

Memorandum

COVID-19: Advice on Public Health Measures for People Travelling to New Zealand from 'Category 2' Countries and Jurisdictions

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To:	Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister		
Copy to"	Hon Dr David Clark, Minister of Health		

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Action for Private Secretaries

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Date dispatched to MO:

Advice on Public Health Measures for COVID-19: People Travelling to New Zealand from 'Category 2' Countries and Jurisdictions

Purpose of report

1. This report provides advice on public health risks arising from people travelling to New Zealand from Category 2 countries and proposes establishing a new category 1b.

Background

1. At its meeting on 27 February 2020, the Ministry of Health's Technical Advisory Group on COVID-19 recommended that the 'countries or areas of concern' for COVID-19 be split into two categories. The advice was as follows:
 - a. Category 1: China
 - b. Category 2: Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, Iran, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand.
2. This approach was adopted from 27 February as part of the New Zealand COVID-19 case definition and is now used to inform planning and the response across the health system and government.
3. In parallel, given the rapidly evolving situation in Iran and the disproportionate number of deaths there (suggesting a much wider outbreak than reported case numbers), health officials recommended on Friday 28 February that Iran should be considered alongside China as a Category 1 country and that similar temporary travel and border restrictions should apply.¹ This recommendation was approved by Ministers with Powers to Act on 28 February 2020 and came into effect at 1800 that day.
4. People travelling to New Zealand from Category 2 countries are not expected to self-isolate at this point but to be aware of possible COVID-19 symptoms and to call Healthline if they become unwell.
5. The outbreak continues to evolve rapidly globally and in specific countries and jurisdictions. In particular, there is an ongoing big increase in cases in Italy and South Korea, with the following numbers as at 29 February 2020:
 - Republic of Korea: 3150 cases with 813 new cases in the prior 24 hours
 - Italy: 1049 cases with 161 in the prior 24 hours.

¹ Self-isolate for 14 days after they have left the Category 1 country and register with Healthline. They should also understand COVID-19 symptoms and to call the Healthline number if they become unwell.

The increases in cases in other Category 2 countries and jurisdictions are much smaller.

6. The outbreak in northern Italy has already led to cases in other European countries notably Germany (57 cases) and France (57 cases); in a sense northern Italy has become an 'epicentre' for the COVID-19 outbreak in Europe.

Appropriate Public Health Measures for People Travelling From Category 2 Countries

7. To date, the focus of the public health response for people travelling from countries and jurisdictions with outbreaks has been on ensuring people know what to do if they become symptomatic and could have been exposed to COVID-19. This approach has been strengthened with additional border measures, e.g. in-cabin announcements and in-flight provision of information about COVID-19 and what to do if you become unwell, and should remain a mainstay of efforts to 'keep it out' and 'stamp it out'.
8. As at 1 March, people travelling to New Zealand from Category 2 countries are not expected to self-isolate. However, these people could be asked to do so even in the absence of specific temporary travel and border restrictions (as currently apply to people travelling from or through China and Iran) if the evolving epidemiology of the outbreak indicates widespread community transmission.

9. The key factors to consider are:

- a. The epidemiology of the outbreak in specific countries and jurisdictions and the impact of containment measures
- b. The approach being taken in other countries and jurisdictions, particularly Australia

Other factors that should be taken into consideration:

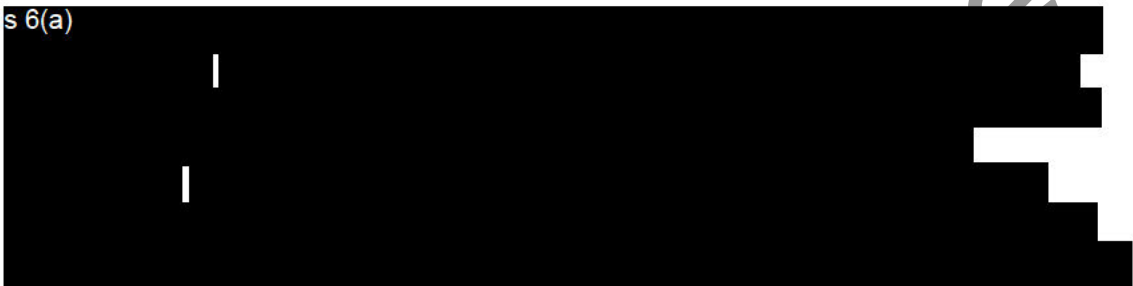
- c. The balance between the likely low risk that individuals travelling to New Zealand have been exposed to COVID-19 and the impact that 14 days self-isolation has from a family/whanau, social, employment and health (including mental health) perspective
- d. The likelihood that an increasing number of countries and jurisdictions will become Category 2 for the purposes of the case definition (and therefore the need to assess and test possible cases)
- e. The current high level of public acceptance of self-isolation as an appropriate expectation in order to protect the health of the wider community
- f. The knowledge that it can be more difficult to withdraw measures such as self-isolation than to initiate them.

Epidemiology

10. **Republic of Korea:** the majority of cases (86%) are concentrated in two provinces (Daegu (2236) and Gyeongbuk (488), which remain the epicentre for the outbreak there. However, there are cases being reported from around the country including in the military.

11. **Italy:** the vast majority of cases (almost 98 percent) continue to be concentrated in the northern provinces of Lombardy (615), Veneto (191) and Emilia-Romagna (217). The remaining cases were recorded in Liguria (42), Piedmont (11), Tuscany (11), Marche (11), Lazio (6), Sicily (4), Campania (13), Puglia (3), and Abruzzo (2) and one each in Calabria and the autonomous region of Bolzano. The new cases in Campania include nine in Naples.
12. While both countries have implemented significant measures to contain the outbreaks and prevent further spread, it will take another one to two weeks to see how successful those measures have been.

Approach in other countries and jurisdictions

13. 
The Australian Government subsequently decided on 29 February 2020 to extend the current travel restrictions in place for people travelling from China to include people travelling from Iran (so in line with New Zealand's approach). Only people who have travelled from or through China and Iran are required to self-isolate (for 14 days) at this point in time.
14. The United Kingdom (UK) also uses two categories to determine measures to apply to travellers and visitors to the UK. While the UK doesn't have any border travel restrictions in place, of note is that its Category 1 countries and places are (as at 29 February 2020):
 - Wuhan and Hubei province (China)
 - Iran
 - Daegu or Cheongdo (Republic of Korea)
 - Italian towns under containment measures.People travelling to the UK from these places should self-isolate, even if asymptomatic, and inform NHS111 (Healthline equivalent) of recent travel.

Likely risk that individuals travelling to New Zealand from areas of concern are incubating COVID-19

15. As noted in previous advice to inform decisions about possible exemptions for students from China from current travel restrictions, the risk that an individual who has been in a place of concern has been exposed to COVID-19 and is now incubating the disease is very low. This is reinforced by the experience with people who have returned to New Zealand from China over recent weeks, including those evacuated from Wuhan (the 'epicentre' of the outbreak in China), and from the Diamond Princess (who are still in quarantine). None of these people have developed symptoms of COVID-19.

16. At the same time, many thousands of New Zealanders have voluntarily and successfully completed 14 days of self-isolation. Thus, self-isolation currently has a high level of acceptance and feasibility.
17. Further extending the expectation of self-isolation will potentially impact on families and businesses if the number of people required to self-isolate grows considerably as the number of countries with community outbreaks grows. So saying, there will be a point where travel restrictions are no longer feasible or appropriate, and at that point the response in New Zealand would be focused on 'stamp it out' and moving to 'manage it'. In this case the focus would shift to preventing further transmission, i.e. contact tracing and containment, rather than on self-isolation (other than for close contacts of confirmed cases).

Advice

18. Given the particularly rapid increase in cases in Northern Italy and the Republic of Korea, the Ministry of Health's advice is:
 - a. For 'Countries or Areas of Concern', create Categories 1a and 1b such that: **Category 1a** places have temporary travel restrictions in place, i.e. China and Iran currently, **and** require all people travelling to New Zealand to undertake 14 days self-isolation; **Category 1b** places do **not** have travel restrictions but require all people travelling to New Zealand to undertake 14 days self-isolation and register with Healthline
 - b. Add **Northern Italy** (roughly north of a line joining Pisa, Florence and the Republic of San Marino) and the **Republic of Korea** to the new Category 1b and require anyone entering New Zealand who has been in those places within the last 14 days to self-isolate for the balance of the 14-day period and register with Healthline.
19. In terms of when a self-isolation requirement for people who have been in Category 1b places should take effect, notably we have now asked people who have travelled to New Zealand either from or through Iran in the last 14 days to self-isolate, i.e. **prior** to the introduction of the travel restriction on 28 February.
20. The high and increasing number of cases now in both northern Italy and Republic of Korea reflect transmission and infection that occurred up to 14 days ago. Therefore, the Ministry's further advice is that people who have been in northern Italy or Republic of Korea in the last 14 days should be asked to self-isolate for the balance of the 14-day period since they were last in those places, and to register with Healthline.
21. All people who have been in these places and in Category 2 'places of concern', whether or not they are in self-isolation, who become unwell and/or develop symptoms suggestive of COVID-19 should ring Healthline promptly.
22. Working closely with Australian counterparts has served us well to date and this proposed approach should be discussed with them ahead of any final decision and announcement.
23. Further work is underway on updated criteria for determining when countries or jurisdictions are included in or moved between categories including, *inter alia*: the number new cases being reported and overall trend; the number of deaths; evidence of community transmission; the impact of containment measures, the degree of uncertainty; and the resilience of the country's health system.

Next steps

24. Officials can provide further information about this topic at your request.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield

Director-General of Health

Proactively Released

Appendix: Map showing northern area of Italy proposed for classification as Category 1b (ignore the different categories, which are in use by the UK)

