



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
HON MARK BROWN
GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS

Covid-19 Update
17 March 2022

A short time ago, Prime Minister Mark Brown addressed the nation. Here is his address:

Kia orana tatou katoatoa,

Here is today's Covid-19 update for Thursday, March 17.

As of 8am this morning we have reached a total of 604 Covid-19 cases to date, with 174 recovered and released from isolation, and 430 cases still active – 427 in Rarotonga and three in Aitutaki.

There were 69 new cases discovered yesterday, up slightly on the previous day's total of 59.

We have still not had anyone require hospital treatment as yet, but we have now had one case displaying what are defined as moderate symptoms, and this person is being fully supported by Te Marae Ora and other public services.

We also currently have 14 active cases aged 70 or over, and these people's symptoms are also being closely monitored.

As well as our elderly, our unvaccinated and those with non-communicable diseases are also more vulnerable to the Covid-19 virus, and so it is especially important that anyone who falls into one of these categories continues to observe all of the relevant health and safety precautions as closely as possible.

To everyone else, please bear this in mind when you are interacting with any of our more vulnerable over the coming weeks and show them every consideration possible with respect to helping them avoid infection.

Now, in addition to our 430 active cases currently in seven-day isolation, we also have 580 close contacts currently in seven-day quarantine.

As I said earlier this week, we are still looking into how we might alleviate the pressures caused by having this many close contacts required to stay home, despite continuing to test negative for the Covid-19 virus. This issue is of particular importance with regard to our essential and frontline workers.

One point I would just like to emphasise for those who may be unaware, is that if you have been positive for Covid-19 and you have completed your seven days of isolation and are asymptomatic, you are free to leave your home and return to work, even if someone else in your household tests positive and the rest of the house is required to quarantine.

This is because once you have been infected by Omicron and recovered you cannot get reinfected again or pass it on to anyone else for at least three months and most probably a lot longer – meaning that there is no danger in a person who has already been infected and recovered coming and going from places where others are in quarantine.

We are also encouraging those who can to work from home to avoid Covid-19 if it is in the workplace. TMO is also able to approve arrangements for some people so they will not have to quarantine when another member of their household is positive.

This is decided on a case-by-case basis, so please contact TMO if you think this is a solution that could work for you.

Today, the Executive Council met and has passed new border regulations, which come into force from tomorrow.

Firstly, we have removed the need for a 10-day stay in New Zealand prior to coming to Rarotonga. This will be welcome news for our people living in Australia who want to come home. The current flight schedules mean that after landing in New Zealand they can catch the next flight to Rarotonga.

Secondly, a negative RAT test within 24 hours of departure will now be accepted for entry into the Cook Islands.

Thirdly, we have removed the restrictions on unvaccinated Cook Islanders and permanent residents to enter the Cook Islands.

This exemption will not apply to visitors and work permit holders however, who are still required to be vaccinated before entering the country. It should also be noted that airlines still have certain restrictions in place with regard to unvaccinated passengers.

And for those of our people planning to travel home from Australia in the near future, note that you will still be required to have a Covid test in New Zealand, meaning that after meeting New Zealand immigration entry requirements you must exit the airport in Auckland and undertake a supervised RAT test before catching your connecting flight.

We are also looking at what further changes will be necessary to facilitate travel to the Cook Islands once the New Zealand border opens to tourists from around the world.

Lastly for today, it has been decided that the Ministerial Order restricting all forms of contact sport, passenger travel to the Pa Enua (excluding Aitutaki), and gatherings over 50 people will now be extended for another two weeks, from midnight tonight until 11.59pm on Thursday, March 31.

That said, some of our Pa Enua understand that we cannot stay cut off forever, so they are working with TMO to put in place strict rules and RAT testing for those who do want to travel to the Pa Enua in the coming days, and this means that we will see exemptions for outer islands travel being more widely allowed.

We will have more news tomorrow, but for now stay safe, and may God continue to bless us all.

Kia orana e kia toa.

Hon Mark Brown
Prime Minister