



AIDE MEMOIRE

9 March 2020

RPT 20/043

REQUEST TO MAKE COVID-19 A QUARANTINABLE DISEASE**Cabinet – Meeting on 9 March 2020****Action sought**

The Ministry of Health is seeking Cabinet approval to make COVID-19 a quarantinable disease.

Notes

- Section 70 of the Health Act 1956 provides the Ministry of Health with the ability to apply a range of controls on people and craft (through Public Health Units).
- However, declaring COVID-19 a quarantinable disease will allow the Ministry of Health to exercise additional powers in relation to arriving planes and ships. This includes being able to quarantine craft and people.
- Customs agrees to the proposal, but notes that it may lead to delays at ports and airports.
- In practice, the new designation will mean that if a plane arrives with someone on board who is suspected to have COVID-19, everyone will be held on board until the person has been assessed by ambulance officers, and a Public Health Unit officer either allows the passenger to leave or the passenger is taken to hospital. If COVID-19 is confirmed, it is likely that some or all of the other passengers on the plane will be either quarantined or required to self-isolate for 14 days. Once everyone has disembarked the plane may be sanitised.
- The full process could delay the plane for anywhere from a few minutes to several hours. This will cause disruption to travellers, both those on board whose onward travel is delayed, and from knock-on effects of the plane itself not being able to depart on its next flight on time.
- Very few flights are expected to be affected at this time, but numbers could increase as COVID-19 spreads.
- If a ship arrives with a suspected case of COVID-19 on board, a similar process will be followed. Passengers and crew may be asked to self-isolate on board, or could be moved elsewhere to do so; border agencies are developing options for dealing with this scenario.
- If a ship is placed into quarantine this could lead to disruption at the port and to the ship's ongoing voyage.
- Customs will continue to work closely with other border agencies and the Ministry of Health to ensure any impacts are minimised.
- The Ministry of Health is leading a communications program to advise stakeholders of the change and what it means to them.