



ALERT LEVEL 2 REMAINS

Statement from the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, Hon. Mark Brown

Monday 23 August 2021

The Cook Islands Government has today approved additional and extended precautionary measures aimed at keeping our people safe from the COVID-19 Delta variant currently in the community in New Zealand.

Today's decisions are based on the latest information from New Zealand where there are now 107 Delta community cases and 421 locations of interest across the North Island as well as ongoing testing effort being overseen by Te Marae Ora.

Following Cabinet deliberations earlier today, Government has decided to:

- Extend Alert Level 2 until 11.59pm on Monday 30 August
- Extend the current suspension on inwards arrivals from New Zealand until 11.59pm on Monday 30 August
- Expand testing criteria and re-test all passengers from New Zealand who arrived in Rarotonga between 2 August-16 August

Additionally, Government have decided to:

- Restrict sea travel from Rarotonga to the Pa Enuā to crew only for transporting cargo
- Mandatory contact tracing facilities for all indoor and outdoor public or private events of 25 people or more, with prior registration with Te Marae Ora for all such events.
- CookSafe tag-in or manual registrations encouraged for all businesses and organisations.

Suspension of Quarantine-free travel to the Cook Islands from New Zealand has been further extended until 11.59pm Monday 30 August with a re-evaluation to be undertaken before this time.

The extension to the suspension of inwards arrivals aligns with Auckland's current Alert Level 4 timeframe.

Alert Level 2 extension

The Cook Islands will remain at Alert Level 2 until 11.59pm on Monday 30 August with a re-evaluation to be undertaken before this time. Elevated and expanded contact tracing and testing effort by TMO (with suspension on inwards arrivals) throughout this period will give us confidence that COVID-19 is not present in the Cook Islands.

Pa Enuā - A Ministerial order restricting air travel from Rarotonga to the Pa Enuā has been extended to Monday 30 August. Travel from the Pa Enuā to Rarotonga is still permitted, although travellers should note they will not be able to return to the Pa Enuā until the aforementioned restriction has been lifted.

Additionally, sea travel from Rarotonga to the Pa Enuā is now restricted to crew only for the purpose of transporting cargo to the Pa Enuā and/or transporting passengers and cargo from the Pa Enuā to Rarotonga, unless an exemption has been obtained from TMO.

Gatherings - All public and private gatherings are restricted to a maximum of 100 people with strict guidelines including compulsory registration of the event and contact tracing. Bars and restaurants must keep records of attendee names and contact details for 14 days. The above requirements now apply to all indoor and outdoor events and social gatherings, public or private, of 25 people or more.

Contact tracing and testing

Contact tracing and swabbing of passengers who arrived in Rarotonga between 2 August and 16 August. Since testing began 17 August 2021 through to 21 August, the laboratory processed 1934 swabs - all have returned negative results.

Today TMO began new testing protocols and at 4:30pm the lab received 353 samples, 86 results back as negative, and 267 results pending.

The contact tracing team is working at full capacity to filter phone calls and to contact people with their test results.

Additionally, TMO has identified 17 people to be tested on Mauke. Arrangements for swabbing have been organised with TMO on Mauke and with assistance through Air Rarotonga.

Managed isolation - Following our intensified contact tracing and testing of passengers from New Zealand, we currently have two separate groups undertaking Managed Isolation Quarantine (MIQ) at the Edgewater Resort and Spa. The first is a

couple who arrived in the Cook Islands on 16 August and disclosed they were at a location of interest on 13 August. They were tested on 21 August and both returned negative test results and remain without symptoms. They were moved to the MIQ on 21 August. Their quarantine will end on 26 August at 6.30pm.

The second group is a family of five. A member of the family is a close contact having been at a location of interest on Monday 16 August. The family arrived in the Cook Islands on 16 August and were tested on 17 August 2021, returning negative results. The close contact was retested on 21 August and returned a negative test result. They remain asymptomatic to date. They were moved to the MIQ on Friday 20 August at 9:00PM. Subject to continued negative test results, their MIQ period will end on 29 August at 3:00PM

Updated Testing Criteria - The following people must be tested:

- Passengers who arrived in the Cook Islands on the 15th and 16th August must now be retested, symptomatic or asymptomatic.
- Passengers who arrived in the Cook Islands from the 2nd August who have not yet been tested
- Symptomatic visitors or locals irrespective of their testing history must be retested
- Someone tested may be ordered to go into quarantine or into isolation until their results are known

Cook Islands residents in New Zealand

Cook Islands residents inclusive permit holders unable to return to the Cook Islands since the 16 August are urged to register with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration (MFAI) via the Cook Islands High Commission in Wellington at dhc@cookhicom.org.nz

Repatriation options for Cook Islands residents in New Zealand are presently being explored by the Border Easement Taskforce and further advice relating to this will be provided in due course. This will be a managed process, the timing and approach to be influenced by New Zealand's containment of the current outbreak.

Returning to NZ

New Zealand based travellers in the Cook Islands can travel back to Auckland on a scheduled flight. They will be able to undertake onward domestic travel home. New Zealand based travellers in the Cook Islands who are awaiting test results from TMO are strongly advised to continue to self-isolate until they have received their results.

New Zealand is requiring New Zealand based travellers who have visited a location of interest in New Zealand abstain from flying within 14 days following the visit to a location of interest, or if they have COVID-19 symptoms.

Keeping Cook Islanders and visitors safe has been the Government's key priority throughout the pandemic. Through our hard work and continued vigilance, we have been very fortunate to have remained COVID-free so far.

Extending our alert levels allows for one full incubation cycle in the Cook Islands (being 16 August – 30 August). Continued testing (with suspension on inwards arrivals) throughout this period will give us confidence that COVID-19 is not present in the Cook Islands.

We thank everyone who has been tested and for the continued patience being exercised as TMO work through testing effort. We urge everyone to remain vigilant and to work together to help protect our communities. Please remember to tag in with CookSafe and turn on your Bluetooth for CookSafe+, to be diligent about personal health practices such as hand washing, mask-wearing and physical distancing. Please continue to check official communications on this evolving situation on the Cook Islands COVID website at www.covid19.gov.ck and the New Zealand Government Unite Against Covid website www.covid19.govt.nz

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