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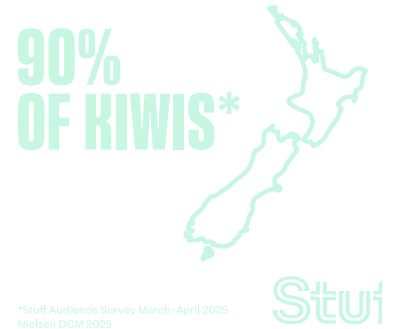
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Coronavirus: Helen Clark wants full inquiry into NZ's Covid-19 response

Tim Murphy of [Newsroom.co.nz](#)

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New Zealand needs to review its handling of [Covid-19](#) 'to do better next time' as global diseases are going to keep coming, warns Helen Clark.



Former UNDP administrator and ex-Prime Minister Helen Clark. Photo: Victoria University of Wellington / Stuff

Former Prime Minister Helen Clark wants a full review into New Zealand's preparedness [and handling of the Covid-19 pandemic](#) - and is calling for the next government to prioritise fixing the 'quarantine chokepoint' with the help of the private sector.

Clark, now co-chair of a review of the World Health Organisation's Covid-19 response, said New Zealand also needed a "full reflection, whether a Royal Commission, Commission of Inquiry or expert panel" on how the pandemic was managed here.

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"We have to learn the lessons. In many ways, we dodged a bullet. We were not ready for this."

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Clark said the country did have an Epidemic Preparedness Act from 2006, as a result of the SARS virus and had a flu pandemic plan, which fortunately it had set aside to deal with the much different Covid-19 disease. "If we had followed that we would be Victoria or would be Italy or whatever."

The former head of the United Nations Development Programme told the *Auckland's Future, Now* summit on the city's post-Covid recovery she understood political leaders being cautious on border issues ahead of the election.

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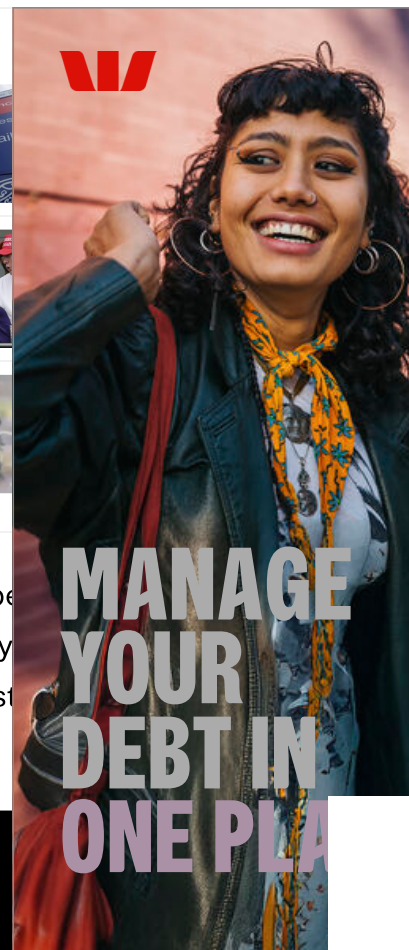
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"There's significant risk aversion and Kiwis are very risk averse. Any appetite for risk, well the surge of cases in Victoria [sent] that down as well. But you take a deep breath and look for ways to take the conversation along post election."



British High Commissioner Laura Clarke and former Prime Minister Helen Clark spoke about the coronavirus pandemic and moving forward at a conference in Te Papa on Monday. Photo: ROSA WOODS / Stuff

The current border arrangements would need to change, soon, to help the city and country's economic fortunes.

"Even with a two week quarantine, there is so much more we can do. It will need [major private sector partnerships](#) to gear up the quarantine system.

"There's no reason in principle why the [international] students could not come back with effective quarantine. There's no reason in principle why tourists who are prepared to pay for two weeks' quarantine can't come back, there's no reason in principle why you can't have Covid-free travel channels

with others, or that working holiday makers couldn't come back if they are prepared to pay for quarantine ... certainly the skilled workers, the global visa people who could drive the economy.

"If, post-election, the thinking can go to how to try to remove this chokepoint which is existing quarantine, that would help even within the existing two week quarantine setting. We need a national conversation and buy-in to this... from let's get this done to how do we get the next stage done."

Former Prime Minister Helen Clark wants a full inquiry into our Covid-19 response. Photo: ROSA WOODS / Stuff

Clark said the spirit New Zealanders had shown in lockdown needed to be unleashed again, post-election, to work out how to "bring through the people who need to be brought through" and to agree a medium and longer-term economic strategy.

She was careful to say strict health measures would remain critical, noting official warnings of a potential second wave.

"We are one human error away from it ... We have points of vulnerability, we know that ... The key thing is to instill in people that we can't be complacent. Those things we did during lockdown, more attention to hand hygiene, social distancing still has a role, maybe we should drop the handshakes. These little things are going to count a lot if there's any resurgence.

"We need to look at technology solutions for tracing work the best. The Covid app - a lot of people download it but then it's hard to find anywhere to use it... it's very frustrating. Sam Morgan's solution was brilliant, in my opinion, but would we all have to wear the lanyards around your neck. But there's got to be some smart solutions."

Latest figures (total, 14-day trend)

In hospital

241

New cases

1,941**Vaccination** (12+ population)**74.0%** boosted**91.5%** double vaccinated[Latest news](#) [The Whole Truth: Vaccination](#) [Covid-19 newsletter](#) [Testing sites](#)

[The WHO review](#), which she co-chairs with former Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, is expected to provide an interim update to WHO ministers in November and a fuller report in May.

Clark said: "Undoubtedly we will find areas where it could have worked better. The idea will be to chart a path to how to do better next time. These diseases are going to keep coming. If we are as flat-footed as we've been with this one it's a pretty bleak old future."

There had been six global declarations of a public health emergency of international concern since 2003. "None of those got away. This is the first that's got away since the great flu of 1918."



The outbreak of the virus is believed to have started in the Chinese city of Wuhan. Photo: Stringer / Getty Images

Clark did not name countries, but one comment could be taken as admonishing a Chinese response early in the spread of the virus in Wuhan.

"It's absolutely critical that countries are up front. Don't suppress young doctors who want to talk about an unknown virus. Total transparency is needed... fast notification to the global health authority, which at this time is the WHO and then things can take their course.

"But delay is fatal."

Audio provided by [RNZ](#).

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