(Beehive, 2021h) [24 Mar 2021]

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24 MARCH 2021

COVID-19 vaccine for urgent overseas travel

HON CHRIS HIPKINS

COVID-19 Response

The Government has confirmed strict criteria for early vaccinations for people who need to travel outside of New Zealand on compassionate grounds or for reasons of national significance, COVID-19 Response Minister CHris Hipkins announced today.

Two weeks ago the Government set out the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out plan – beginning with those most at risk of getting and spreading COVID-19 and those most at risk of getting seriously sick from it.

"The Government has carefully considered circumstances where there is a genuine need for people to be vaccinated urgently in order to travel overseas," Chris Hipkins said.

"A high threshold has been set, which will balance compassion with the need to avoid potential queue jumping ahead of at-risk groups, without a strong justification. These provisions will not extend to vaccinations for new arrivals or returnees."

Even before people will be considered, they will need to satisfy a series of criteria, including being a New Zealand citizen, resident or visa holder; needing to travel before 31 August 2021; and having already made arrangements for returning to New Zealand.

"People should also ensure they will be able to receive both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine prior to their departure," Chris Hipkins said.

The compassionate grounds that would be considered for travel overseas include:

- needing to provide critical care and protection for a dependant;
- accessing critical medical care that is not available in New Zealand; and
- visiting an immediate family member who is dying.

"This does not include reuniting with family, attending a funeral or memorial service, or attending a school or university."

National significance overseas travel will include representing New Zealand:

- in an official capacity;
- at significant international events; and
- in an official non-government capacity.

"The key yardstick here is people travelling in an official capacity and ensuring their participation is in our national interest. We also expect these requests will need to be made by the appropriate agency or association on behalf of the individual, not by individuals themselves.

"It does not include private or recreational travel.

"The final consideration is the level of risk travellers will be exposed to COVID-19 in the destination country.

"Underlying these decisions is a fundamental recognition that while where there are legitimate urgent reasons to travel overseas, it is also in all our interests to ensure New Zealanders are protected against COVID-19 to the best extent possible when travellers return home," Minister Hipkins said

Further information about the new criteria and application process for an advanced vaccine request will be available in the coming week, before applications open 31 March.

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