Level restrictions in the HYEPU forecasts. However, the impact of the restrictions is likely to be smaller than previously estimated because:

41.1 GDP data from the third quarter of 2020 shows that the economy performed better than anticipated. This suggests that the impact of higher Alert Levels may be lower than previously thought, at least when there is significant fiscal support in place.

41.2 Some proportion of the lost activity will also be made up later in the year if the period of heightened Alert Level restrictions is relatively short.

- 42 Allowing for the issues discussed above, the Treasury estimates the approximate economic impacts of Auckland remaining in Alert Level 2 to be around \$50 million per week, or 1 percent of national GDP.

- 43 It is also important to note that some of these GDP losses will occur even without Alert Level restrictions, as people adjust their behaviour in response to perceived risk.

- 44 At the same time, the impacts will differ across industries and within regions. For example, CBDs with more businesses that rely on foot traffic typically experience larger declines in economic activity during lockdowns and a slower recovery. A further example is the loss of large events such as concerts and sports matches which are harder to defer. This makes the economic and social benefits from these events less likely to be delivered and they also feature “sunk costs” from their preparation. These sectors are more likely to face longer term impacts if consumer and business confidence falls due to uncertainty over the likelihood and duration of future Alert Level restrictions.

Impacts on at risk populations

- 45 Providers and community groups advise that with the increased Alert Level in Auckland there was an increased demand for food, and increased levels of anxiety and confusion, particularly around messaging of the Alert Level measures.

- 46 The Alert Level changes put increased pressure and challenges on many New Zealand communities. Given the impacts of COVID lockdowns are not always

immediately experienced, cumulative community shocks could worsen over time even if Auckland returned to Alert Level 1.

- 47 Some additional funding was needed for providers to support vulnerable communities. Providers are now indicating this has positioned them well to support those in need of assistance.
- 48 We also heard about the impact of COVID-19 on young people and over time we expect to understand these impacts more fully.
- 49 The Office of Ethnic Communities has sent out a COVID-19 survey for its mandated communities asking about the impacts of COVID-19 on business and employment, and seeks responses on the key concerns of ethnic communities.

Public attitudes and compliance

- 50 Social license remains crucial to a successful COVID-19 response. The public reaction to individuals who did not use the COVID-19 Tracer app or otherwise failed to follow good practices suggests a possible erosion of this. Further erosion could undermine the overall response.
- 51 Daily QR code poster scans have already started to decrease, with 454,254 fewer scans on 9 March than on 8 March. I am awaiting advice from officials on options to increase scanning behaviours.
- 52 If it is decided to move Auckland to Alert Level 1 and this is announced some time ahead of it coming into effect our experience of moving down from Alert Level 2 in other responses suggest many people will behave in accordance with the Alert Level 1 rules before they take legal effect. Alternatively, keeping Auckland at Alert Level 2 is likely to see a further decline in compliance with the Alert Level settings. It would be difficult to regain the social licence for Alert Level 2 restrictions for a prolonged period if the perceived risk of further community spread is low. And it appears many Aucklanders have already started to behave as if they have returned to Alert Level 1.

Ability to operationalise the proposals in this paper

- 53 We are well placed to implement the options in this paper as they involve the status quo or a return to Alert Level 1 nationally. However as noted in the preceding section, there is likely to be increased non-compliance.

Timing of when a move down Alert Level should come into effect

- 54 If it is decided to move Auckland to Alert Level 1 there is a choice as to when to do so. On the one hand, a delay between the announcement and coming into effect will potentially see large numbers of people behaving in accordance with the Alert Level 1 rules ahead of them coming into effect.
- 55 Based on the evidence available at 9:30am on Thursday 11 March 2021, the Director-General's interim advice is that there is no additional public health risk in the move to Alert Level 1 happening as early as 11:59pm Thursday 11 March.

Alert Level boundary

56 There are no implications under either option for an Alert Level boundary. If Auckland remained at Alert Level 2 there would continue to be an Alert Level boundary but with no checkpoints as travel across the boundary is not prohibited.

Retaining face coverings on public transport

57 The current requirement for face coverings on public transport throughout New Zealand is an appropriate measure in response to the level of public health risk. I propose that we continue this measure to mitigate the risk of transmission between passengers given physical distancing is difficult, with the same exemptions as we have currently.

Update on Communications

58 In the last Cabinet paper, I noted challenges with our usual approach to communications. There were concerns about the effectiveness of communications to Pacific, other ethnic and disabled communities – particularly youth – in relation to Alert Level settings.

59 Officials are continuing to improve communications outreach, and are clarifying the roles, responsibilities and resourcing across Government for translation of information, noting that accurate translation takes time. Ethnic community leaders are interested in understanding how they can support the government to distribute key messages about the COVID-19 response and vaccine.

60 The DPMC COVID-19 Group works with the Iwi Communications Collective to ensure messages reach Māori partners and grass roots communities, and supports iwi and Māori providers to develop resources that are tailored specifically for the needs of their communities.

61 Specific initiatives are underway to improve engagement with a younger demographic. These include:

61.1 The target demographic across Unite Against COVID-19 (UAC) channels was decreased from 18 to 15 years-old through all targeted paid media, and Spotify was added as a key channel for youth;

61.2 When the change from Alert Level 3 to 2 was announced, UAC used 20 Auckland social media influencers to post a #stayinforit post that encouraged younger audiences to stay in for the weekend (during Alert Level 3). This included influencers in Māori, Pacific, Indian and youth communities;

61.3 The DPMC COVID-19 Group Engagement Team has worked with the Ministry of Education to establish a Zoom forum to have regular connection with Auckland secondary schools head girls and boys. Work is also underway to engage with the National Māori Tertiary Students Association – Te Mana Akonga.

- 62 If Auckland moves to Alert Level 1, the All of Government daily messaging grid will promote “Living at Alert Level 1” information available on the Unite Against COVID-19 website in 25 languages, as well as translated information on the Ministry of Pacific Peoples website and the Ministry of Pacific Peoples’ Facebook page. The messaging goes to more than 350 communications and engagement contacts in central and local government, DHBs, business associations, regional and community groups, and is passed on to thousands more of their contacts.

Economic support measures

- 63 The Wage Subsidy Scheme (WSSMAR21) opened to receive applications on Thursday 4 March, with payments being made from Monday 8 March. Following Cabinet’s previous decision to shift out of Alert Level 3, there will be no further round of applications from this resurgence.
- 64 The Resurgence Support Payment (RSPMAR21) opened for applications on 8 March and will close one month after a nationwide return to Alert Level 1. The Resurgence Support Payment for the February resurgence (RSPFEB21) will close on Monday 22 March.
- 65 For both RSP activations, as of 8 March around \$100 million has been applied for, with nearly \$68 million disbursed. Given it is early in the application window for the March payment, the vast majority of this is for the February payment. The fiscal costs will not be significantly affected by the decisions in this paper.
- 66 Other support for businesses includes the Short-Term Absence Payment to help firms support eligible workers awaiting a COVID-19 test result, and the Leave Support Scheme to help firms to support workers instructed to self-isolate in relation to the COVID-19 response. These support measures are available at all Alert Levels.
- 67 The Ministry of Social Development has seen an increase in the total number of Short-Term Absence Payment applications over February 2021, with:
- 67.1 a total of 87 applications by 12 February, with \$31,000 paid to employers;
 - 67.2 a total of 1,209 applications approved by 19 February, with \$507,000 paid to employers;
 - 67.3 a total 2,268 applications approved by 26 February, with \$1.032 million paid to employers; and
 - 67.4 a total 4,416 applications approved by 5 March, with \$2.021 million paid to employers.
- 68 The number of Leave Support Scheme applications continues to increase – with 3,200 applications approved by 5 March 2021, and \$19.772 million being paid out under this scheme.

Financial Implications

- 69 Relaxing Alert Level controls will improve economic activity as discussed above and this will impact on tax revenues.

Legislative Implications

- 70 I will make or amend an Order under section 11 of the COVID-19 Public Health Response Act 2020 informed by Cabinet's decision.
- 71 Before making a replacement Order or amending an Order, I must have regard to any advice from the Director-General about the risks of the outbreak or spread of COVID-19, and the nature and extent of any measures that are appropriate to address those risks. I may also have regard to Cabinet's decision on the level of public health measures appropriate to respond to those risks and avoid, mitigate, or remedy the effects of the outbreak or spread of COVID-19.
- 72 Additionally, Ministerial consultation requirements will be satisfied through previous consultation on template Orders for Alert Level requirements and the proposals outlined in this paper.
- 73 The Act requires that there be 48 hours between publishing the Order and its coming into force. This requirement does not apply when an Order only removes or reduces requirements. Any decisions to add requirements beyond the current template orders will take more time.

Impact Analysis

- 74 The Treasury has determined that the regulatory proposals in this paper are exempt from the requirement to provide a Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) because they are intended to alleviate the short-term impacts of a declared emergency event of COVID-19 outbreak. These proposals are required urgently to be effective, making a complete, robust and timely impact analysis unfeasible.

Human Rights

- 75 The human rights implications of controls to slow the spread of COVID-19 are significant and have been set out in detail in previous papers on Alert Level decisions [CAB-20-MIN-0161 and CAB-20-MIN-0176 refer].
- 76 Relevant departments and the Solicitor-General will continue to keep any remaining restrictive measures under review to ensure that they remain necessary and are implemented in a way that is consistent with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act.

Population impacts

- 77 Population impacts are discussed in paragraphs 46-50.

Consultation

- 78 This paper was prepared by the COVID-19 Group in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The Ministry of Health has provided specific input

and text, including advice on the course of the outbreak, the public health response, and the views and recommendations of the Director-General of Health. The Treasury, Ministries of Social Development and Pacific Peoples and the Office of Ethnic Communities have provided input into relevant parts of the paper. Further agency consultation has not been possible in the timeframe. The Crown Law Office were informed of the paper.

Communications

- 79 The Prime Minister will communicate the decisions set out in this paper after Cabinet agreement. Communications will be co-ordinated with the Government's broader communications around its COVID-19 response. Information on a change in Alert Level will be available in 25 languages on the Unite Against COVID-19 website.
- 80 When a decision is taken to move Alert Levels, it is important to provide early notification to international partners who may be affected by, and who may have some effect on the successful implementation of, such a change. Jurisdictions with whom New Zealand currently has, or is negotiating, one or two-way quarantine-free travel arrangements (Australia, Cook Islands, Niue) require notification to inform their health and border decision-making and provide certainty to travellers. Foreign diplomatic and consular representatives based in, or accredited to, New Zealand require notification to allow the continuation of consular support to foreign nationals currently in New Zealand, which can help amplify (and translate) government messaging. Other international partners may experience particular impacts related to special arrangements (e.g. medical evacuation from the Pacific; travel to/from Antarctica).

Proactive Release

- 81 I intend to proactively release this Cabinet paper following Cabinet consideration.

Recommendations

The Minister for COVID-19 Response recommends that Cabinet:

- 1 note that at 6:00am on Sunday 7 March, Auckland was moved to Alert Level 2 and the rest of New Zealand moved to Alert Level 1;
- 2 note the current February Auckland cluster comprises 15 positive community cases, all of whom are currently either recovered (14) or quarantined (1);
- 3 note that based on the evidence available to date, the Ministry of Health considers there is no evidence of community transmission and the cluster is under control;
- 4 note the Director-General will provide updated advice at the time a decision is made;

Options

- 5 agree that one of the following options is an appropriate measure in response to the level of public health risk:

EITHER

5.1 Option A: Keep Auckland at Alert Level 2 and the rest of country at Alert Level 1 for a period of seven days;

OR

5.2 Option B: Move Auckland to Alert Level 1 and the rest of the country remain at Alert Level 1 (recommended by the Minister and Director-General of Health);

6 agree that the changes to Alert Level in recommendation 5.2 take effect from:

EITHER

6.1 11:59pm Thursday 11 March;

OR

6.2 11:59pm Friday 12 March.

7 note that the Director-General advises there is no additional public health risk in Auckland moving to Alert Level 1 from 11:59pm Thursday 11 March;

8 agree that if Auckland is kept at Alert Level 2, Cabinet will next review Alert Levels on Thursday 18 March 2021;

Face coverings on public transport

9 agree the current requirement for face coverings on public transport throughout New Zealand is an appropriate measure in response to the level of public health risk and it be continued in the Order giving effect to the decision in recommendation 5 above with the same exemptions as are in the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Alert Level Requirements) Order (No 4) 2021;

Other matters

10 agree that once a decision is made to change Alert Levels, officials provide advance notice to international partners including (but not restricted to): Australia, the Cook Islands, and Niue; and those foreign diplomatic and consular staff based in, or accredited to, New Zealand; and

11 agree that Cabinet's decision today will be communicated by the Prime Minister.

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response