



August 18 2021

Statement from the Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, Mark Brown on 18 August 2021

Today the Cook Islands Government has confirmed it will extend its precautionary measures in response to the latest information regarding the community outbreak of the COVID-19 Delta variant in New Zealand. This afternoon we have learned that in New Zealand there are now 21 Delta community cases in Auckland. Nineteen are in managed isolation and two are in hospital. There are over 100 locations of interest. Genome sequencing has revealed that the current positive cases are a close match with a recent returnee from Sydney on a managed red zone flight on August 7.

Case numbers and locations of interest are expected to rise and this is why the Government has decided to:

- Extend Alert Level 2 until 11.59pm on Monday 23 August
- Extend the current suspension on inwards arrivals from New Zealand until 11.59pm on Monday 23 August
- Intensify contact tracing and testing of high risk New Zealand visitors who arrived in Rarotonga between 2 August-16 August

Suspension of inwards travel to the Cook Islands

Quarantine-free travel to the Cook Islands from New Zealand has been suspended until 11.59pm Monday 23 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.

New Zealand travellers currently in the Cook Islands, who have not been at a New Zealand location of interest and do not have COVID-19 symptoms, are able to return from the Cook Islands on a scheduled flight. Locations of interest are on the New Zealand Ministry of Health [website](#).

Yesterday, the first outbound flight from Rarotonga to New Zealand carried 254 passengers; a later flight had bookings for 65 passengers. An airport team in Rarotonga has been deployed to undertake pre-departure risk assessment going forward.

Alert Level 2

The Cook Islands will remain at Alert Level 2 until 11.59pm on Monday 23 August.

Travel from the Pa Enua to Rarotonga is still permitted at this time, although travellers should note they will not be able to return to the Pa Enua until restriction has been lifted.

In response to the evolving situation in New Zealand and to minimise exposure risk while Te Marae Ora continue testing and surveillance, the Ministerial order also now restricts all public and private gatherings to a maximum of 100 people.

COVID testing of recent arrivals

Te Marae Ora - the Cook Islands Ministry of Health TMO has set up four testing stations in Rarotonga – Black Rock, Tupapa Admin block, Ngatangiia and Constitution Park. Testing in Aitutaki is at the Hospital.

As of 4pm today (18 August, 2021) a total of 1411 people were tested - 1275 in Rarotonga and 136 in Aitutaki. So far, a total of 633 results have returned negative, 567 for Rarotonga and 66 for Aitutaki.

Today, TMO will continue with intensive targeted testing and contact tracing of high risk persons who arrived from New Zealand between August 2 and August 16. Those considered high risk are people who have been at an identified location of interest in New Zealand and/or or are symptomatic.

Additional personnel have been deployed to support TMO. A dedicated swabbing team was mobilized to the Edgewater Resort this morning to interview people who arrived 2 August – 16 August and to test those who meet the criteria. This criteria will be reviewed again in the next 24 hours.

Testing

Recent arrivals in the high risk category must remain in their accommodation/residence and contact TMO on 57481, 57482, 57486, 56199 for a risk assessment and immediate testing.

After testing, visitors and/or recent arrivals must remain in their rooms/residence until they have received their results, which may take up to 12 hours. Once they obtain a negative test result, they can exit isolation. Should anyone test positive, they will be transferred to a dedicated managed isolation facility.

Returning to NZ

People who visited a location of interest in New Zealand during the specified times will not be able to travel back to New Zealand for 14 days following their last exposure. They may also be asked to self-isolate in Rarotonga for the remainder of their 14 day period.

Other New Zealand visitors have no restrictions on their movements or activities, apart from complying with Alert Level 2 measures.

Keeping the Cook Islands safe

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.

We now need to take our combined efforts to the next level. We need everyone to remember to tag in with Cooksafe, to be vigilant about personal health practices such as hand washing, mask wearing and physical distancing. Most importantly, if you haven't already done so, please get vaccinated with urgency.

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