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## Government takes further action to protect New Zealanders from COVID-19

Hon Dr David Clark

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- Travel restrictions introduced for Iran from today
- No exemptions for students from China to enter the country
- Increased health staff presence at international airports

The Government has announced a suite of new actions as it steps up its response to the rapidly changing global spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus.

This includes placing temporary restrictions on travel from Iran as a precaution, a decision not to allow any exemptions for overseas students from China to enter the country and bolstering the health presence at international airports.

“The Government’s priority continues to be the health and safety of New Zealanders,” Health Minister Dr David Clark said.

“Our pandemic plan is in place and our focus remains on keeping COVID-19 out of New Zealand. These enhanced travel restrictions and an increased border presence add to our existing actions to limit the risk of it entering the country.

“The situation in Iran is obviously concerning. There is ongoing spread of the disease there, and a large degree of uncertainty about the scale of the outbreak and the ability to contain it.

On the medical and scientific advice, Ministers have put in place further temporary travel restrictions covering incoming travellers from Iran. This means people will not be able to travel from New Zealand and anyone who has been in Iran in the last 14 days will need to self-isolate.

"This is a sensible precaution. Many airlines have already cancelled flights from Iran.

"New Zealand citizens and permanent residents will still be allowed to return home, but will be told to self-isolate for 14 days.

"These restrictions will come into force immediately, and will initially apply until midnight Tuesday 3 March. They will be reviewed every 48 hours, which is the same approach being taken to the China travel restrictions that have been in place since 3 February.

"Border restrictions are a key part of protecting New Zealanders. Immigration New Zealand is ready to implement the entry restriction on travellers from Iran to keep New Zealanders safe," Immigration Minister Iain Lees-Galloway said.

"People should check with their travel agents about flight options if their travel plans are disrupted," Iain Lees-Galloway said.

"The Government has also decided not to allow any exemptions to let overseas students from China into New Zealand at this time. Universities requested this but our priority is protecting New Zealanders," David Clark said.

"The situation with COVID-19 is rapidly evolving. We are seeing concerning trends internationally, with more and more countries reporting confirmed cases.

"Now is not the time to step back from our approach. We must put the health and safety of New Zealanders first.

"The advice from officials, including health was not to proceed with an exemption.

"Allowing thousands of students into the country from China, and guaranteeing they were safely in self-isolation, would have been incredibly difficult to implement and was not a risk the Government was prepared to take on New Zealanders' behalf," David Clark said.

Acting Education Minister Tracey Martin says it was not an easy decision but it is the right one at this stage.

"The Government is conscious of the impact extended travel restrictions will have on universities and affected students but we've opted for a safety-first approach.

"Public health must be the top priority and that includes being able to ensure we could provide healthcare support for thousands of additional students in the event of them arriving from China.

"The Government will continue to provide practical support to education providers as they adjust the way they deliver programmes to students. This includes being more flexible about entry dates for offshore Chinese student visas," Tracey Martin said.

"We need to maintain our focus on keeping COVID-19 out of New Zealand, while at the same time continuing to prepare for the likely arrival of individual cases," David Clark said.

"Health officials are constantly reviewing our response to COVID-19.

"We've had health staff at our major airports since late January, meeting all flights from China and being available to meet passengers from other flights if they display symptoms of concern.

"There are now more than 40 countries with cases of COVID-19, so it makes sense to strengthen our health presence at airports.

"Starting tomorrow, health staff will scale up to meet all direct international flights landing at New Zealand airports from Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Thailand.

"Our border response is further ramping up to have health staff available for all international flights into New Zealand.

"They will be available to provide advice and check passengers – particularly anyone that is unwell or displaying symptoms of concern.

"The international situation with COVID-19 continues to evolve at pace. New Zealand is well placed and well prepared to respond.

"We will continue to take a precautionary approach, based on the best available scientific and medical advice," David Clark said.



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