

## **Update 1: Operation Turou Managed Return of Stranded Cook Islanders and Cook Islands Residents 5 October 2021 (CKT)**

Kia Orana

Te Marae Ora (TMO) wishes to provide the following update:

As many of you are all aware, the Managed Return of stranded Cook Islanders in NZ as a result of the current COVID-19 community outbreak will be taking place this week and next.

For that reason, the Secretary of Health decided to activate the Incident Management System (IMS) yesterday. The IMS structure provides a structured approach to managing a national response to public health events and emergencies. It ensures best practice in emergency management through seven critical functions: Leadership; Partner Coordination; Information and Planning; Health Operations and Technical Expertise; Operations Support and Logistics; Finance and Administration; and International Expertise.

The activation of the IMS for this instance is somewhat special. Although not an immediate response to a public health event or emergency, it will allow us to prepare, implement and adapt quickly, collaboratively and efficiently as we navigate through the Managed Return.

You can expect daily updates for the duration of time that IMS is active (Operation Turou) on this occasion.

The Cook Islands remains COVID-19 free.

This Thursday (7 October) morning (at approx. 2.30am) the Cook Islands Government co-ordinated charter flight from Christchurch will arrive in Rarotonga carrying up to 90 passengers. The final number of passengers will not be known until a negative COVID-19 test result has been received for every passenger. Pre-departure medical checks will be taking place at Christchurch Airport before passengers will be cleared to board the flight.

Once the plane has landed and taxied to the terminal, a Te Marae Ora Health Official and a representative of the Cook Islands Police will board the plane and give the passengers a briefing on what to expect both upon exiting the plane and during their Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ) stay at the Edgewater Resort.

The Cook Islands Government has laid out strict protocols for the arrival of the repatriated passengers at Rarotonga Airport and their transfer to a MIQ facility, where they will complete 7-days of supervised quarantine, including further testing for the virus. Only once all criteria

are met will these individuals be allowed to join their loved ones and friends.

The entire process has involved the coordination of almost a dozen ministries and government agencies, ensuring public health and safety remains the utmost priority.

Below you can find details on how we're handling the repatriation process to maintain our COVID-19 free status.

### **Upon arrival at Rarotonga International Airport**

- All passengers will disembark the plane as per instructions of designated officials from Te Marae Ora Ministry of Health.
- The roughly 90 passengers will be processed at Rarotonga International Airport before being transported to the MIQ facility (Edgewater Resort and Spa)
- They will clear Immigration before collecting their luggage and clearing Customs and Biosecurity
- Duty-free shops in the terminal will not be open. However, we understand some are taking orders for collection at the conclusion on MIQ.
- Carry-on baggage will be disinfected by health officials at the entrance to the terminal
- Checked in baggage will be disinfected by health officials before being placed on the carousel.
- Once passengers have their luggage and have cleared Customs and Biosecurity they will then progress through the exit into the arrivals terminal and directly onto waiting buses.
- At no time will arriving passengers and the general public, have the opportunity to come into contact with each other. Cordons will be in place, separating the returnees from the general public.
- Throughout the process, personal protective equipment (PPE) will be provided to those at risk of coming into close contact with arriving passengers and/or their baggage.
- Only front-line staff from the various Border Agencies and transport companies who are fully vaccinated will be working. At the conclusion of their duties, they will each be tested for COVID and will self-isolate until they receive a negative test result.

### **Upon arrival at MIQ Facility – Edgewater Resort**

Upon arrival at the MIQ facility, returnees will be pre-checked and will be escorted to their respective rooms.

There will be strict rules at the facility. Returning residents are required to sign an agreement on arrival, agreeing to abide by the quarantine requirement during their stay.

As part of the government-funded programme, meals will be provided, and individuals will be given the opportunity to exercise outdoors, however no swimming is permitted. Laundry service will be provided along with laundry facilities being made available for those with

further needs.

The returnees will receive daily health checks to ensure their wellbeing, and for the wellbeing and health of others. Full cooperation is needed to ensure health checks can be completed effectively.

Health officials will be on standby should any of those undergoing supervised quarantine begin feeling unwell, such as experiencing symptoms of fever, a cough, difficulty breathing, or sore throat. These individuals will be quarantined in their rooms to receive medical care.

While guests won't be able to have physical contact with their family and loved ones whilst in MIQ, family and friends who wish to, may drop off food and personal items, not alcohol, at the facility (Edgewater Reception). Items will be inspected prior to delivery to rooms. Hotel Security or Police will ensure that the items do not contain or present a health and safety risk.

Any items being dropped off for returnees for the night of their return, must be dropped off by 4pm Wednesday 6 October. After then daily drop-offs must be made by 5pm.

Absolutely NO items can be left by returnees for family/friends to collect – this includes medication being carried for someone else.

Please ensure any food deliveries are in solid containers that will not leak and can be washed and then taken home. This will help reduce the amount of rubbish staff will have to deal with, as will bringing nu in plastic bottles.

Edgewater staff will make deliveries to guests around mealtimes only – 7am, 11am, 5pm – so please ensure any deliveries are at Reception before these times.

Any breach of the quarantine requirements may result in prosecution and a term of imprisonment of up to 12 months or a fine not exceeding \$10,000.

Upon completion of 7 days of supervised quarantine at the facility, a health professional will confirm all returning residents meet a certain set of criteria prior to release.

This includes confirmation individuals have followed strict protocol and been in supervised quarantine for at least 7 days, have no symptoms consistent with COVID-19, and have produced a negative test result for COVID-19.

Once all criteria are met and approval is granted by Te Marae Ora, returning Cook Islanders will be permitted to leave the MIQ facility and be reunited with their family and friends.

ENDS: For more information, please visit [www.health.gov.ck](http://www.health.gov.ck) or contact Jaewynn McKay; [jaewynn.mckay@cookislands.gov.ck](mailto:jaewynn.mckay@cookislands.gov.ck) +682 55486