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Government sets out plan to reconnect New Zealanders to the world

RT HON JACINDA ARDERN(/MINISTER/RT-HON-JACINDA-ARDERN)

Prime Minister (/portfolio/labour-2020-2023/prime-minister)

- Vaccination rollout will speed up, with all eligible ages able to book in their vaccine by 1 September
- Move to 6 weeks between doses to ensure more NZers at least partially vaccinated as soon as possible in face of Delta risk
- Phased approach to reopening border with self-isolation pilot this year and set up of new testing and vaccine checking systems at border
- From the first quarter of 2022 move to new individual risk based border settings that will establish low, medium and high risk pathways into the country
- Elimination retained as best strategy to keep COVID out and economy open

The Government will use the second half of 2021 to vaccinate as many New Zealanders as possible and safely conduct a self-isolation trial for vaccinated New Zealanders in order to prepare for a phased resumption of quarantine-free travel, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced today.

The Government's framework for re-opening borders and moving to an individualised risk-based model for quarantine-free travel was unveiled at a forum on Reconnecting New Zealanders to the World in Wellington today. The release of the plan followed the publication of Sir David Skegg's Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group's advice to Government on Wednesday.

"Getting vaccinated is the number one thing everyone can do to be protected against COVID-19, help accelerate our economic recovery, reduce the risk of lockdowns, and safely allow New Zealand's borders to begin re-opening next year," Jacinda Ardern said.

"The plan announced today is informed by the best available scientific evidence and public health advice. It will allow us to capture the opportunities vaccination brings, while protecting the gains New Zealanders have worked so hard for.

"Key to this is maintaining our Elimination Strategy. The advice is clear: If we open our borders now we will lose the freedoms and advantages we have achieved so far.

"If we give up our elimination approach too soon there is no going back, and we could see significant breakouts here like some countries overseas are experiencing who have opened up early in their vaccination rollout.

"Therefore the first step in our plan is speeding up the vaccination process to ensure everyone is at least partially vaccinated as soon as possible to reduce the risk and impact of Delta entering the country.

"From today we are moving to a six week period between doses, meaning more people can get their first dose quicker and ensuring everyone is at least partially vaccinated in the coming months. Those who work at our border, have underlying health conditions or wish to be fully vaccinated sooner can still get their second dose after three weeks.

"We are also bringing forward the eligibility dates for the remaining groups. As already announced 50 plus will be open from Friday 13th August, 40 plus will be open on Wednesday 18th August, 30 plus will be open on Wednesday 25th August and from 1 September we will be open for all eligible ages.

"Once enough people are vaccinated, we will be able to start the next step in the plan: a phased introduction of an individual risk-based approach to border settings in 2022.

"Low-Risk, Medium-Risk and High-Risk travel pathways will be created, and which pathway a traveller takes will be based on the risk associated with where they are coming from and their vaccination status.

"Each pathway will have testing and isolation requirements proportionate to that risk.

"The Low-Risk pathway will permit quarantine free entry for vaccinated travellers who have been in low risk countries.

"The Medium-Risk pathway would include a combination of self-isolation and/or reduced MIQ for vaccinated travellers who have been in medium risk countries.

"To prepare for the Medium-Risk pathway the Government will run a self-isolation pilot in the second half of this year to test processes and systems for the safe use of this tool.

"Businesses and organisations that need to send staff overseas will be invited to express interest in participating in the pilot which will run between October and December 2021.