



BRIEFING

Update on quarantine capacity as at Friday 15 October 2021

Date:	15 October 2021	Priority:	Urgent
Security classification:		Tracking number:	2122-1377

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Chris Hipkins Minister for COVID-19 Response	<p>Note that due to increasing COVID-19 cases in the community MIQ is experiencing significant capacity challenges for both quarantine and managed isolation rooms.</p> <p>Agree to suspend cohorting across the entire MIQ managed isolation system as of Monday, 18 October in order to provide MIQ with the ability to accommodate already planned border arrivals.</p>	17 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	
Kara Isaac	General Manager, MIQ Policy		✓

The following departments/agencies have been consulted
The Ministry of Health

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 Withdrawn |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

Update on quarantine capacity as at Friday 15 October 2021

Date:	15 October 2021	Priority:	Urgent
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Purpose

To provide you with an update on current quarantine capacity levels and seek your agreement to suspending cohorting across the Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ) system in order to provide MIQ with maximum flexibility to accommodate border arrivals on an ongoing basis.

Recommended action

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

- a **Note** that MIQ is experiencing significant capacity challenges, and as of 0800 Friday 15 October, there are 100 quarantine rooms available in Auckland.

Noted

- b **Note** that based on the latest modelling we expect quarantine capacity in Auckland to be extremely tight over the next five days, and if the number of positive cases continues to track upwards, it is possible that we will reach near quarantine capacity in Auckland in the next few days (depending on the time it takes to receive referrals).

Noted

- c **Note** that on Wednesday, 13 October you agreed to convert the Novotel Ibis Ellerslie (currently operating as a dual-use facility) to a full quarantine facility [briefing 2122-1325 refers], which will bring an additional 143 quarantine rooms online from Wednesday next week.

Noted

- d **Note** that in that briefing we advised you that we were working through options for relocating the next cohort of border arrivals (225 passengers / approximately 142 rooms) that were due to enter the Novotel Ibis Ellerslie from Tuesday, 19 October.

Noted

- e **Note** that we have explored whether we could free up managed isolation space in the immediate future by potentially exempting travellers on specified flights this weekend from Brisbane and Perth from MIQ, however, public health advice meant that this option was not viable in the timeframe available.

Noted

- f **Note** that all of the 500 room QFT contingency and our MIQ operational contingency are being used to support the community response.

Noted

- g **Note** that we have developed a plan to relocate the cohort scheduled to enter the Novotel Ibis Ellerslie next week, but it will be tight and require cohorting to be suspended across the MIQ system so that we can place these arrivals in empty rooms in other facilities in Auckland and Christchurch.

Noted

- h **Agree** to suspend cohorting across the entire MIQ managed isolation system as of Monday, 18 October in order to provide MIQ with the ability to accommodate already planned border arrivals.

Agree / Disagree

i **Note** that we are having discussions with Waikato Tainui and relevant DHBs to use up to 75 rooms in the Amohia community quarantine facility (currently reserved for Waikato community cases) on a short-term basis as an “overflow” facility for some South Auckland cases, and we have not yet reached agreement on this.

Noted

j **Note** that we are still exploring the possibility of converting further Auckland managed isolation facilities into a quarantine facility, however this would only be possible if done alongside a system level change to current managed isolation settings that would free up space to put border arrivals currently designated for these facilities early November.

Noted

k **Note** that you will receive further advice in the coming days on reducing the standard MIQ period to nine days, and a limited reopening with specified Australian states and COVID-19 free Pacific Islands.

Noted

l **Agree** to proactively release this briefing with any withholdings consistent with the Official Information Act 1982.

Agree / Disagree



Kara Isaac
**General Manager - Policy
MIQ, MBIE**

15 / 10 / 2021



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

..18 / ..10 / ..2021

Background

1. The COVID-19 community outbreak in Auckland and the Waikato continues to evolve rapidly and the continuing growth in positive community cases is placing significant strain on the MIQ system.
2. As of 0800 Friday 15 October, there are 100 quarantine rooms remaining available in Auckland. Additionally there are 102 rooms available at the Amohia, Waikato. Wellington and Christchurch do have some capacity (55 rooms between them) but transferring positive cases around the country comes with significant additional risk.
3. We are exploring a range of options to increase capacity across the network, but space is expected to continue to be incredibly tight over the coming days. As one measure, you have agreed to convert the Novotel Ibis Ellerslie (currently operating as a dual-use facility) to a full quarantine facility [briefing 2122-1325 refers] in order to increase quarantine capacity in Auckland.
4. This briefing updates you on the progress and flow-on impacts of implementing this decision, as well as the status of other avenues we are exploring to increase flexibility and capacity across the system.

Based on the latest modelling we expect quarantine capacity to be extremely tight over the next five days

5. As you are aware, the number of positive community cases has continued to increase over the last several days, with 43 positive cases on Tuesday, 55 on Wednesday, 71 on Thursday and 63 today.
6. Quarantine capacity continues to be extremely tight, although it is difficult to predict exactly if/when we will reach full capacity. This is because our capacity levels are dependent on a number of factors, including:
 - The number of new positive cases per day
 - Of those, the number that were already isolating in MIQ as a household or community close contact
 - The number of recovered cases exiting quarantine each day
 - Whether there has been any damage to the rooms that requires significant maintenance and/or repair work
 - When the referrals are actually received from the public health units.
7. If the number of positive cases continues to track upwards, it is possible that we will reach our quarantine capacity in the coming days. We will continue to monitor this closely and provide you and your office with daily updates on how quarantine capacity is tracking.

The Novotel Ibis Ellerslie Auckland will be operational as a full quarantine facility from Wednesday next week

8. On Monday, 11 October, we informed you that we intended to revert the Novotel Ibis Ellerslie back to full quarantine. We are now planning on the basis that this cohort will depart between today and Monday, 18 October, and be operational as a quarantine facility from Wednesday next week.

9. This will provide an additional 143 quarantine rooms for Auckland community cases, bringing the total number of quarantine rooms in Auckland to 660 rooms. As of 0800 Friday 15 October, 32 of these rooms (at the Holiday Inn) are currently being used by close contacts of community cases.
10. Although this conversion will provide additional quarantine capacity, the loss of these rooms from our managed isolation network in Auckland has created an immediate capacity challenge of what to do with the next cohort of 225 passengers requiring 142 rooms scheduled to enter that facility from 19 - 21 October.

We have a plan to relocate the cohort scheduled to enter the Novotel Ibis Ellerslie next week, but it will be tight, and require cohorting to be suspended

11. MIQ has considered all options for how to relocate this cohort, however, there are very few levers to pull given that MIQ is currently operating close to capacity (including rooms being used from contingency). This is due to:
 - The ongoing loss of managed isolation capacity as a result of the the Holiday Inn (220 rooms), Ibis Ellerslie (100 rooms), Distinction (125 rooms) and Novotel Ibis Ellerslie (140 rooms) being dedicated to quarantine (and close contacts, in the case of the Holiday Inn).
 - An increase of at least 523 border arrivals in the next 14 days (4,641 arrivals compared to 4,118 expected departures). These numbers will increase as people who have been approved for emergency allocations confirm their travel plans and we receive notification from MFAT of further arrivals from Afghanistan.
 - The arrival of two large groups constraining capacity in Christchurch: 276 Antarctic scientists arriving 11-25 October and 100 fishermen arriving on 26 October.
 - The release of 3,517 MIAs vouchers for October in the first three lobby releases to re-open the pathway for border arrivals after being suspended in August (no vouchers for October were released this week and we are currently holding 1,000 vouchers for November to preserve capacity).
 - All of the 500 room QFT contingency and the 400 operational contingency already being allocated to support the community response.
12. We looked into whether we could free up managed isolation space by exempting travellers on specified flights this weekend from Brisbane and Perth from MIQ. Public health advice, however, ultimately determined that this option was not viable in the timeframe available.
13. We now believe that we will be able to accommodate this cohort as long as there are no concurrent events. However, it will require suspending cohorting across the MIQ system so we can place arrivals in empty rooms in other facilities in Auckland and Christchurch, as well as bringing back rooms that had previously been taken offline in order to complete remedial ventilation work (this has been cleared with health officials).
14. A full outline of options we are currently working on to increase quarantine and managed isolation capacity is provided in **Annex One**.

Suspension of cohorting to provide maximum flexibility to accommodate planned arrivals

15. Following the introduction of the Australia QFT in April, cohorting was progressively rolled out across managed isolation facilities in April and May of this year. Cohorting was an IPC response aimed at removing the possibility of someone earlier in their stay with undetected COVID infecting someone later in their stay who then took COVID-19 into the community.

16. The New Zealand context has significantly changed since May when we had no COVID-19 in the community. Additionally, self-declared data collected since late August indicates that over 75% of people entering MIQ are either partially or fully vaccinated, further reducing the risk of COVID coming into New Zealand via the border.
17. We have managed to improve the efficiency of our cohorting approach since it was first introduced. However, cohorting is now constraining MIQs ability to respond to constantly changing and emerging events. This is because once a cohort reaches its 96 hour mark and is “closed” we are not able to utilise any empty rooms for another 14 days.
18. You previously agreed in principal to suspend cohorting in Christchurch facilities if this is required to accommodate incoming travellers to the Novotel Ibis Ellerslie [2122-1325]. Given the significantly changed context of the COVID-19 response since May 2021, we recommended that cohorting be suspended across the managed isolation system as of Monday, 18 October to provide MIQ with maximum flexibility to be able to respond to emerging events.
19. Increasing vaccination rates of border arrivals, together with day 6/7 testing to identify any cases earlier, gives us some level of comfort that any increased risk arising from suspending cohorting will be mitigated to some extent.
20. Cohorting will still be maintained where possible and practicable.


Utilising rooms that have been offline for remedial ventilation work

21. In Christchurch we are planning to access 35 rooms at the Novotel Airport to accommodate a portion of the relocated Novotel Ibis Ellerslie cohort. These rooms had previously been taken offline in order to complete remedial ventilation work to bring the facility up to MIQ preferred conditions.
22. However given the shift in the border risk profile (less than 1% positive cases, most returnees now reporting being vaccinated), and the pressure the system is under, we intend to bring these rooms back online. This has been cleared with health officials.
23. Utilising these rooms in Christchurch, alongside the decision to suspend cohorting, will provide us with enough managed isolation capacity to accommodate the passengers that were due to go to the Novotel Ibis Ellerslie next week.
24. We are also bringing back an additional 224 rooms across the wider managed isolation network (between now and 1 November) that had been taken offline to allow ventilation remediation work to be completed. These rooms are across five facilities in Auckland, Hamilton and Christchurch.

We are still working with Waikato Tainui and relevant DHBs to get agreement that rooms in the Amohia can be used on a short-term basis as an “overflow” facility for some South Auckland cases

25. We worked closely with Waikato Tainui and with Te Arikinui Tūheitia Paki, the Māori King, about the initial repurposing of the Distinction Hamilton to the Amohia community isolation and quarantine facility. The conversion was agreed on the basis that it would accommodate local Waikato community cases only.
26. We have been in discussions with iwi, the kingitanga and relevant DHBs about using up to 75 rooms in the Amohia community quarantine facility as an “overflow” facility for some South Auckland cases.
27. We are still in negotiations and have not yet got agreement for this to occur.

Potential to convert further Auckland MIFs into quarantine facilities

28. We have been working at pace to identify whether there are other isolation facilities in Auckland that could be converted into quarantine facilities.
29. As previously advised [2122-1325] refers, the Sudima (190 rooms) and Naumi (150 rooms) have been identified as potential options, although both have a range of maintenance issues or factors that need to be overcome before they can be considered for dedicated quarantine.
30. Additionally, converting one or both of these facilities to quarantine would only be possible if done alongside a system level change was made to current managed isolation settings (e.g. reduced length of MIQ stay and/or exempting some groups from the current requirement to enter MIQ). This is because managed isolation capacity is currently so stretched that otherwise there would be nowhere to put border arrivals currently designated for these facilities in late October/early November.
31.  Negotiations
32. An additional complexity when converting facilities and reallocating occupants is that MIQ rooms are not interchangeable. The Ibis Ellerslie, for example, consists of small rooms that are only appropriate for single occupants or couples, and therefore whānau groupings from facilities with larger rooms cannot be swapped in or out on a one to one basis.
33. This is presenting a further constraint on efforts to re-stack and increase capacity, as a number of the people who are entering quarantine as part of the community outbreak are larger families with complex needs.

Next steps

34. We will suspend cohorting across the across the entire MIQ system effective Monday, 18 October.
35. Over the weekend you will receive two Cabinet papers on:
 - Potentially reducing the standard MIQ period for border arrivals to nine days
 - A limited reopening to specified low-risk Australian states or territories and COVID-19 free Pacific Islands.

Annexes

Annex One: Options to increase quarantine capacity in Auckland.

Annex One – Options to increase Quarantine capacity in Auckland.

	Change	Direct impact on Q capacity	Indirect impact on Q capacity	Notes
1.	Close contacts no longer going into Holiday Inn. Either remain in community or diverted to another facility.	Will enable currently available rooms for close contacts to be made available for quarantine cases.		Discussions underway with Auckland with aim for close contacts to be going into the Naumi from 18 October. All close contacts currently in Holidsay Inn being consolidated on same floor to free up rooms for quarantine.
2.	Release of close contacts from Holiday Inn after 7 days.	Currently 43 rooms in Holiday Inn being taken by close contacts. Releasing early would provide additional quarantine capacity for community cases.		Not recommended by Public Health
3.	Reduce intake of community cases into MIQ. Focus on larger proportion of cases being managed in the community.			Relies on triaging and decision making by ARPHS as well as appropriate wraparound support being provided by other agencies (e.g. MSD)
4.	Release of asymptomatic community cases earlier than 14 days to self-isolate.	Direct impact, creating Q capacity which can be taken by new cases.		This is underway, but current shift in setting is not going to make meaningful change in current situation (estimated as less than 10 cases per day).
5.	Move some South Auckland community cases to the Amohia, Waikato and/or transfer current Waikato cases in quarantine in Auckland to Amohia.	Direct impact. Would create capacity of approximately 80 rooms for Auckland (less if any are reserved for Waikato).		Negotiations on this are currently underway. Work is underway to secure health workforce to staff the Amohia

	Change	Direct impact on Q capacity	Indirect impact on Q capacity	Notes
6.	Break cohorting	<p>Indirect. Would enable to movement of travellers due to enter isolation facilities to other isolation facilities, 'stacking' them more efficiently.</p> <p>This would support the transition of an isolation facility into quarantine.</p>		You have already agreed to break cohorting in Christchurch if required to enable the dispersal of people due to enter the Novotel Ibis Ellerslie (2122-1325).
7.	Conversion of Novotel Ibis Ellerslie into additional Auckland quarantine facility	<p>142 additional quarantine rooms. Depending on cleaning etc required facility should be available for quarantine from Wednesday.</p> <p>Creates substantial flow-on issue for future planned intakes.</p> <p>Only possible IF done alongside shifts to divert or free up managed isolation capacity to accommodate planned arrivals.</p>		<p>You have already agreed to this conversion (2122-1325).</p> <p>Future planned entrants can be accommodated IF cohorting is suspended.</p>
8.	Converting Negotiations into additional Auckland quarantine facility	<p>Negotiations</p> <p>creates substantial flow-on issue for future planned intakes.</p> <p>Only possible IF done alongside wider system level shift to shorter stay to free up managed isolation capacity to accommodate border arrivals designated to these facilities in late October/November.</p>		No current capacity in managed isolation elsewhere to absorb cohorts redirected from these facilities.

	Change	Direct impact on Q capacity	Indirect impact on Q capacity	Notes
9.	Delaying scheduled maintenance/ventilation remediation work		Indirect. Potential to increase isolation capacity following delay of remediation, or completion of remediation work.	<p>Done.</p> <p>Ventilation remediation work at the Novotel Auckland Airport scheduled for 01OCT-23NOV has been accelerated at this time. Essential fire alarm work and ventilation underway now in compressed new timeframe. Facility at full capacity from 1 November, however the accelerated work on filtration will now be completed by 01 November outside the current peak window. Approximately 100 rooms are expected to return to MIQ availability after 01Nov.</p>