



## An attempted re-writing of the Covid response record

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**National called for the border to be closed two hours before that happened, not one month before as Judith Collins claimed.**

Early in The Press Leaders Debate, Labour leader Jacinda Ardern reiterated New Zealand was “among the first to close its borders” as the pandemic spread across the world.

But National’s Judith Collins said her party had called for the border to be closed in February, “and it took another month for it to happen”. She added some claims about National raising the issue of masks, and then-Health Minister David Clark telling Parliament “all we need to do is think about hygiene and sneeze into our elbows”.

How much of all of that is true? In short, quite a bit, but not the most important part.

National’s then-health spokesperson Michael Woodhouse was sounding the alarm about Covid-19 in January, well before the Government had put protective measures in place. But he didn’t explicitly call for border closures until March 11, and that was only for two countries.

National’s then-leader Simon Bridges made the call for a complete border closure at 4.25pm on March 19. His press release was issued while an urgent Cabinet meeting was underway. Two hours later, Ardern announced that from 11.59pm that night, the borders would close to everyone but citizens and residents.

It is true, however, that Woodhouse was ahead of the Government in calling for a series of actions to protect the country against Covid-19.

On January 23, he said Covid-19 should be made a notifiable disease and travellers from affected areas should be screened. He also called for “heightened health surveillance at international airports” at that time.

David Clark’s first press release mentioning Covid-19 came three days later when he announced public health staff would from the following day be meeting flights from China to “actively look for signs of the novel coronavirus”.

Immediately, Woodhouse said the Government should be going further, with [unclear] and other protective measures.



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Almost immediately, Woodhouse said the Government should be going further, with screening and other protective measures.