



# Briefing

## RECONNECTING NEW ZEALANDERS: UPDATED ADVICE ON ISOLATION SETTINGS AT THE BORDER

To: Minister for COVID-19 Response, Hon Chris Hipkins  
Associate Minister of Health, Hon Ayesha Verrall  
CC: Reconnecting New Zealand Ministers

Date	28/02/2022	Priority	High
Deadline	28/02/2022	Briefing Number	DPMC-2021/22-1542

### Purpose

This briefing provides updated advice on the decreasing public health justification for self-isolation for travellers arriving in New Zealand. It recommends self-isolation and Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ) requirements be removed for vaccinated international arrivals commencing 11.59pm Friday 4 March 2022. Officials will provide further advice on other public health measures for unvaccinated international arrivals to the Minister for COVID-19 Response during the week of 28 February.

### Recommendations

1. **Note** that COVID-19 cases detected at the border in international arrivals represent a very small proportion of overall cases in New Zealand;
2. s9(2)(h) [REDACTED]
3. **Note** that the public health advice from the Ministry of Health is that the relative COVID-19 transmission risk posed by international arrivals is no longer higher than the domestic risk of COVID-19, and therefore self-isolation and MIQ are not required for public health risk management at this time;

4. **Note** that advice from the Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group is that it would now be appropriate to drop the requirement for self-isolation of fully vaccinated travellers after they arrive in New Zealand, subject to some monitoring conditions;
5. **Agree** that fully vaccinated international arrivals to New Zealand will no longer be required to self-isolate on arrival or be in MIQ; YES/NO
6. **Note** that recommendation 5 can be implemented by 11.59pm Friday 4 March 2022;
7. **Note** that this effectively brings Step 2 of Reconnecting New Zealanders forward for New Zealand Citizens and Residents and other people currently permitted to enter New Zealand;
8. **Note** that the Director General of Health advises that continuing to require unvaccinated New Zealand citizens to enter MIQ is no longer justified on the basis of reducing outbreak size or containing transmission, but there are risks with this approach so further consideration is needed;
9. **Note** that officials will provide urgent advice, including health advice, on risk mitigation measures for unvaccinated travellers, such as requiring a period of self-isolation until a negative RAT test (or series of tests) is returned;
10. **Agree** to seek Cabinet's agreement to delegate decisions on the need for non-vaccinated New Zealand citizens to enter MIQ and any mitigation measures to Ministers with Power to Act; YES/NO
11. **Agree** that removing these requirements applies to all New Zealand citizens and residents and other eligible travellers under current border settings only, and that all previous decisions regarding when non-citizens and non-residents can enter still stand; YES/NO
12. **Note** this means there will not be any restriction on the timing or number of New Zealand citizens and residents entering New Zealand, nor those leaving and re-entering;
13. **Agree** to create a power in a COVID-19 Order for the Director General to specify testing requirements for arrivals, noting that the Director General intends to specify that a Rapid Antigen Test be distributed at the airport to incoming travellers and self-administered on day 0/1; YES/NO
14. **Note** that a positive result would require the traveller to comply with existing domestic settings for positive COVID-19 cases;
15. **Note** that the increase in traveller volume and air connectivity expected with ending self-isolation and MIQ requirements will bring economic and social benefits but may limit the ability to respond to future changes in risk;
16. **Agree** that airports and airlines are given advanced warning of any changes to border settings to allow them to scale up staffing at their contact centres prior to decisions being publicly announced; YES/NO



17. **Agree** that MIQ workers, the chair of the National Iwi Chairs Forum Pandemic Response Group, along with our Pacific partners and Australia, be given advanced warning of any changes to border settings; and **YES/NO**
18. **Agree** that this briefing will be proactively released, subject to any appropriate redactions. **YES/NO**


<b>Ruth Fairhall</b> <b>Head of Strategy and Policy, COVID-19 Response</b>
27/02/2022

<b>Hon Chris Hipkins</b> <b>Minister for COVID-19 Response</b>
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<b>Hon Ayesha Verrall</b> <b>Associate Minister of Health</b>
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Contact for telephone discussion if required:

Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Ruth Fairhall	Head of Strategy and Policy, COVID-19 Response	s9(2)(a)	✓
Paul Ballantyne	Senior Policy Advisor	s9(2)(a)	

Minister's office comments:

- Noted
- Seen
- Approved
- Needs change
- Withdrawn
- Not seen by Minister
- Overtaken by events
- Referred to

Proactively Released

# RECONNECTING NEW ZEALANDERS: UPDATED ADVICE ON ISOLATION SETTINGS AT THE BORDER

## Executive summary

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1. COVID-19 cases detected in international arrivals at the border are now a very small proportion of overall cases in New Zealand. Advice from the Director General of Health and from the Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group (SPHAG) indicates that it is timely for Ministers to consider the need for self-isolation for vaccinated people arriving from overseas who test negative on arrival.
2. Modelling shows that without self-isolation there would likely be more travellers than currently predicted under the existing Reconnecting New Zealanders settings and therefore cases entering the community. However, these numbers will remain a very small proportion of overall cases for the foreseeable future.
3. The Director General's advice shows there is a reasonable public health rationale to maintain a testing requirement for international arrivals to assess whether people coming across the border are positive and potentially to look for any new variants. He proposes a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) on day 0/1 with a requirement to log a positive result and isolate if positive, like a community case. This would be a high trust model of monitoring and compliance.
4. The Ministry of Health recommends overseas surveillance as the main monitoring for new variants of concern, rather than genome sequencing of all positive cases that come across the border but that sequencing and PCR priorities are reviewed over the coming two weeks to see how they are best deployed as we move through the Omicron outbreak.
5. Under the reconnecting settings only fully vaccinated arrivals can self-isolate.<sup>1</sup> The Ministry of Health's advice is that there should no longer be an MIQ requirement for unvaccinated people. Taking this approach would be consistent with broader settings across the community, where vaccination status does not lead to different self-isolation requirements for cases or contacts of cases. It would mean that no travellers are required to enter MIQ. Officials will provide further advice on this to support decisions by Ministers as soon as possible this week, including on the significant implications for the future of MIQ operations.
6. The SPHAG agrees that it would now be appropriate to drop the requirement for self-isolation of fully vaccinated travellers arriving in New Zealand. The Group also recommends retaining pre-departure tests, testing arriving travellers as soon as practicable, and that travellers self-isolate until they test negative. It also recommends that all positive border cases undertake PCR tests to enable genome sequencing and that they then be managed in the same way as domestic cases.

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<sup>1</sup> Fully vaccinated' refers to those vaccinated with either: 1) a complete of any combination of the Medsafe or WHO approved vaccines; or 2) complete course of any other government-approved vaccine and 1 dose of Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Moderna or Janssen; or a single dose of any other government-approved vaccine and 1 dose of Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Moderna or Janssen.



7. Taking legal considerations into account, and noting that it will be difficult to reinstate settings once they have been removed, officials recommend the following steps:
  - a) Removing self-isolation and MIQ requirements for all permitted vaccinated international arrivals entering New Zealand from 11.59pm Friday 4 March; and
  - b) Providing further urgent advice the week of 28 February on whether further mitigations are required for non-vaccinated international arrivals who may no longer be subject to MIQ requirements (e.g. self-isolation until negative RAT result).
8. It is possible that the legal instruments could be drafted to remove the restrictions on people from Australia from 11.59pm Wednesday 2 March as a phased measure. However, as these would be the same instruments which would apply to people from elsewhere in the world from Friday, it may be perceived as anomalous.
9. Officials recommend that existing requirements for pre-departure testing be retained. These settings include evidence of a negative COVID-19 result from either a PCR test administered no more than 48 hours before scheduled departure, or supervised loop-mediated isothermal amplification test or RAT 24 hours before the scheduled departure.
10. We also recommend that testing requirements for international arrivals proceed as planned, with RATs distributed at the airport to incoming travellers and a self-administered mandatory day 0/1 test requirement until further notice. A positive result would require the traveller to comply with existing domestic settings for positive COVID-19 cases (note that this is a high-trust model and there will be no active follow up or enforcement).
11. Operational issues that need to be worked through to implement these changes including amending the relevant orders, clarifying requirements with officials at the border and with airlines, and ensuring that communications are accurate. There are significant implications for MIQ.
12. Further advice will be provided during the week of 28 February will include: the existing phasing and passenger eligibility for the remaining steps, including advice on bringing forward visitors from Australia and visa waiver countries to Step 3; any changes to testing requirements for arriving passengers; and the potential impact of arrivals on the health system. Officials will also provide further advice on retaining the intent of the existing Pacific Quarantine Free travel settings.

## Background

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13. On 24 February initial Public Health advice from Ministry of Health noted that the relative risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 in the community now exceeds the risk at the border and that it is questionable whether there remains a strong public health justification for either MIQ or the full seven days self-isolation for eligible arrivals. The Ministry of Health also advised that a reassessment of each border measure in detail and as a system should be prioritised and any changes should be implemented as soon as is feasible.
14. Minister Verrall commissioned the Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group to consider whether self-isolation is still needed for vaccinated international arrivals. The group, chaired by Sir David Skegg, provided their advice on Sunday 27 February.
15. With both the health advice and the Skegg Group advice now received, it is timely for Ministers to consider the need for self-isolation.



## The changed risk profile of international arrivals

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16. In recent weeks there has been significant growth of COVID-19 cases in New Zealand due to the highly transmissible Omicron variant. As of 11.59pm Saturday 26 February there were 14,982 new cases in the community, with a seven-day average of 6,705 cases per day. Updated modelling suggests the peak of cases is now one to four weeks away, and actual case numbers will be much higher than those reported. The impact of these high number of cases is significantly mitigated by our high vaccination rate, with 95 percent of people aged 12+ having now had two doses and 72 percent of people aged 18+ having received a booster dose.
17. COVID-19 cases detected in international arrivals at the border are now a very small proportion of overall cases in New Zealand. Border cases have been decreasing since 27 January, both in number and as a proportion of arriving travellers. On 11.59pm Saturday 26 February there were 41 new cases detected in MIQ, with a seven-day average of 9.4 cases per day.
18. Now that New Zealanders can enter the country without using MIQ, there will be a significant increase in the number of travellers. This will increase the number of imported COVID-19 cases through the air border. Te Pūnaha Matatini (TPM) modelling estimates that the increase in community cases and hospitalisations due to these increased traveller numbers would be less than a further one percent over the course of the current outbreak. This is significantly less than the difference between the “high” and “medium” scenarios in the previous and updated TPM model for domestic case numbers.
19. Without self-isolation there would likely be even more travellers and therefore cases entering the community. But these numbers will remain a very small proportion of overall cases for the foreseeable future.

## Public Health advice from the Ministry of Health

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20. The Ministry of Health provided updated advice on 27 February that reconfirmed that that the relative COVID-19 transmission risk posed by international arrivals is no longer higher than the domestic risk of COVID-19. This advice also reconfirmed earlier advice that the requirement for those entering New Zealand to self-isolation should be removed, in line with the requirement of close contacts under Phase 3 of the Omicron plan.

### *Testing*

21. The current testing requirements for arrivals under the self-isolation pathway are: a negative pre-departure test; take a RAT on days 0/1 and 5/6; report the results, and if tested positive get a PCR test from a community testing centre.
22. While these requirements are greater than those that are now required by non-household close contacts in New Zealand, the Ministry considers that some testing requirement is justified. There is a reasonable public health rationale to maintain a testing requirement for international arrivals to assess whether people coming across the border are positive and potentially looking for any new variants.
23. The testing requirements Health proposes are a RAT on day 0/1 with a requirement to log a positive result and isolate if positive, just like a community case. This would be a high



trust model of monitoring and compliance, as it will not be possible to take a more active enforcement role given the volume of people expected to enter New Zealand.

24. On balance Health considers there is not a strong case for doing a follow up PCR test and whole genome sequencing (WGS) for all positive RATs on arrival. The main reason that PCR tests would be required would be to do WGS as part of surveillance of potential new variants. Health considers that we will get warning of these from surveillance in other countries. It recommends that PCR and WGS priorities are reviewed over the coming two weeks to see how they are best deployed as we move through the Omicron outbreak. Surveillance testing was also raised by Sir David Skegg's group (see below).

#### *Unvaccinated New Zealanders*

25. Under the Reconnecting New Zealand programme only fully vaccinated arrivals can self-isolate and avoid entering MIQ. The Ministry of Health's advice is that there should be no MIQ requirement for unvaccinated people. Taking this approach would be consistent with broader settings across the community, where vaccination status does not lead to different self-isolation requirements for cases or contacts of cases.
26. However, the Ministry of Health notes there are risks associated with this approach and that more robust decisions could be made following more fulsome consideration of alternative MIQ and self-isolation configurations, such as requiring unvaccinated returnees to complete a period of self-isolation until a negative RAT test (or series of tests) is returned. Further advice on these risk mitigation measures will be provided as soon as possible for Ministers with Power to Act to take decisions this week.

### **Advice from Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group**

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27. The Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group (SPHAG) chaired by Sir David Skegg provided advice to the Associate Minister of Health (Public Health) on 27 February that considered the ongoing need for self-isolation for fully vaccinated returning travellers. The advice did not consider the future of MIQ or vaccine requirements for international arrivals.
28. The SPHAG advice underlines the inevitable uncertainty as the global situation continues to evolve and the virus continues to mutate and noted the likelihood of new variant emerging. The advice also highlights the significant change to the pattern of risk in New Zealand as COVID-19 has spread widely domestically while there has been a marked reduction in the number of people at the border arriving with the virus.
29. Taking account of this rapid change in the risk posed, SPHAG advises that it would now be appropriate to drop the requirement for self-isolation of fully vaccinated travellers after they arrive in New Zealand. SPHAG notes that this could apply both to returning New Zealanders and tourists when the border is opened more generally. The Group recommends retaining pre-departure tests, testing arriving travellers as soon as practicable, and that arrivals self-isolate until they test negative. It also recommends that all positive border cases undertake PCR tests to enable genome sequencing and that they then be managed in the same way as domestic cases. Finally, SPHAG also recommends that arriving passengers be given detailed information on New Zealand's COVID-19 settings and be strongly encouraged to get boosters if they have not already.
30. The SPHAG advice also notes that genome surveillance of cases occurring in arrivals at the border will be required, alongside careful monitoring of international reports given the



importance of early detection of new a more dangerous variant entering New Zealand. The advice also makes observations on the concept of “full vaccination”.

## Updated advice on border settings/policy considerations

31. The overarching consideration for New Zealand’s border settings is whether there is a public health justification for either MIQ or self-isolation for arrivals; and the limitations that isolation and quarantine settings continue to impose on the right of New Zealanders, including their ability to return.
32. Consideration must be given to the views of our Treaty partners. Consistent feedback from Māori has recommended delaying reopening international borders, however, this has been in the context of a different risk profile for international travel. Officials met with members of the National Iwi Chairs Forum Pandemic Response Group on 27 February. They understood the reasons for the removal of self-isolation and did not raise any major issues with the proposal but were concerned about the need for surveillance of new variants (discussed further below).
33. [Legally Privileged] s9(2)(h)
34. Taking these considerations into account, and noting that it will be difficult to reinstate settings once they have been removed, officials recommend the following steps:
- a) Remove self-isolation and MIQ requirements for all permitted international arrivals entering New Zealand from 11.59pm Friday 4 March; and
  - b) Officials to provide further urgent advice during the week of 28 February on whether further mitigations are required for non-vaccinated international arrivals who may no longer subject to MIQ requirements (e.g. self-isolation until negative RAT result).
35. This timeframe allows for the necessary regulatory framework to be updated, and the aviation sector and border agencies to prepare. Officials considered the option of an exemption power to bring forward implementation earlier for Australia, but this was found not to be possible, primarily because the Isolation and Quarantine Order does not have an exemption power. It is possible, depending on the drafting instructions, that the legal instruments could be drafted to remove the restrictions on people from Australia from 11.59pm Wednesday 2 March as a phased measure. However, as these would be the same instruments which would apply to people from elsewhere in the world from Friday, it may be perceived as anomalous.
36. Officials recommend the following updated settings, pending further advice to be provided during the week of 28 February. These recommendations were also supported by the Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group:
- a) Requirements for **pre-departure testing**: evidence of a negative COVID-19 result from either a PCR test administered no more than 48 hours before scheduled departure, or supervised loop-mediated isothermal amplification test or RAT 24 hours before the scheduled departure.



- b) **Testing requirements for international arrivals** with RATs to distributed at the airport to incoming travellers and a self-administered mandatory day 0/1 test requirement until further notice. A positive result would require the traveller to comply with existing domestic settings for positive COVID-19 cases (note that this is a high-trust model and there will be no active follow up or enforcement).

37. Officials will provide further advice on retaining the intent of the existing Pacific Quarantine Free travel settings.

## Operational considerations and risks

38. Should Ministers agree to this approach, there will be a wide range of operational factors to consider. While these do not provide grounds for retaining restrictive measures any longer than is justified on public health ground, they do need to be factored into planning and worked through at pace:

- a) **Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ)**: the impact will be immediate, with demand dropping away almost completely. The only exceptions will be a small number of community cases, refugees and/or Afghanistan arrivals.

MIQ estimate that they will need four days lead in time to facilitate the concurrent release of arrivals from MIQ facilities. On Saturday 5 March MIQ will have approximately 1,500 border arrivals in their facilities. MIQ estimates that approximately 1,450 of them will be vaccinated and eligible for release.

There will be significant employment implications for MIQ staff with the most affected being hotel and MBIE employed staff. Other agency staff (NZDF, Health, and Aviation Security) will be returned to their agencies for redeployment.

MIQ will need to advise their staff slightly before, or at the same time as, the Prime Minister's announcement given the implications for many people.

Minister Hipkins is also taking an oral item to Cabinet tomorrow on the significant downscaling of MIQ facilities over the coming months, with a Cabinet paper due to be considered on 7 March.

- b) **Traveller volumes**: it is currently estimated that under existing settings 14,800 passengers will arrive in the 14-day period from 28 February to 13 March – with most of those people currently intending to self-isolate, and only 600 booked into MIQ. The removal of isolation requirements is almost certain to result in a rapid increase in demand for inward and outward travel, however exact numbers and timing are not known. Given that most airlines flying into New Zealand have mandatory vaccination requirements for passengers, officials do not anticipate the removal of vaccination requirements for incoming eligible travellers having much of an impact on overall traveller volumes.

- c) **Airlines**: given the proposed changes will ease the compliance burden on airlines, we anticipate they will be able to adapt to new border settings reasonably quickly. Airlines have previously indicated that they need four weeks to prepare new flight schedules, so a rapid increase in demand may be faster than airlines' ability to increase capacity. While this may result in airlines not initially being able to meet demand, it may also temper the recovery of passenger numbers allowing time for border agencies to scale up their operations at the airport.



The response of airlines to updated settings is also likely to depend to a degree to which they have confidence that the removal of isolation settings will not be reversed (i.e. we need to be clear about what factors would bring isolation requirements back and that it would be a very high bar). Airlines and airports will be providing their views on any operational implication by 9am Monday 28 February.

- d) Public communications: there will be significant communication requirements to avert confusion amongst travellers, airlines and other stakeholders. This will include work across a range of agencies including Health, Customs, Immigration New Zealand and on Unite Against Covid-19 communications channels. Updating existing welcome packs for travellers that contain RATs and printed information may also be required.
- e) Digital tools: The Ministry of Health estimates that it will take approximately 48 hours to update their digital tools, including Nau Mai Rā. There will also be issues to work through for those arrivals that have already submitted their declaration prior to any changes in border setting being announced. Changes to settings may also impact on the design of the New Zealand Traveller Declaration.
- f) Airports and resourcing at the border: border agencies will need to re-align their processes, re-train frontline staff and review their processes. Customs advises that they could quickly streamline processing of passengers at the border, but that they would ideally require 2 weeks lead time to make the necessary changes. Border agencies will also need to review their resourcing across all airports as a result of any changes. Wellington and Queenstown airports are not currently ready for international operations and will need time to be brought online. Border resourcing may also be impacted by the Omicron outbreak (i.e. due to COVID-19 positive border staff having to self-isolate). Immigration New Zealand advises that Airport Liaison Officers can be in place for the week commencing 7 March (2 each in Singapore, London, and Los Angeles; 1 in Dubai).
- g) Regulatory updates: the Parliamentary Counsel Office has advised that the earliest the various amendment Orders could be signed is Wednesday 2 March (assuming drafting instructions were received on the morning of Tuesday 1 March). The exemption from the 48-hour requirement is available given that the proposed changes would be removing or reducing requirements.
- h) Health system capacity: given we do not know what the impact of discontinuing self-isolation and MIQ requirements will have on passenger volumes, it is not possible to advise what the ultimate impact on the health system capacity will be from the proposed changes. However, given recent trends whereby new daily cases have accounted for only a small fraction of total new cases, we anticipate the impact to be modest.



## Further advice required on other border settings

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39. In addition to the further advice on these requirements, the upcoming advice to be provided during the week of 28 February will cover the following issues:

- a) the existing phasing and passenger eligibility for the remaining steps, including advice on bringing forward aspects of Step 4 to align with Step 3<sup>2</sup>;
- b) any changes to testing requirements for arriving passengers, including the SPHAG recommendation that arrivals be tested as soon as is practicable and that they self-isolate until they test negative;
- c) the potential impact of arrivals on the health system during the peak of our Omicron outbreak;
- d) any specifics about testing regimes or ages of children requiring a test; and
- e) any changes to enforcement/compliance/infringement.

40. The Ministry of Health is also preparing advice on the current testing settings for workers and any changes to the mandated testing requirements for the border workforce. Public Health advice is that the main risk to border workers is from the community. Any decision to revoke or amend the Required Testing Order does not however mean the removal of all testing.

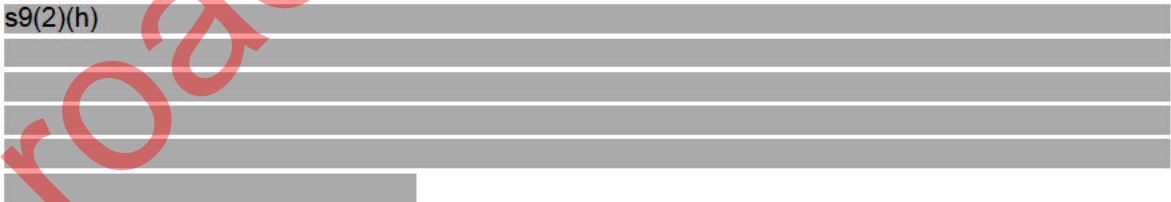
41. A Cabinet paper proposing an exit strategy for the Maintaining International Air Connectivity (MIAC) scheme is being considered by the Cabinet Economic Development Committee (DEV) on Tuesday 2 March. Officials consider that it will remain necessary to extend MIAC past its current end date of 31 March. While removing self-isolation requirements will accelerate the return of passengers and our ability to exit MIAC, commercial capacity will not necessarily increase to required level on all routes immediately. The proposed exit strategy provides a way to progressively reduce and end MIAC support as passenger travel increases and air connectivity rebuilds.

42. Separate advice is being developed on the maritime border.

## Crown Law advice [Legally privileged]

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43. s9(2)(h)



<sup>2</sup> Under Step 3, the following fully vaccinated people can enter New Zealand from anywhere in the world and self-isolate upon arrival: current temporary work and student visa holders with a valid visa who can still meet their visa requirements, and up to 5,000 international students for semester 2. Under Step 4, the following fully vaccinated people can enter New Zealand and self-isolate upon arrival from July: all travellers from Australia, visa waiver visitors, visitors from other countries who already hold a valid visitor visa; and travellers arriving under the Accredited Employer Work Visa categories.



44. s9(2)(h)

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

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**Te Tiriti o Waitangi Analysis**

51. Consideration has been given to the implications for Māori and the findings and recommendations in the Tribunal report. As part of the Crown's consideration of easing international border settings, the impact on the health and wellbeing of Māori needs to be taken into account. COVID-19 is already having a disproportionate effect on Māori due to a range of factors, including underlying health conditions and lower vaccination rates.

52. There will be many Māori who support reconnecting with Australia as it provides greater social advantages due to the large population of Māori living in Australia. However, this could put a strain on already stretched resources and services in Māori and rural communities.

53. The removal of the requirement to self-isolate may benefit Māori as they are more likely to live in multi-family, multi-generational households and are also overrepresented in lower socio-economic populations, which would make it difficult to self-isolate. They are also less likely to have alternative living options or afford other forms of isolation such as hotels.
54. At the National Iwi Chairs Forum Pandemic Response Group – Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet hui on February 27, members of the Group noted they understood the reasons for the removal of self-isolation. However, the final proposals in this paper were not discussed – the engagement was on the basis that positive RAT tests would be followed by a PCR test and where required, whole genome sequencing, because of the importance of surveillance for other variants. Subsequent Health advice is that not all positive RATs will be followed by a PCR test (see paragraph 24). The change to surveillance practice leaves a protection gap against new variants that will emerge (but noting that PCR and WGS priorities will be reviewed in the next fortnight). Consequences for MIQ and an accelerated timetable for future reconnecting steps were not discussed.
55. The Pandemic Response Group noted that the change in settings may lead to increased pressure on Māori communities, particularly those in regional areas. In this context they noted that it will be important to ensure healthcare and community services and facilities are provided and are appropriate to the specific situation Māori face. To date this has been supported by the \$120 million Māori Communities COVID-19 Fund announced in October, and the recent \$140 million boost to support Māori and Pacific households throughout New Zealand. The Pandemic Response Group suggested this funding should be targeted at the regions most in need.

## Next Steps

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56. Subject to Ministers agreeing to the recommended approach outlined above, we would suggest key changes be quickly communicated to the public. Officials would also suggest that airports and airlines are given advanced warning to allow them to scale up their staffing prior to decisions being announced publicly; and that the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment give their affected staff advanced warning of decisions before they are publicly announced. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade recommends that the governments of the Cook Islands, Niue and Australia also be given advanced notice. We also recommend advanced advice be provided to the Chair of the Iwi Leaders Forum Pandemic Response Group.
57. Following a decision by Ministers, officials will also commence the detailed work required to operationalise the changes.
58. Further advice will be provided urgently this week on unvaccinated travellers and MIQ. Providing further urgent advice the week of 28 February on whether further mitigations are required for non-vaccinated international arrivals who may no longer be subject to MIQ requirements.

## Consultation

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59. This briefing has been prepared in consultation and with input from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Transport, Customs, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Te Arawhiti, Te Puni Kōkiri, the Ministry for Pacific Peoples, the Ministry for Primary Industries, the Parliamentary Counsel Office and the Crown Law Office.



<b>Attachments:</b>	
<b>Attachment A:</b>	Talking point for Cabinet on Monday 28 February
<b>Attachment B:</b>	Draft recommendations to table at Cabinet on Monday 28 February

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## Attachment A: Talking points for Cabinet

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- Public Health advice is that self-isolation and managed isolation and quarantine for arrivals to New Zealand are no longer justified as measures to prevent and limit risk of an outbreak or limit the spread of COVID-19 in the New Zealand community.
- s9(2)(h)  
[REDACTED]
- I therefore propose that we remove the requirements for self-isolation for vaccinated travellers entering New Zealand.
- If these requirements are removed, all New Zealanders and any others currently permitted to enter New Zealand, will be able to enter regardless of the country they are travelling from. This effectively brings forward Step 2 of the Reconnecting New Zealanders programme. It does not, however, make any immediate changes to who has the legal right to enter New Zealand.
- These changes will require significant work to be operationalised and have amendment orders drafted. Officials have advised us that they will not be able to be implemented until 11.59pm Friday 4 March.
- s9(2)(h)  
[REDACTED]
- Officials will continue to assess other aspects of the border settings and provide further Public Health advice on their appropriateness for the current context. I am not currently proposing any changes to pre-departure testing or settings for Quarantine free travel with the Pacific, or any existing in-flight settings. Except I understand that the Director General proposes that incoming travellers carry out just one RAT test rather than two.
- It is possible that the legal instruments could be drafted to remove the restrictions on people from Australia from 11.59pm Wednesday 2 March as a phased measure. However, as these would be the same instruments which would apply to people from elsewhere in the world from Friday, it may be perceived as anomalous.
- The Director General of Health advises that continuing to require unvaccinated New Zealand citizens to enter MIQ is no longer justified on the basis of reducing outbreak size or containing transmission, but there are risks with this approach so further consideration is needed. Officials will provide further advise urgently this week.
- I am therefore seeking your agreement that Ministers with Power to Act take decisions on unvaccinated travellers and any additional mitigations needed in place of MIQ.
- I recommend that we agree to the tabled recommendations so that legal drafting can be completed quickly.



## **Attachment B: Draft Recommendations to table at Cabinet**

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The Minister for COVID-19 Response or the Associate Minister of Health recommends Cabinet

1. Note that on 1 February 2022 Cabinet agreed that:
  - a. Step 1 of Reconnecting New Zealanders (which allows fully vaccinated New Zealand Citizens and residents, and other eligible travellers to enter New Zealand from Australia and self-isolate upon arrival) commences at 11.59pm Sunday 27 February;
  - b. Step 2 of Reconnecting New Zealanders (which allows fully vaccinated New Zealand Citizens and residents, other eligible travellers, skilled workers granted and exception, and travellers on a working holiday scheme) to enter New Zealand from Australia and self-isolate upon arrival) commences at 11:59pm Sunday 13 March 2022 [CAB-22-MIN-0008].
2. Note that the public health advice from the Ministry of Health is that the relative COVID-19 transmission risk posed by international arrivals is no longer higher than the domestic risk of COVID-19, and therefore self-isolation and MIQ are not required for public health risk management at this time;
3. Note that advice from the Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group is that it would now be appropriate to drop the requirement for self-isolation of fully vaccinated travellers after they arrive in New Zealand, subject to some monitoring conditions;
4. Agree that fully vaccinated international arrivals to New Zealand will no longer be required to self-isolate on arrival or be in MIQ;
5. Note that recommendation 4 can be implemented from 11.59pm Friday 4 March 2022;
6. Note the Director General of Health advises that continuing to require unvaccinated New Zealand citizens to enter MIQ is no longer justified on the basis of reducing outbreak size or containing transmission, but there are risks with this approach so further consideration is needed;
7. Note that officials will provide urgent advice, including health advice, on risk mitigation measures for unvaccinated travellers, such as requiring a period of self-isolation until a negative RAT test (or series of tests) is returned;
8. Agree that Ministers with Power to Act (the Prime Minister, the Minister for COVID-19, Minister of Health, Minister of Justice and the Associate Minister of Health - Minister Verrall) take decisions on unvaccinated travellers and any additional mitigations needed in place of MIQ;
9. Agree that removing these requirements applies to all New Zealand citizens and residents and other eligible travellers under current border settings only, and that all previous decisions regarding when non-citizens and non-residents can enter still stand;
10. Note this means there will not be any restriction on the timing or number of New Zealand citizens and residents entering New Zealand, nor those leaving and re-entering;



11. Note that the Director General of Health intends to change testing requirements for vaccinated travellers to a single Rapid Antigen Test to be distributed at the airport to incoming travellers and self-administered on day 0/1;
12. Note that a positive result would require the traveller to comply with existing domestic settings for positive COVID-19 cases;
13. Note all other settings for international travel will remain in place subject to further public health advice, including requirements for pre-departure testing, settings for Pacific travel and in-flight settings.

Proactively Released