



BRIEFING

Options for managing severe demand for MIQ space due to concurrent events

Date:	25 August 2021, 9.15am	Priority:	Urgent
Security classification:		Tracking number:	NZ-002 [2122-0706]

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Chris Hipkins Minister for COVID-19 Response	Note options for managing severe demand for MIQ space due to concurrent events, and request to discuss.	26 August 2021

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)			
Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Megan Main	Deputy Secretary, MIQ	Privacy of natural persons	
Kara Isaac	General Manager - Policy, MIQ		✓

The following departments/agencies have been consulted
Ministry of Health

Minister's office to complete:

Approved

Declined

Noted

Needs change

Seen

Overtaken by Events

See Minister's Notes

Withdrawn

Comments



BRIEFING

Options for managing severe demand for MIQ space due to concurrent events

Date:	25 August 2021, 8am	Priority:	Urgent
Security classification:		Tracking number:	NZ-002 [2122-0706]

Purpose

To provide you with options for managing severe demand for managed isolation and quarantine (MIQ) space should significant interventions be required due to concurrent events.

Recommended action

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

- a **Note** that current MIQ-provided quarantine availability in Auckland is very limited, and on current projections the Jet Park quarantine facility is expected to reach capacity by Thursday, 26 August 2021. *Noted*
- b **Note** that work is underway to designate a current Managed Isolation Facility (MIF) as a second Auckland quarantine facility but that forecasts indicate this facility will also be at quarantine capacity early next week under current settings. *Noted*
- c **Note** that MIQ is experiencing extreme pressures across the network due to the concurrent events of:
 - a. accommodating the final tranche of New South Wales (NSW) managed returns;
 - b. the current community outbreak of COVID-19 requiring a second quarantine facility in the coming days;
 - c. the forecast intake of people from Afghanistan this week arriving sooner and being larger than expected; and
 - d. the potential flow on workforce impacts of MIQ staff testing positive for COVID-19. *Noted*
- d **Note** that based on current modelling of community cases and expected border arrivals, it is highly likely that Ministers will have to make significant decisions over the coming days on options to manage demand for MIQ space, which fundamentally involves either:
 - a. Reducing the number of people intending to enter New Zealand over the next two-four weeks (ie. cancelling vouchers), or
 - b. Revisiting the current settings for this community outbreak, only moving acute and high risk COVID-19 cases into MIQ, or
 - c. Relaxing public health settings in MIQ (ie. suspending cohorting) *Noted*
- e **Agree** to meet with officials to discuss these options as soon as possible.

Agree / Disagree

f **Agree** that this briefing be proactively released with appropriate withholdings under the Official Information Act 1982.

Agree / Disagree



Megan Main
Deputy Secretary, MIQ
MBIE

25/08/2021



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

26 /08/2021

Background

1. On Sunday, 22 August 2021, we provided you with some high level options to manage demand and free up MIQ capacity to respond to the current COVID-19 community outbreak. A number of those options have now been implemented, including stopping the release of Managed Isolation Allocation System (MIAS) vouchers, the deferral of the 24 August Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) flight from Vanuatu, and re-designating the Grand Mercure Wellington as a quarantine facility.
2. Since then, the operating context for MIQ has changed significantly, and there is now a need to consider the possibility of further interventions to manage severe demand for MIQ space.

Current quarantine availability in Auckland is very limited

3. As of Tuesday, 24 August 17:30, there are 159 COVID-19 positive community cases in total in MIQ: 144 in Auckland and 15 in Wellington. Given the large number of places of interest, we expect the number of positive cases to continue to increase over the coming days.
4. All positive cases to date have been transferred to MIQ. In addition, 16 close contacts who cannot self-isolate in the community have been transferred to the Holiday Inn in Auckland.
5. The Jet Park quarantine facility is currently accommodating 198 community and border COVID-19 cases and we currently have 131 (out of 278) quarantine rooms remaining across the country, broken down by region as follows:
 - Auckland – 70 rooms
 - Wellington – 28 rooms
 - Christchurch – 33 rooms
6. On current projections, we expect that the Jet Park quarantine facility will be full by Thursday, 26 August, and a current MIQF will need to be designated as a second Auckland quarantine facility that same day.
7. We are currently planning for the second quarantine facility to be the Novotel Ellerslie (247 rooms). However, its capacity may be impacted by a concurrent workforce event (outlined below). Our second option is the Holiday Inn Auckland, which is currently taking close contacts who cannot isolate in the community, and people who present symptomatic at the border (251 rooms). Discussions with Holiday Inn are currently underway and we will be able to update you on these later today. On current projections the second facility will be at capacity by early next week.
8. There is also risk in standing up an additional quarantine facility in such a short timeframe. Quarantine facilities operate on an increased staff to case ratio (both clinical staff and security staff) and under a much stricter operating framework. There will be little time available to both bring on additional staff and train them all in quarantine standards. Additionally, it is being reported that where COVID-19 cases have not been vaccinated, they are more acutely unwell than people seen with previous variants of COVID-19, require more intensive clinical care, and have an increased likelihood of requiring a longer stay in quarantine. It is also expected that a higher proportion of cases will need hospital level care than previously seen.

MIQ is experiencing extreme pressure due to concurrent events

9. Our isolation room availability remains tight across the whole MIQ network.
10. The final NSW managed return flight arrived on Sunday, 22 August. Due to the travel preferences of people returning from NSW, this flight ended up being a larger than originally anticipated, with 145 people on board (by comparison, only 21 people were on board the first tranche 3 flight on 9 August). This cohort is due to leave MIQ on Sunday, 5 September, closing out the NSW managed returns process.
11. The MIQ intake of people from Afghanistan this week has arrived sooner and is larger than expected, with 39 people entering MIQ in the last two days, up to 120 people expected to enter on 25 and 26 August, and an unknown number expected on 27 August. MIQ had originally designated the Commercial information as a dedicated facility for Afghanistan returnees. However, the larger than expected number of forecast arrivals means that the Commercial information will reach capacity on Thursday, 26 August, and a second MIQF will be required. This facility will be the Commercial information removing up to another 352 rooms from general managed isolation capacity.
12. In the last two days, a staff member based at Commercial information has tested positive for COVID-19 with 79 MIQ staff who have been deemed to be close contacts. Currently these staff have been allowed to continue working at these facilities while awaiting test results, under the same exemption that applies to the health workforce. However, if any of those staff were to also test positive this could lead to significant workforce shortages at this facility and the need to re-locate staff from other Accor MIFs. A second staff member at the Commercial information also tested positive but has subsequently returned a negative result. This remains under investigation with a final determination due later today.
13. The combined impact of losing the Commercial information from our MIQ portfolio for at least the next 2-3 weeks is up to 750 rooms. Alongside this, expected arrivals over the border in the next 14 days remain steady with a forecast 3,327 arrivals (excluding arrivals from Afghanistan from 27 August and arrivals from Australia on 5 September) and 3,694 departures.
14. Having reduced our operating reserve, and given these additional pressures, we have almost no ability to respond to any further concurrent events.

Pre-emptive decisions will soon need to be made on options to free up MIQ capacity

15. MBIE has taken a number of steps in recent days to try and conserve quarantine space and free up MIQ capacity. These steps have included:
 - Not releasing any vouchers from 22-26 August while we work to help stabilise the network.
 - Working with industry to agree the deferment of the RSE cohort from Vanuatu scheduled for 24 August, releasing 150 rooms in Hamilton for general use. We have also opened a conversation with industry about deferring the next cohort of workers from Samoa, scheduled for 10 September.
 - Not proceeding with the first planned red flight from Australia scheduled for 1 September. The first red flights will now be on Sunday, 5 September.

16. Ventilation remediation at the Commercial information, which was due to commence on 27 August, has now been deferred to mid-September. This deferment was a decision made by the contractors who were due to carry out the remediation work.
17. Despite these steps, in light of the expected increase in community cases over the coming days, and extreme pressures on the rest of the MIQ network, we anticipate that you will have to make significant decisions on options for our managing the severe demand for MIQ capacity over the coming fortnight.
18. Fundamentally, these options involve either:
 - Reducing the number of people intending to enter New Zealand over the next two-three weeks (ie. cancelling vouchers), or
 - Revisiting the current settings for this community outbreak, only moving acute COVID-19 cases into MIQ, or
 - Relaxing public health settings in MIQ (ie. suspending cohorting).
19. Table One provides an overview of options for managing demand for MIQ space for your consideration. All options pose trade-offs, and several involve legal risk.

Next steps

20. We would like to discuss the options presented in Table One with you as soon as possible, in order to progress planning for interventions that may need to be taken manage severe demand for MIQ space.

Table One

Actioned options				
Region	Option	Risk/potential consequences	Mitigations	Status
Auckland	Free up Holiday Inn for symptomatic people from the border or community, and close contacts who cannot safely self-isolate in the community	Requires returnees to be diverted to other MIFs Impacts operational reserve		Complete 188 rooms for symptomatic people and close contacts
	Defer planned remediation work at <small>Commercial information</small> [REDACTED] Note: Contractors lined up to complete remediation work have cancelled due to delays – unavailable to start work until 13 September	Ventilation risk	Do not fill all rooms (eg. person in every second room)	Complete 224 rooms for one managed isolation cohort from 27 August – mid Sep
Hamilton	Deferred RSE arrivals from Vanuatu due 24 August so returnees can be diverted to Hamilton, taking pressure off Auckland Note: Industry agreed to defer until QFT in place			Underway Hamilton MIQs will be filled with general managed isolation returnees 24-26 August
Wellington	Convert the Grand Mercure dual use MIQF into a dedicated quarantine facility	Required cohort diversion Reduced Isolation capacity in WLG Poses workforce capacity issues Not all rooms can be used as quarantine rooms due to lack of air filters	Expedite installation of air filters	Complete 38 rooms for cases
	Bay Plaza Wellington allocated for close contacts who cannot self-isolate in the community	No managed isolation capacity in Wellington for general use		As of 24 August no rooms had been required for close contacts. If this remains by 26 August, we may need to revisit whether to return Bay Plaza to

				general use and put any future close contacts into Grand Mercure
All regions	Stop re-release of MIAS vouchers (eg vouchers cancelled by returnees who no longer require them) between 22/8 – 26/8	Frustrations raised in media		Complete Small number of rooms retained
	Defer first red flight from Australia scheduled for 1 September to 5 September		1 September flight was not public knowledge - eligible applicants for emergency allocations will be advised first flights are on 5 September	Complete 125 vouchers that were planned to be released for 1 September will now not be released. However, capacity already reallocated to increased arrivals from Afghanistan

Options under action

Region	Option	Risk/potential consequences	Mitigations	Status
Auckland	Establish new quarantine facility from existing MIQ managed isolation facility (likely Novotel Ellerslie or Holiday Inn Auckland)	Requires returnees to be diverted to other MIFs Impacts operational reserve and managed isolation capacity Staff member has tested positive for COVID-19. Currently close contacts are allowed to continue working while awaiting test results but this may change if any other staff members test positive		Underway

Options under consideration

Region	Option	Risk/potential consequences	Mitigations	Status
Auckland	Require the approximately 90 government employees (eg. NZDF personnel, Immigration NZ and MFAT staff) returning from Afghanistan			

	to complete their 14 days of isolation in the community, not in MIQ			
Christchurch	Use some operational contingency for general managed isolation use, to free up capacity in Auckland	Impacts operational reserve		Under review
All regions	Scale down, defer, or cancel (some) group bookings: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. RSE group from Samoa scheduled for 10 September arrival (150 rooms across two dedicated facilities) 2. Russian and Ukrainian fishermen scheduled for 14 September (60 rooms) and 21 September (100 rooms) 3. Antarctic scientists scheduled for 17 and 18 September arrival (239 rooms) 	Reputational risk, including impacts on international commitments Russian and Ukrainian fishermen high COVID-19 risk		Discussions opened with RSE industry re deferring Samoa flight. Would be open to considering For discussion with Minister and relevant government agencies
	MIQ no longer takes close contacts who cannot self-isolate at home	Public health risk associated with non-compliance	Close contacts managed by other government agencies (eg wraparound supports)	For discussion with Minister and relevant government agencies
	MIQ only takes acute or high risk COVID-19 cases, with lower risk (eg. asymptomatic and vaccinated) cases remaining in the community	Public health risk associated with non-compliance Reputational risk Additional pressure on MIQ by having high number of more complex cases, especially in facilities which are not usually set up for quarantine	Positive cases managed by other government agencies (eg wraparound supports)	For discussion with Minister and relevant government agencies

	Do not release/issue any more vouchers (apart from emergency allocations) for rooms in September	<p>Already high level of frustration around lack of voucher releases since July</p> <p>Creates demand issues down the line</p> <p>Does not address immediate issue as all August and early September vouchers have been released</p> <p>Reputational risk</p>	<p>Could include additional October vouchers and/or some November vouchers in upcoming planned voucher release (refer MBIE BR 2122-0631) in order to release more vouchers in the near future without compromising immediate response requirements</p>	For discussion with Minister and relevant government agencies
	Reduce the flow of arrivals over the border (eg cancel MIQ vouchers for some arrivals expected in next 1-3 weeks)	<p>Legal professional privilege</p> <p>Significant reputational risk</p> <p>Creates demand issues down the line</p> <p>Legitimate expectation that people who have their vouchers cancelled will be allocated a voucher for a later date</p> <p>Would require restacking cohorts</p> <p>Long haul flights need lead-in time</p>	Allow NZ citizens and families to return but not others	For discussion with Minister and relevant government agencies

Options with additional public health considerations

Region	Option	Risk/potential consequences	Mitigations	Status
All	Suspend cohorting in some or all MIFs	IPC risk especially with Delta variant - reintroduces risk of someone at the beginning of their stay infecting someone at the end of their stay	Change arrangements in MIFs (eg. reduced fresh air time, smoking, extended room restrictions)	Not recommended