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Additional COVID-19 tests for returnees from higher risk countries

28 Dec 2020

An additional test for COVID-19 will be required for returnees from higher risk countries on their arrival in New Zealand from midnight 31 December 2020.

- New virus variants and ongoing high rates of diseases in some countries prompt additional border protections.
- Extra (day zero or day one) test to be in place this week.
- New ways of reducing risk before people embark on travel being investigated,

including pre-departure testing for people leaving the United Kingdom for New Zealand, with a view to implementing added measures from mid-January; other higher risk countries to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

An additional test for COVID-19 will be required for returnees from higher risk countries such as the United Kingdom on their arrival in New Zealand from midnight on 31 December, was announced today.

The extra PCR test will be applied when returnees whoÕve been in the United Kingdom or the United States during the preceding 14 days arrive at a managed isolation and quarantine facility.

This new testing will be in addition to the current day three and day 12 tests. The returnees will also be required to be in isolation or quarantine in their allocated room at a facility until their initial test has returned a result.

This means if the result is positive they will be transferred to a quarantine facility effectively several days earlier than under the standard two-test regime. The changes will be in force from midnight on 31 December.

New Zealand has been monitoring overseas developments very closely, and, like many other countries, has heightened concerns about the new variants of the virus and their potential to spread more rapidly, and the ongoing high rates of infection in some countries.

Asymptomatic people coming across the border are subsequently picked up in day three testing, so this will pick them up as early as possible. It will also help identify earlier anyone who sat close to them on flights.

While growing travel restrictions are being imposed in countries that host airport hubs and by airlines themselves Ð which block routes to New Zealand for the overwhelming majority of travellers from higher risk countries Ð the New Zealand Government is taking this extra precautionary step to provide another layer of protection and to support our goal of making summer unstoppable.

Our 14-day managed quarantine and isolation regime is providing one of the strongest border defences anywhere in the world. These additional requirements for returnees from higher risk countries will provide extra safety for people working in the facilities and greater assurance for New Zealand generally.

Pre-departure testing for UK arrivals to New Zealand from mid-January

Keeping the virus out remains our biggest protection and as weÕve done all along, we regularly review our settings and make changes where they will make a difference.

Plans for pre-departure risk reduction measures, including testing for people leaving the United Kingdom for New Zealand, are currently being worked on, with a view to implementing them from mid-January. These include selecting the most effective forms of testing in the circumstances. Additional risk measures for other countries are also being considered.

Returnees will still need to go through our 14-day managed isolation and quarantine process, on arrival in New Zealand.

WeÕre aware this would present an extra hurdle for Kiwis planning to return and weÕre not considering this lightly.

WeÕre going beyond what weÕve done in the past, to stay ahead of what appears to be a worsening situation globally and, in doing so, we would reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading during transit and entering our managed isolation facilities.

An eventual safe travel zone with Australia and Realm countries will ultimately mean fewer people from lower risk countries staying in our managed isolation facilities, thereby allowing more people from higher risk countries to arrive. Additional offshore risk measures including pre-departure testing would help us prepare for the increased risk such arrivals will bring to our facilities and to incoming flights.

Information about the new testing requirements for those travelling to NZ from high risk countries.

The Ministry of Health has provided further information about the new testing requirements for those traveling from high risk countries.

What is happening?

From 11:59pm on 31 December 2020 anyone arriving into New Zealand from the UK or USA will be required to:

have a COVID-19 test on day 0, i.e. when they first arrive into managed isolation

- remain in their room until the result of that test is complete

As now, if they are symptomatic on arrival they will go straight to a quarantine facility.

Why is this necessary?

WeÕve been monitoring overseas developments very closely, and, like many other countries, have heightened concerns about the new variants of the virus and their potential to spread more rapidly.

It is an extra precautionary step to provides another layer of protection for New Zealand from COVID-19.

What type of test is it?

It will be the same PCR nasal swab that people currently receive but is in addition to the existing day 3 and day 12 tests.

How long does it take for results to come back?

It usually takes 24-48 hours. People will be contacted directly if positive. They will be sent a text if negative.

What happens if the test is negative?

People will complete the remainder of their 14 days managed isolation as normal. They will be required to undertake a further test about day 3 of their stay and again about day 12 before they leave.

What happens if the test is positive?

If the result is positive the person will be transferred to a quarantine facility. This is several days earlier than previously would have been the case.

What else is happening?

The Government is preparing to require people travelling from the high risk locations to also have a pre-departure COVID-19 test. More details on this will be announced separately.

More information