

Memo

Public health advice on Alert Level settings for Taranaki – 12 November 2021

To:	Dr Ashley Bloomfield, Director-General of Health
Copy to:	Bridget White, Deputy Chief Executive, COVID-19 Health System Response
From:	Steve Waldegrave, Group Manager COVID-19 Policy Response Dr Caroline McElnay, Director of Public Health
Date:	12 November 2021
For your:	Decision

Purpose of report

1. This memo provides public health advice on Alert Level settings for Taranaki following the notification of six cases in Stratford late on Thursday 11 November 2021.

Context

2. As at 2:30pm on Friday, 12 November 2021::
 - a. Auckland and parts of Waikato (including Waitomo, Waipa, Ōtorohanga, Raglan, Te Kauwhata, Huntly, Ngāruawāhia, Hamilton City and some surrounding areas) are at Alert Level 3 Step 2.
 - b. The rest of New Zealand, including Taranaki is at Alert Level 2.
3. As shown below, most cases continue to be notified in the top half of the North Island.

Table 1 – Notified and active cases associated with current outbreak as at 9:00am Thursday 11 November 2021

DHB	New	Active	Recovered	Total
Northland	4	30	9	39
Auckland	181	3,071	1,837	4,916
Waikato	15	137	81	218
Taranaki	1 ¹	1	0	1
Canterbury	0	3	1	4
3-day rolling average of new cases		7-day rolling average of new cases		Deaths
178		166		7

¹ Only one case from Taranaki DHB has been notified to EpiSurv as at 9:00am on Friday 12 November, the additional five cases will be included in tomorrow's data.

Public Health Risk Assessment

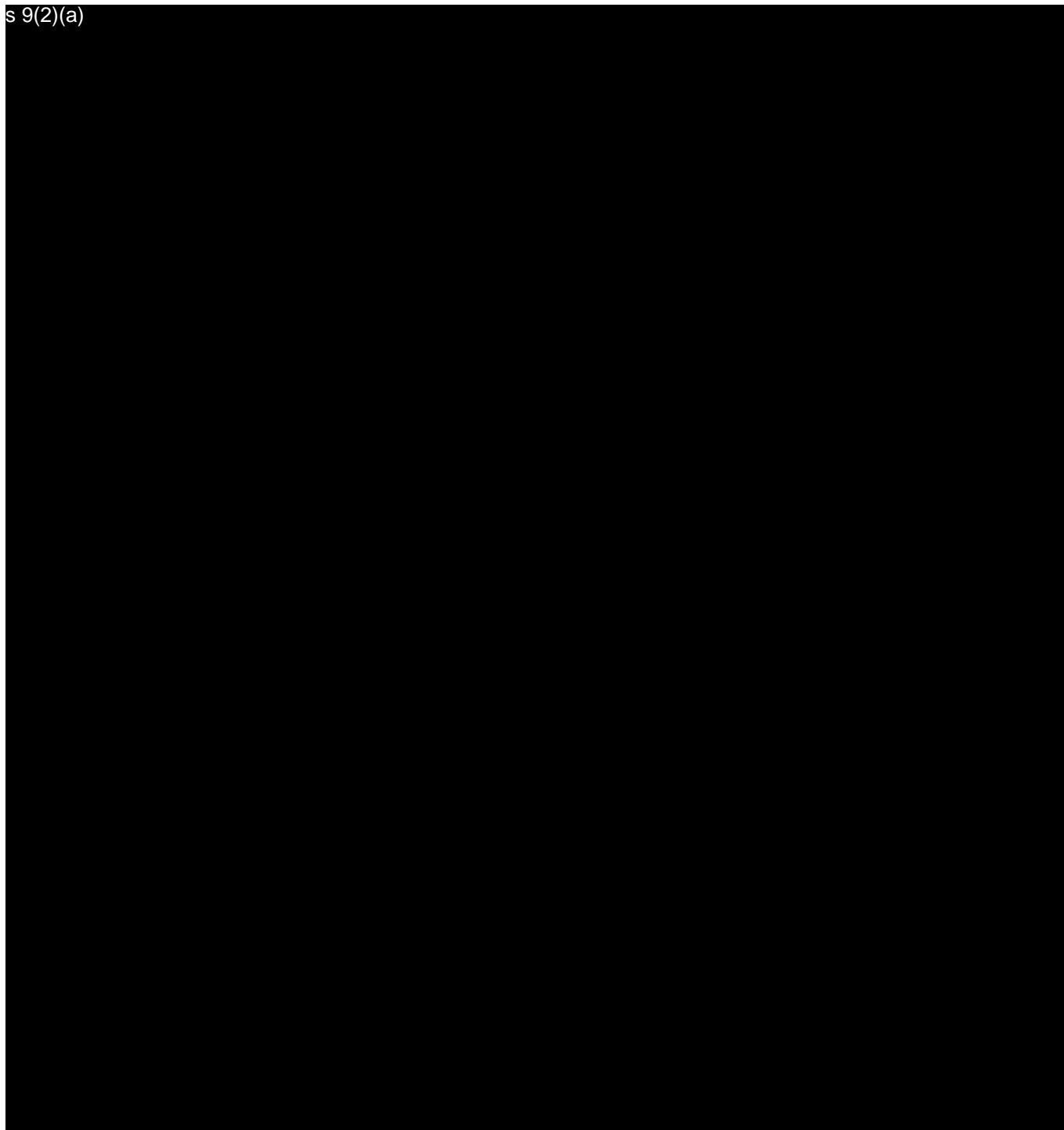
4. A Public Health Risk Assessment (PHRA) for Taranaki was conducted at 2:30pm on Friday 12 November 2021 following the notification of six cases in Stratford, south Taranaki, late on Thursday 11 November 2021.

Taranaki outbreak overview

While there are new cases notified in Stratford, there is a plausible link to the Auckland outbreak

5. As at 2:30pm on Friday 12 November 2021, there are six cases notified in Stratford, south Taranaki.

s 9(2)(a)



Contact tracing and case management capacity is currently adequate

15. Contact tracing is underway today to determine the movements of the cases and any locations of interest.
16. As at 2:30pm on Friday 12 November 2021, contact tracing has identified five close contacts. Three are in Stratford, and two in Masterton. Rapid testing of these contacts is underway with results expected around 6:00pm today (Friday 12 November 2021). Three contacts are symptomatic - some of which have family members who are also symptomatic. If they test positive, all would have been infectious in the community.
17. As at 1:00pm on Friday 12 November 2021, 12 locations of interest, including pharmacies, a hardware shop, and a supermarket have been identified. So far, four have been uploaded onto the Ministry of Health website.
18. Taranaki DHB have advised that they have capacity for contact tracing. However, they have indicated that they will need to hand off delegated cases/contacts from Auckland Regional Public Health Service to focus on their own response.

There had been consistent wastewater detections in Stratford since Tuesday 2 November 2021

19. Following the detection of the virus in samples collected from Stratford between Tuesday 2 to Sunday 7 November 2021, the virus was again detected in composite samples collected on Tuesday 9 and Wednesday 10 November 2021. The six cases notified in Stratford are consistent with these detections.
20. The virus was not detected in samples collected from Hāwera (composite), Kaponga (grab), Opunake (composite), Patea (composite), Manaia (grab), Waverley (grab), and New Plymouth on Tuesday 9 November 2021.

Testing rates in Taranaki are below the national average but strong in Stratford

21. Testing rates in Taranaki are relatively low but Taranaki DHB advise that rates have been robust in Stratford following the positive wastewater results. Overall testing rates in Taranaki are the sixth highest by DHB, behind the Auckland metro DHBs, Northland DHB, and Waikato DHBs).
22. Those testing rates are below the national rate of 5 people for 1,000 being tested. In the past five days they have varied between 1.4 and 3.8 people per 1,000 population, below the national rate of 5 people per 1,000. Yesterday, 462 people were tested across Taranaki in the community.

Table 2 - Number of community tests completed by Taranaki DHB as of Friday 11 November 2021

	Sunday 7/11	Monday 8/11	Tuesday 9/11	Wednesday 10/11	Thursday 11/11
<i>Per 1000</i>	1.4	3.7	3.8	1.7	3.8
<i>Total tests</i>	170	461	466	207	462

23. Testing is currently available at a pop-up site in Stratford, Taranaki Base Hospital and Hāwera Hospital. These sites will be open over the coming weekend and opening times will be extended if required. Swabs are being flown to Wellington three times a day for processing. Capital and Coast DHB have confirmed that they have the capacity to prioritise these swabs.

Vaccination rates in Taranaki are lower than most national averages

24. Taranaki vaccination rates are slightly behind most national averages, including for age and ethnicity. Based on current average daily rates, Taranaki should hit the 90 percent second dose milestone in late-December. In Stratford, 82.9 percent of the population have had one dose and 70.4 percent are fully vaccinated.
25. While vaccination rates are lower than most national averages, in the past two weeks Māori and Pacific Peoples rates have increased more than the national averages:
 - a. First dose vaccination rates in Taranaki have increased overall by two percent, six percent for Māori, and five percent for Pacific peoples.
 - b. Second dose vaccination rates in Taranaki have increased overall by seven percent, 10 percent for Māori, and 13 percent for Pacific peoples.

Table 3 - Vaccine uptake by within Taranaki DHB as at 11:59pm Thursday 11 November 2021

Ethnicity	DHBs	First dose		Second dose	
		Doses %	To 90%	Doses %	To 90%
All ethnicities	Taranaki	86%	3,829	73%	17,149
	New Zealand	90%	8,574	80%	421,332
Māori	Taranaki	73%	2,773	54%	5,724
	New Zealand	76%	81,885	59%	175,505
Pacific Peoples	Taranaki	87%	42	69%	263
	New Zealand	87%	7,353	74%	44,838

Table 4 - Increases in Taranaki vaccination rates in the two weeks since 11:59pm Thursday 29 October 2021

DHBs	First dose			Second dose		
	All ethnicities	Māori	Pacific	All ethnicities	Māori	Pacific
Taranaki	2%	6%	5%	7%	10%	13%
New Zealand	3%	5%	3%	7%	8%	8%

26. The increasing vaccination rates are encouraging, particularly for Māori and Pacific populations and for second doses, but there does remain a large disparity in coverage. Vaccination hubs are open in New Plymouth and Hāwera on Saturday 13 and Sunday 14 November 2021 and there are several pop-up clinics in the community.

Taranaki's health system capacity is currently adequate

27. Health services in Taranaki can meet the requirements of the current outbreak in the region. However, a significant escalation in case numbers and hospitalisations would strain the capacity of health services.
28. Taranaki DHB report that ICU capacity is up to five beds, however they will be challenged with resourcing at this level. A plan is in place in case this scenario eventuates with further support.

Public health advice and recommendations

29. Based on today's PHRA and given the information to date, the risk of undetected community transmission in Taranaki is **LOW** and our recommendations are:
 - a. that Taranaki can remain at Alert Level 2, pending no unexpected developments.
30. From a public health perspective, these recommendations are proportionate to the risk of transmission of COVID-19, given the level of risk for communities in these areas.
31. This PHRA did not consider changing the Alerts Level settings for Auckland, parts of Waikato currently at Alert Level 3 Step 2, or the rest of New Zealand. Previous public health advice provided to you on the settings for those areas remains.

Rationale – Taranaki Alert Level settings

32. Based on the information available, the risk of undetected community transmission in Taranaki is considered LOW because:
 - a. Transmission is occurring within a defined household. All current cases in Taranaki belong to one household. There is a plausible origin of infection linked to the Auckland outbreak and there have been only relatively low risk exposure events.
 - b. There is no evidence yet of undetected community transmission. Wastewater and community testing does not suggest there are undetected cases.
 - c. There have been strong testing rates in Stratford which provides good confidence that there are no unknown cases. The increasing vaccination rates in Taranaki across all ethnicities are providing additional protection.
33. On Saturday 13 November 2021, Taranaki will play Southland in the National Provincial Championship semi-final in Inglewood. This was highlighted as a potential risk due to the possibility an undetected case attending. The game will be held in accordance with Alert Level 2 restrictions, and in addition to being outdoors, there are robust risk mitigations advised by the local Medical Officer of Health including limits on indoor and outdoor bubbles. A pop-up vaccination clinic will also be onsite.

s 9(2)(a)

35. Consequently, on the basis of the above, there is currently no public health rationale for Taranaki to shift to Alert Level 3 at this stage. However, this will be kept under review.

Equity

36. Taranaki has a high Māori population with a lower-than-average vaccination rate. Based on what we know about the current outbreak, an outbreak in the area is likely to have disproportionate impacts on local Māori communities, particularly those in more rural or remote areas.
37. Insights from the sector have indicated that Māori service providers are particularly for those supporting outbreak response in Auckland. Non-Māori primary care, service

providers, and DHBs will need to support Māori service providers with any additional outreach programmes.

38. Vaccination rates among at-risk communities need to increase. Additional resources and focus are being given to vaccination efforts in these communities, including targeted outreach and mobile vaccination services.

New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990

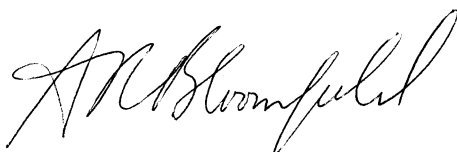
39. The restrictions imposed at Alert Level 2 must themselves be necessary and proportionate to prevent or limit the risk of the outbreak or transmission of any COVID-19 Delta outbreak. These restrictions are likely justified under section 5 of the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990, given the public health risk for people arising from community transmission of COVID-19 in areas with low vaccination rates, and the public health consequences of the outbreak spreading.

Recommendations

We recommend that you:

- | | | |
|----|--|--------------|
| a) | Note that a public health risk assessment for Taranaki conducted on Friday 12 November 2021. | Noted |
| b) | Note that the risk of undetected community transmission in | |
| | i. Auckland remains HIGH. | Noted |
| | ii. Waikato is LOW-MEDIUM. | Noted |
| | iii. Taranaki is LOW. | Noted |
| | iv. The rest of New Zealand remains LOW. | Noted |
| c) | Agree that Taranaki should remain at Alert Level 2, pending no unexpected developments. | Yes |
| d) | Note that Taranaki will remain under regular review and a further public health risk assessment of the situation will occur on Sunday 14 November 2021. | Noted |
| e) | Agree to forward this advice to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. | Yes |

Signature



Date: 12 November 2021

Dr Ashley Bloomfield
Te Tumu Whakarae mō te Hauora
Director-General of Health