



BRIEFING

Immediate options to increase quarantine capacity to support the ongoing community response

Date:	12 October 2021 3.00pm	Priority:	Urgent
Security classification:		Tracking number:	2122- 1325

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Chris Hipkins Minister for COVID-19 Response	<p>Note that MIQ is projected to reach near quarantine capacity in Auckland on either Wednesday 13 October or Thursday 14 October.</p> <p>Agree in principle that that we convert the Novotel Ibis Ellerslie to a full quarantine facility to rapidly access additional quarantine rooms if/when we reach the point of having less than 80 available quarantine rooms across Auckland.</p> <p>Indicate your preferred option for managing the current Novotel cohort, noting that both have trade-offs.</p>	13 October 2021

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)			
Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Brigadier Rose King	Joint Head of MIQ, MBIE	Privacy of natural persons	
Andrew Milne	Associate Deputy Secretary, MIQ		✓
Privacy of natural persons	Manager, MIQ Policy		

The following departments/agencies have been consulted
The Ministry of Health, DPMC (PAG).

Minister's office to complete:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Approved | <input type="checkbox"/> Declined |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Noted | <input type="checkbox"/> Needs change |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seen | <input type="checkbox"/> Overtaken by Events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> See Minister's Notes | <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn |

Comments



BRIEFING

Immediate options to increase quarantine capacity to support the ongoing community response

Date:	12 October 2021	Priority:	Urgent
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Purpose

To provide you with immediate options to rapidly increase quarantine capacity in Auckland, given the likely scenario that MIQ will reach near capacity in Auckland on either Wednesday 13 October or Thursday 14 October.

Recommended action

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) recommends that you:

- a **Note** that, as of 0800 Tuesday 12 October, MIQ has 86 quarantine rooms available in Auckland (taking into account today's referrals) and based on current modelling, we expect to reach near quarantine capacity in Auckland on either Wednesday 13 October or Thursday 14 October.

Noted
- b **Note** that the Novotel Ibis Ellerslie (the Novotel), which is currently operating as a dual-use facility, currently has 190 returnees who entered New Zealand between 1 and 4 October, on flights originating from Los Angeles, Perth, Doha and Singapore.

Noted
- c **Note** that MIQ has considered options to rapidly increase quarantine capacity in Auckland and identified that the most feasible option at this time is to utilise the remainder of the Novotel, but this means we would need to release the current border returnees from managed isolation, prior to their full 14-day period of isolation.

Noted
- d **Note** that the public health risk posed by releasing this cohort of returnees prior to the completion of their full 14-day managed isolation period is considered to be **low**, because:
 - All returnees in this cohort have returned negative pre-departure test, day 0/1, 3 and 6/7 testing – noting that there have only been two test refusals among this cohort, both of whom were infants 1 years old or younger.
 - No cases have been identified among returnees from the same flights who were sent to other facilities – providing reassurance of a low-risk of potential in-flight transmission.
 - Most of the returnees (over 70%) report that they are at least partially vaccinated (noting that this is self-reported data).
 - Given the incubation period of the Delta variant (2 – 6 days on average), and our own case detection data, we are most likely to identify a case during days 0/1 – 7 (inclusive), with recent data analysis showing that around 86% of acute cases are identified by day 7. All of the returnees have spent least 8 days in the facility.

Noted

e **Agree in principle** that we convert the Novotel to a full quarantine facility in order to rapidly access additional quarantine rooms if/when we reach the point of only having 80 available quarantine rooms across Auckland.

Agree / disagree / discuss

f Subject to your agreement to (e), **indicate** your preferred option for managing the current Novotel cohort, noting that all have trade-offs:

a. **Option one** – disperse 71 of the current Novotel occupants to other MIQ facilities to complete their required 14-day isolation period, and as a measure specific to this cohort, require the remaining 119 occupants to isolate at home (subject to conditions) due to the shorter remaining period of their required 14-day isolation;

Agree / disagree / discuss

b. **Option two (recommended)** – release all current border occupants early from the Novotel and, as a measure specific to this cohort, require them to isolate at home (subject to conditions).

Agree / disagree / discuss

g **Agree** that the portion of the cohort (option one) or the whole cohort (option two) is released from the Novotel and completes the remaining time in another place of isolation.

Agree / disagree / discuss

h **Agree** that before they can leave the Novotel they must undertake a test prior to departure and continue their self-isolation until they have a day 12 negative swab result. The returnees will receive regular phone-call wellbeing checks from NCTS and will be followed up if a day 12 test is not logged on the required day.

Agree / disagree / discuss

i **Note** that public health advice supports Option two.

Noted

j **Note** that clause 12 of the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Isolation and Quarantine) Order 2020 allows a Medical Officer of Health to determine that for any reason that a person's place of isolation or quarantine is any other facility or place; and that they must consider relevant individual and operational implications; and whether the other facility or place is able to meet the person's particular physical or other needs.

Noted

k **Note** that if the Novotel is converted into a full quarantine facility as proposed, we are still to determine where we will have to disperse the next incoming cohort (scheduled to arrive between 19 and 21 November*) amongst other facilities and that options are limited, but the most likely option currently is in Christchurch, which would require breaking cohorting in those facilities. *should read 19 and 21 October - JH

Noted

l **Agree in principle** to suspend cohorting in Christchurch facilities if this is required.

Agree / Disagree / Discuss

m **Note** that if you agree to options one or two then they will be liable to receive an invoice for the number of days that they were staying at the Novotel only and not for the full 14 days (subject to any exemptions or waivers).

Noted

n **Note** that officials are simultaneously continuing to investigate additional options for accommodating community cases, and will provide you with further advice by early next week about more systemic changes (including short-stay options) that could be made across the MIQ network to increase quarantine capacity.

Noted

- o **Agree** to proactively release this briefing with appropriate redactions consistent with the Official Information Act 1982.

Agree Disagree



Andrew Milne
Acting Deputy Secretary
MIQ, MBIE

12 / 10 / 2021



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

13 / 10 / 2021

As discussed earlier today, current returnees can be released after a negative day 12 test.

I don't want to get ahead of a planned / structured change to MIQ settings.

Background

1. The COVID-19 community outbreak in Auckland and the Waikato is evolving rapidly. As of 0900 Monday 11 October, there are 31 active community cases within the Waikato region, in addition to 420 community cases in Auckland.
2. The continuing growth in positive community cases is placing significant strain on the MIQ system, and as advised in briefing 2121-1313, based on current modelling we expect to reach near quarantine capacity in Auckland on Wednesday 13 October or Thursday 14 October.
3. We have already made some immediate changes to increase our quarantine capacity, namely converting the Distinction Hamilton into the Amohia community quarantine and isolation facility for community cases.
4. This advice is provided in order to free up further capacity to accommodate community cases/contacts over the next few days before the 'COVID-19 care in the community' pathway is fully operational.
5. We will provide you with further advice by early next week with recommendations about more systemic changes (including short-stay MIQ options) that could be made across the network to support the community response and increase quarantine capacity.

Based on recent numbers we still expect to exhaust quarantine availability in Auckland on Wednesday or Thursday

6. As of 0800 Tuesday 12 October, we have 86 quarantine rooms available in Auckland at the Novotel Ibis. Jet Park and the Holiday Inn are at capacity with today's referrals.
7. There are 107 rooms available at the Amohia, Waikato, which is currently for use by positive community cases from the Waikato region.
8. Wellington and Christchurch do have some capacity (roughly 45 rooms between them) but transferring positive cases around the country comes with significant additional risk.
9. The latest numbers suggest that with today's referrals, we will reach near quarantine capacity in Auckland on either Wednesday 13 October or Thursday 14 October.
10. We are therefore seeking your in-principle agreement to the plan set out below to free up additional quarantine space in the short term. This plan would be immediately executed if/when we reach the point of having less than 80 quarantine rooms available across Auckland. E
11. The 80 room trigger point is based on our latest modelling, taking account of the number of rooms that are currently available and due to become available in the coming days.

We recommend that the Novotel Ibis Ellerslie Auckland be converted into a full quarantine facility for community cases

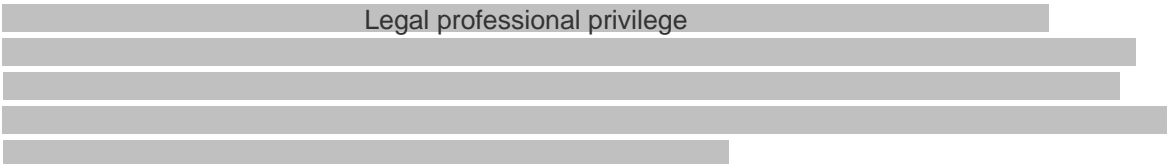
12. We have been working at pace to identify whether there are other isolation facilities in Auckland, which meet public health requirements, that could be converted into quarantine facilities.
13. We considered the Sudima and Naumi, as alternatives, but ultimately discarded these as immediate options as both have a range of maintenance issues or factors that need to be overcome before they can be considered for dedicated quarantine. They would also not be available for a much longer period (i.e. next week).

14. The Novotel Ibis Ellerslie (the Novotel) is currently operating as a dual-use facility. After considering all the options, we have determined that the most feasible option is to use this facility to rapidly access additional quarantine rooms later this week.
15. There are currently 190 returnees in the Novotel who entered New Zealand between 1 and 4 October, on flights originating from Los Angeles, Perth, Doha and Singapore.
16. All of these returnees arrived after 30 September 2021, and have undergone routine day 6/7 nasopharyngeal swabbing (NPS), alongside pre-departure testing (PDT), day 0/1 and day 3 NPS. No cases have been detected among this cohort to date, and no cases have been identified from the flights these returnees arrived on either (in the instances where the flights were split across facilities).
17. Public health has confirmed that it is unlikely that a case will subsequently be identified amongst this cohort of 190 returnees, and the public health risk associated with this particular cohort is considered to be low, because:
 - All returnees in this cohort have returned negative PDT, day 0/1, 3 and 6/7 testing (noting that there have only been two test refusals among this cohort – one from a 5 month old who was not required to be tested, and one from a 1 year old whose parents refused day 3 testing – however, this infant has subsequently returned a negative day 6/7 test result).
 - No cases have been identified among returnees from the same flights who were sent to other facilities – providing reassurance of a low-risk of potential in-flight transmission.
 - Most of the returnees report that they are at least partially vaccinated (noting that this is self-reported data). Over 70% of the returnees in the Novotel Ellerslie have vaccination data in their BHR, indicating they have self-reported being either partially or fully vaccinated. This leaves 51 of the 190 returnees in the Novotel Ellerslie that do not have recorded vaccination data. Of these 51 returnees:
 - 21 are under the age of 12;
 - 20 arrived from Perth (4 of which are under 12 years) ;
 - 16 arrived from Doha (7 of which are under 12 years) ; and
 - 15 arrived from Singapore (10 of which are under 12 years).
18. Given the incubation period of the Delta variant (2 – 6 days on average), and our own case detection data, we are most likely to identify a case during days 0/1 – 7 (inclusive), with recent data analysis showing that around 86% of acute cases are identified by day 7.
19. Based on their current 14 day isolation period, the last returnees would exit this facility on Monday 18 October. We would likely be able to access these rooms for quarantine within 48 hours of their departure, meaning we would have access to these rooms from Wednesday 20 October for community cases.
20. In order to convert the Novotel to a quarantine facility more quickly, we could entirely empty it of its current border occupants who have been determined to be low risk and who are lower risk than our active community cases and their households.
21. If this decanting took place on Wednesday 13 October, we could surge in cleaning support and expect to have the facility ready to operate as a dedicated quarantine facility 48 hours later, by the afternoon of 15 October 2021.
22. In light of these considerations, we have identified two options for how the current 190 Novotel occupants could be managed:

- **Option one** – disperse a portion of the current Novotel occupants to other MIQ facilities, and as a one-off measure, require the remaining occupants to isolate at home (subject to conditions); or
- **Option two (recommended)** – as a one-off measure, release all current border occupants early from the Novotel and a require them to isolate at home (subject to conditions).

23. Further information about each option is outlined below.

Option one – disperse a portion of the current Novotel occupants to other MIQ facilities, and requiring the remaining occupants to isolate at home (subject to conditions)

24. This option would see the current Novotel cohort split into two groups based on their date of arrival in the MIQ. Based on the current numbers, there are 119 occupants who are due to exit MIQ on 15/16 October and would be required to isolate at home for the remaining period of time.
25. The self-isolating returnees will receive regular wellbeing checks from NCTS via phone. Additionally, to monitor compliance to day 12 PCR testing requirements for the 119 returnees completing their 14-day isolation period at home, these returnees will be followed up by NCTS if a test is not logged on day 12. See further details of public health recommended requirements for self-isolation according to arrival date in **Annex One**.
26. The remaining 71 occupants would be transferred to the Naumi to complete the remainder off their 14 day MIQ stay.
27. Clause 12 of the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Isolation and Quarantine) Order 2020 allows a Medical Officer of Health to determine that for any reason that a person's place of isolation or quarantine is any other facility or place.
28. A Medical Officer of Health can therefore determine that the place of isolation or quarantine for a current occupant of the Novotel will be at their home for the balance of the standard 14 day period. In making a determination, they must consider relevant individual and operational implications; and whether the other facility or place is able to meet the person's particular physical or other needs.
29. In making any determination, there is a degree of individual assessment. A Medical Officer of Health would consider whether self-isolation is appropriate or not and whether there is an appropriate property that they can self-isolate at. A rapid assessment of the returnees' circumstances will be undertaken to support this.
30.  Legal professional privilege
31. The inclusion of self-isolation means that we would be introducing new complexity at pace to the MIQ system. The early release of some of this cohort could also be seen as setting a precedent for how long people need to stay at MIQ when compared to the time other returnees (some of who were on the same flights) will need to complete.
32. However, the messaging would be clear that this is a one-off, extraordinary measure, supported by public health advice in relation to this specific cohort, designed to allow us enough time (i.e. an extra 3-4 days) to develop more systematic, whole of network options for increasing quarantine capacity and supporting community cases. It is the lowest risk option available to us.

33. The decision to move the returnees to other facilities does further impact our serious shortage of available rooms if a further emergency or situation were to arise. This includes MIQs ability to continue to support the isolation of community close contacts who cannot safely self-isolate at home. There is also a risk of exposing the Novotel cohort to COVID-19 in another managed isolation facility (MIF), as discussed in paragraph 35 below.

Option two (recommended) – release all current border occupants early from MIQ (subject to conditions)

34. This option would require a Medical Officer of Health to determine that for all of the current 190 occupants of the Novotel, their place of isolation or quarantine will be at their home for the balance of the standard 14 day period. This determination would be subject to the same conditions as the early release cohort in option one. If any travellers could not safely isolate at home, then we would support them to secure suitable bridging accommodation.
35. Based on the public health advice and operational impacts, we recommend that the whole cohort is released from the Novotel and completes the remaining time in another place of isolation. We recommend that before they can leave the Novotel they must undertake a PCR test prior to departure and that they must continue their self-isolation until they have returned a day 12 negative swab.
36. Self-isolating returnees would receive regular wellbeing checks via phone, as well as follow up compliance checks for day 12 testing as required (see paragraph 23).
37. This option has the advantage of being quick to implement as it would mean that the entire Novotel cohort would be treated in the same manner subject to the Medical Officer of Health's determination, and cohorting in other facilities would not be impacted, which could introduce greater risk. It is also the preferred option from a public health perspective considering the risk presented by our community cases.
38. However as per option one, it could be seen as setting a precedent for how long people need to stay at MIQ when compared to the time other returnees (some of who were on the same flights) will need to complete.
39. It would therefore be important to be clear that this decision was made so that we can respond rapidly to the increasing community cases. We consider this is a response to the specific circumstances of this outbreak and it should be presented as such.
40. If you agree to either options one or two, the public health advice is that private transport be used if at all possible, but public transport is permitted if necessary as they will be required to scan in, wear a mask etc. during travel. Overall, the public health risk of this is considered low. Rapid antigen testing is not available at such short notice.

Further discounted option

41. We also considered whether we could take the entire cohort of returnees and transfer them all to other facilities.
42. Due to the pressure on the system, this is not possible as we could not house them in other managed isolation facilities in Auckland (such as the Sudima or the Naumi) as there is not enough capacity . In addition, given the low public health risk presented by the cohort as detailed above, it is preferable from a public health perspective to release the Novotel cohort early (subject to testing and self-isolation conditions) than to re-distribute them to other MIFs and break cohorting.
43. From a public health perspective, the potential risk of exposing the Novotel cohort to COVID-19 in another MIF relatively late in their stay – and the subsequent risk of onward transmission to the community – outweighs the public health risk posed by the cohort if released early subject to the conditions described above.

Management of next planned cohort of border entrants to the Novotel

44. The next cohort of border entrants is scheduled to enter the Novotel between 19 and 21 October, travelling from Singapore, Los Angeles and Vanuatu. This cohort of 225 passengers is expected to require 142 rooms.
45. If the Novotel is converted into a full quarantine facility as proposed, we will have to disperse the incoming cohort amongst other facilities. We do not currently have a solution to this but are working this through, The current most likely option is to divert them to Christchurch facilities, which would require breaking cohorting in those facilities.
46. We therefore seek your agreement in-principle to suspend cohorting in Christchurch if this is required.

Potential to accommodate Auckland community cases in the Amohia community isolation and quarantine facility

47. As previously advised, the Distinction Hamilton has been converted to the Amohia community isolation and quarantine facility, which has provided us with an additional 110 quarantine rooms. Tainui held a ceremony on Sunday afternoon via Zoom to bless the facility.
48. We consulted with Iwi and with Te Arikinui Tūheitia Paki, the Māori King, about repurposing the facility and the conversion was agreed on the basis that it would accommodate local Waikato community cases.
49. Given that the number of cases in the Waikato have increased at a lower rate than expected, Commercial information We would, however, need to discuss this with iwi and carefully work through the implications with them, alongside the wider implications for the workforce. We will provide you with an update on the progress of these discussions by the end of this week.

Application of MIQ fees

50. The COVID-19 Public Health Response (Managed Isolation and Quarantine Charges) Regulations 2020 provide that the Chief Executive may determine that a lesser charge is payable for a person who stays in an MIQF for less than 14 days. This must be calculated on a pro rata basis.
51. If you choose either option one or two above resulting with some or all returnees staying in the Novotel Ellerslie being required to isolate at another place (i.e. their home) for the remainder of the 14 day stay, then they will be liable to receive an invoice for the number of days that they were staying in the MIQ facility only and not for the full 14 days (subject to any exemptions or waivers).

Next steps

52. Subject to your direction on the options presented in this paper, we will immediately begin the process to convert the Novotel into a full quarantine facility.
53. We will continue to develop additional options for accommodating community cases in Auckland and the Waikato, including short-stay options, and provide you with further advice by early next week.

Annexes

Annex One: Public health recommended self-isolation requirements for current Novotel occupants.

Annex One – Public health recommended requirements for Novotel occupants completing their isolation period at another place of isolation

Arrival date	Pax	Time spent in facility by 12/10	Cases identified from flight (in other facilities)?	Number/timing of tests conducted during stay	Recommended requirements for further testing & isolation post-release
1/10	26 – Singapore	11 days	SQ281 (1/10) – no cases identified	PDT Day 0/1 Day 3 Day 6/7 Routine day 11 NPS is due on 12/10/21 anyway – we advise that this test is conducted on 12/10/21 as planned, however, the returnees can leave on 12/10/21 before receipt of the results.	Isolate at home until receipt of negative day 11 test result, following existing community-based self-isolation guidance for close contacts. Ideally, this will be somewhere without other household members, however, if this is not possible, it is permitted that they isolate at a residence with other occupants. The household members do not need to self-isolate, unless one or more household members develop symptoms at any time. In this instance, they need to be tested and stay at home until negative test result AND until 24 hours after symptoms resolve.
2/10	50 – Singapore 42 – Doha	10 days	SQ281 (2/10) – no cases identified QR898 (2/10) – no cases identified	PDT Day 0/1 Day 3 Day 6/7 We recommend a day 10 NPS test on 12/10/21 as a condition for early release, however, the returnees can leave on 12/10/21 before receipt of the results from this test.	Day 12 NPS in the community. Isolate at home until receipt of negative day 12 test result, following existing community-based self-isolation guidance for close contacts. Ideally, this will be somewhere without other household members, however, if this is not possible, it is permitted that they isolate at a residence with other occupants. The household members do not need to self-isolate, unless one or more household members develop symptoms at any time. In this instance, they need to be tested and stay at home until negative test result AND until 24 hours after symptoms resolve.

Arrival date	Pax	Time spent in facility by 12/10	Cases identified from flight (in other facilities)?	Number/timing of tests conducted during stay	Recommended requirements for further testing & isolation post-release
4/10	60 – Perth 11 – LA	8 days	NZ826 (4/10) – no cases identified NZ5 (4/10) – no cases identified	PDT Day 0/1 Day 3 Day 6/7 We recommend that these returnees undergo NPS on 12/10/21 as a condition for early release, however, the returnees can leave on 12/10/21 before receipt of the results from this test.	Day 12 NPS in the community. Isolate at home until receipt of negative day 12 test result, following existing community-based self-isolation guidance for close contacts. Ideally, this will be somewhere without other household members, however, if this is not possible, it is permitted that they isolate at a residence with other occupants. The household members do not need to self-isolate, unless one or more household members develop symptoms at any time. In this instance, they need to be tested and stay at home until negative test result AND until 24 hours after symptoms resolve.