



BRIEFING

Crowne Plaza update

Date:	2 September 2021	Priority:	Urgent
Security classification:		Tracking number:	NZ-004 / 2122-0849

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Chris Hipkins Minister for COVID-19 Response	<p>Note that evaluation and remediation of Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) measures at the Crowne Plaza MIF have been completed and there are no outstanding areas of concern</p> <p>Agree to the Crowne Plaza taking returnees as part of their next cohort on 9 September as well as the placement of community close contacts in the Crowne Plaza</p>	4 September 2021

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)			
Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Brig. Rose King	Joint Head of MIQ	Privacy of natural persons	✓
Shayne Gray	General Manager, Service Quality and Assurance MIQ		
Privacy of natural persons	Senior Policy Advisor, MIQ Policy		

The following departments/agencies have been consulted
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 Withdrawn |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



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Purpose

To provide you with an overview of all the work undertaken to assess the Crowne Plaza managed isolation facility, including the results of the ventilation reviews, the Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) audits as well as the overall review by the Technical Advisory Group. The Ministry of Health's Chief Science Advisor has also reviewed these conclusions and their assessment is included.

Now this work has been completed, officials seek your approval that the Crowne Plaza is the facility that will take community close contacts as part of MIQ's response to the current New Zealand community outbreak and general returnees as part of its next cohort on 9 September 2021.

Recommended action

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

- a **Note** that a returnee in the Crowne Plaza MIF was identified as both the most likely index case for the current New Zealand community outbreak, as well as the source of in-MIF transmission to another returnee in an adjoining room

Noted

- b **Note** that following this event a source investigation was commissioned, and MIQ's Technical Advisory Group (TAG) was asked to provide advice on the re-opening of the Crowne Plaza and any additional measures that should be put in place prior to re-opening

Noted

In-MIF transmission

- c **Note** that the TAG recommended a number of precautionary measures to further reduce the risk of in-MIF transmission, which have been implemented across all MIFs

Noted

Risk of transmission to the community

- d **Note** that the atrium of the Crowne Plaza, containing both the MIF lobby and a public walkway which are separated by a Perspex screen, was raised as a potential point of contact between the index case and the community

Noted

- e **Note** that, following a technical assessment of the space, the TAG review concluded that "the risk of infection to members of the public walking through the public atrium is negligible"

Noted

- f **Note** that as a precautionary measure and to alleviate any perception risks associated with the shared air space between the MIF lobby and public walkway, the TAG review

recommended sealing the gap between the MIF lobby and public walkway, which has been completed

Noted

- g **Note** that the TAG review concluded that there is limited public health or IPC rationale for closing the walking area on the ground floor, but that further advice is being developed on alternative options should this be undertaken on a precautionary basis

Noted

- h **Note** that Dr Ian Town (Chief Science Advisor, Ministry of Health) has provided independent review of the TAG's findings, and supports its final advice

Noted

Continuation of the Crowne Plaza as a MIF

- i **Note** that on the basis of the above expert advice, MIQ officials recommend continuing to operate the Crowne Plaza MIF

Noted

- j **Agree** to the Crowne Plaza MIF continuing as a managed isolation facility

Agree / Disagree / Discuss

- k **Note** that the next cohort scheduled to be accommodated at the Crowne Plaza is due to arrive on Thursday 9 September

Noted

- l **Note** that if the Crowne Plaza is not to be continued as a MIF by 9 September, it will not be possible to accommodate these arrivals in other MIFs, and officials will need to consider other measures to address the shortage in MIQ capacity this will create, potentially including cancelling MIAS vouchers of these returnees

Noted

- m **Note** that given travel times for long-haul flights, any such decisions would need to be made no later than Saturday 4 September

Noted

- n **Note** that if the Crowne Plaza is not continued as a MIF, this will result in the ongoing loss of 347 rooms of MIQ capacity (approximately 800 people per month)

Noted

Placement of community close contacts

- o **Note** that the reassignment of the Holiday Inn Auckland to accommodate community cases means that an alternative MIF is required to accommodate community close contacts

Noted

- p **Note** that after an assessment of options to replace the Holiday Inn, the Crowne Plaza was identified as the most appropriate facility

Noted

- q **Note** that this will require cohorting be technically suspended in this facility although mitigations will be in place

Noted

- r **Agree** that MIQ should accommodate community close contacts at the Crowne Plaza

Agree / Disagree / Discuss

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

Agree / Disagree



Brigadier Rose King
Joint Head of MIQ
MIQ, MBIE

02.. / ..09.. / ..2021..



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

03 / 09 / 2021

Background

1. On 9 August a returnee at the Crowne Plaza MIF tested positive for COVID-19, and was transferred to the Jet Park Managed Quarantine Facility. This case was later identified as the most likely index case for both the current New Zealand community outbreak, and the infection of a returnee in an adjoining room at the Crowne Plaza.
2. In light of the likely instance of in-MIF transmission of COVID-19, and the need complete a thorough source investigation, no further arrivals were placed in the Crowne Plaza and an urgent review of events at the Crowne Plaza and audit of the IPC and ventilation systems was commissioned. The next cohort of arrivals is due to arrive on 9 September 2021.

Context: Current pressures on the MIQ system

3. The MIQ system is currently operating under extreme pressure, supporting both the response to the New Zealand community outbreak and a number of pressures on international arrivals. This pressure is apparent on both MIQ facilities and its workforce, who are at the frontline of New Zealand's efforts to eliminate COVID-19 from our community.

Community outbreak

4. In support of the response to the ongoing community outbreak MIQ has converted three facilities from Managed Isolation Facilities to Managed Quarantine Facilities – the Novotel IBIS and Holiday Inn in Auckland, and Grand Mercure in Wellington.
5. This work is on track to have more than doubled – and in Auckland almost tripled – our quarantine capacity.
6. As at 0730 on 2 September, the MIQ system was accommodating 735 people in 363 quarantine rooms.
7. In addition to support for quarantine, a number of community close contacts, who have not tested positive for COVID-19 but have been directed by a Medical Officer of Health to isolate in a MIQ facility, are also being accommodated in MIQ, with a further 39 people in Auckland currently being accommodated.
8. To provide facilities for this, almost 600 rooms of isolation capacity have been temporarily removed from the system across the three repurposed facilities.

Overseas returnees

9. Simultaneously, MIQ capacity has been under considerable pressure from international returnees.
10. In addition to ongoing very high demand from general travellers (primarily New Zealand citizens and residents) seeking to book online, and the largest cohorts of group allocation bookings yet authorised by Ministers, MIQ is also managing:
 - a. The final phase of New South Wales managed return flights, with the final flight having arrived on 22 August. This cohort is due to leave MIQ on Sunday 5 September, closing out the NSW managed returns process which has seen 2,696 people, using 1,991 rooms, return since early July; and
 - b. The intake of people from Afghanistan at short notice. This is a large group of people, with complex and varied needs, currently expected to total more than 390 returnees. An entire MIF, the Naumi in Auckland, has been required to accommodate these returnees and provide them with necessary support.

IPC assurance of Crowne Plaza

Review of events and IPC at the Crowne Plaza

11. MIQ operates an ongoing programme of audits of IPC measures, to ensure facilities and practices in MIFs continue to meet latest IPC standards, including as changes are made in line with evolving scientific understanding of COVID-19 and the risks it poses.
12. The Crowne Plaza was last subject to a routine audit of IPC measures in June 2021, as part of MIQ's ongoing assurance programme. This audit raised a number of recommendations, based on the latest understanding of transmission risks and IPC standards, and these were all addressed following that audit by 25 June 2021.
13. Following the identification of a returnee from the Crowne Plaza as the likely index case, a source investigation was commissioned. The final source investigation report determined that despite significant investigations into potential epidemiological links, the exact chain of transmission from the MIQ returnee is not able to be determined. It is likely that there was an unknown intermediary.
14. This was after reviewing CCTV footage, access card data, and any other available information on the individual's movements. It also included reviewing specific aspects of the ventilation system in areas where the index case had been and so could have contributed to the transmission.

TAG recommendations – in-MIF transmission

15. While the source investigation was underway and while the exact nature of transmission from the MIQ returnee couldn't be confirmed, the MIQ Technical Advisory Group (TAG) recommended a number of precautionary measures to further reduce the risk of transmission between returnees across all MIFs, including:
 - a. Updating information provided to returnees on the importance of minimising opening of doors, and of wearing a mask when they are required to open their room door or exit the room;
 - b. Prioritising day 6/7 testing for all returnees on the same floor as a positive case;¹ and
 - c. Further reviewing in-MIF processes to reduce the need for returnee movements and reduce the risk of returnees opening doors at similar times.
16. All recommendations of the TAG review have now been implemented across all MIFs.

Further IPC audit

17. An additional IPC audit of the Crowne Plaza was carried out on Wednesday 1 September, following the implementation of a number of measures, both corrective and precautionary. This audit confirmed that the Crowne Plaza meets relevant IPC standards, and was provided to the TAG to assist their consideration of the potential continuation of the Crowne Plaza as a MIF.

TAG recommendations – Continuing to operate the Crowne Plaza

18. On 2 September the MIQ TAG was reconvened to provide advice on the risks of continuing to use the Crowne Plaza as a MIF. This advice is included as Annex One.

¹ Day 6/7 testing was previously conducted ad hoc as required, and is being rolled out for all returnees, making this recommendation an interim measure until Day 6/7 testing is in place for all returnees at all MIFs.

19. The TAG review did not identify any likely point at which the index case could have transmitted COVID-19 to the general public from the Crowne Plaza MIF.
20. It also specifically considered whether transmission could have occurred from the index case to a member of the public walking through the public atrium at the Crowne Plaza.² This public walkway, which is separated from the atrium by a Perspex barrier which blocks (but does not completely seal) the two areas, was identified as a potential area where the index case could have transmitted COVID-19 to the community.
21. The TAG review concluded that the risk of infection to members of the public walking through the public atrium is negligible.
22. This conclusion takes into account advice that:
 - a. The public health case investigation from Auckland Regional Public Health Service (ARPHS) to determine whether transmission could have occurred from the source case to a member of the public walking through the public atrium at the Crowne Plaza has determined that this is highly unlikely;
 - b. Modelling by engineers at the University of Canterbury suggest that the risk of infection to members of the public if an infectious case were standing in the MIF lobby is very low (<1%), even under 'high risk' ventilation and air flow conditions; and
 - c. Air flow measurements between the MIF lobby and public atrium also demonstrated that the public atrium was positively pressurised comparative to the MIF lobby, meaning air is more likely to move from the public atrium into the MIF lobby than the reverse.
23. In this context, TAG also concluded that from a public health and IPC perspective, there is therefore no rationale or justification for shutting the public atrium for any period of time to members of the public.
24. In spite of the conclusion that the risk of transmission from a person with COVID-19 in the Crowne Plaza lobby to a member of the public in the walkway is negligible, the TAG recommended a number of measures which could act as sensible precautionary measures and address the perception of risk from this arrangements, primarily by sealing the gap in the Perspex screens separating the public walkway from the MIF lobby. This work has been completed.

Review by the Ministry of Health's Chief Science Advisor

25. Dr Ian Town, Chief Science Advisor to the Ministry of Health, was also asked to independently review the TAG's findings and recommendations regarding the ongoing suitability of the Crowne Plaza as a MIF.
26. Dr Town endorsed the final advice of the TAG review, including its headline recommendation that the Crowne Plaza should continue to be operated as a MIF.

Use of exercise spaces at the Crowne Plaza

27. Consideration is also being given to steps could be taken to minimise returnee movements through the lobby area by ending the use of an adjoining space for exercise.
28. The TAG noted in its advice that there is limited public health or IPC rationale for closing the walking area on the ground floor.

² At this time, all members of the public who were in the area when the index case was present in the lobby, and so in the vicinity of the public walkway, have been located and tested negative for COVID-19.

29. Discontinuing use of the walking area on the ground floor would require all returnees to use car park space on the 15th floor of the hotel for exercise. This also raises IPC concerns, and may conflict with previous recommendations from the Ombudsman regarding access for returnees to exercise spaces, as this would noticeably limit the opportunities for exercise able to be offered to returnees at the Crowne Plaza.
30. While discontinuing the use of the ground floor walking area would allay the perception of risk created by returnee moving through the lobby space, on the basis of the TAG advice officials consider that on balance it should continue to be offered to returnees staying at the Crowne Plaza.

Testing facilities in the Crowne Plaza

31. The testing facilities in the Crowne Plaza have not been identified as an area of concern. Testing is conducted in a ballroom with high ceiling spaces. Separate entry and exit doors, both opening into a high-ceiling foyer space, allow the operation of a one-way system that significantly minimises the risk of transmission between returnees undergoing testing. This is supported by the hotel's ventilation system, which operates entirely on fresh (as opposed to recirculated) air.

Continuation of the Crowne Plaza

32. Based on the steps and findings outlined above, officials consider that there is sufficient assurance that the IPC measures at the Crowne Plaza are appropriate, and recommend that the Crowne Plaza continues operations as a MIF.

Implications of not continuing to operate the Crowne Plaza as a MIF

33. Given the considerable pressure currently on the MIQ system, a decision to not continue to operate the Crowne Plaza as a MIF will have both immediate and on-going consequences.
34. The next cohort of arrivals scheduled to be accommodated at the Crowne Plaza is due to arrive on Thursday 9 September.
35. At this time there is no capacity in the MIQ system to accommodate these arrivals at another facility if the Crowne Plaza is unavailable. Officials will need to urgently prepare further advice on options to accommodate these travellers. Given other pressures on MIQ capacity at this time, it may prove necessary to cancel these bookings if no alternative accommodate can be found.
36. In light of the time that travellers arriving from long-haul destinations may spend in transit, these decisions would need to be made, and if necessary passengers notified, by Saturday 4 September.
37. If the Crowne Plaza is not able to continue to be used as a MIF will also result in the ongoing loss of capacity to the MIQ system. At 347 rooms the Crowne Plaza is one of the largest MIFs, and the loss of that capacity – capable of accommodating approximately 800 travellers per month – would be a noticeable reduction in MIQ capacity, at a time that we already face a significant lack of supply to meet demand for MIQ rooms.

Placement of community close contacts

38. Through the current New Zealand community outbreak MIQ has been accommodating a number of community close contacts of positive cases at the Holiday Inn Auckland MIF. This has allowed MIQ to support these individuals in safely isolating themselves as required by public health advice.

39. As of Thursday 2 September the Holiday Inn will transition to a quarantine facility, as part of MIQ's work to increase quarantine capacity to ensure that all community cases can be accommodated in Managed Quarantine Facilities.
40. If MIQ is to continue to support community close contacts who are unable to isolate at home, a new MIF from the existing MIQ network will need to be identified to accommodate these people after this time.

Assessment of replacement options

41. MBIE officials have considered three potential Auckland MIFs which could fill this role: the Crowne Plaza; the Four Points Sheraton; and Sudima Auckland Airport. Officials have also considered placing community close contacts in unused capacity across Auckland MIFs.

Crowne Plaza

42. The Crowne Plaza is currently empty, having been cleared of returnees following the end of its last cohort and kept empty to enable the assessment and remediation work detailed above.
43. The recent assurance activity also gives reassurance that procedures and ventilation at the Crowne Plaza meet the latest understanding of IPC requirements.
44. However, while available to take community close contacts immediately, the next cohort of international arrivals is scheduled to arrive at the Crowne Plaza on Thursday 9 September (117 of 347 rooms). At this point, the Crowne Plaza would be accommodating both community close contacts and border returnees in the same facility.
45. Placing a cohort of returnees alongside community close contacts at this time would also entail the breaking of the cohorting model at this facility (mitigations discussed below).

Four Points Sheraton

46. The Four Points Sheraton is available and could begin hosting community close contacts immediately.
47. However, it presents two significant drawbacks:
 - a. Previous IPC audits have identified the need to remediate the ventilation system at the Four Points. This work was scheduled to begin on 13 September, having previously been deferred to provide emergency capacity to support the managed return of New Zealanders from New South Wales. However, due to pressures across the system, we are likely to need to again defer this work to continue to provide capacity. This will again delay the point at which the ventilation system of the Four Points is able to be remediated.
 - b. In addition, a MIQ staff member from the Four Points has recently tested positive for COVID-19, which will result in an immediate impact on staff availability as a number of other staff, who are considered close contacts of this community case, are required to self-isolate.

Sudima Auckland Airport

48. Space is currently available at the Sudima Auckland Airport MIF, which could be used to host community close contacts.
49. However, the Sudima Auckland Airport also has outstanding actions required to remediate its ventilation system to ensure it meets current IPC standards.
50. In addition, this MIF was used to provide alternative accommodation to returnees who were previously scheduled to be hosted in the Crowne Plaza. These returnees currently occupy

the majority of the rooms at the Sudima, leaving only an estimated 38 rooms available for community close contacts.

Multiple facilities

51. Officials also considered the option of placing community close contacts in available space across other MIFs around Auckland (rooms otherwise being cohorting inefficiency).
52. While this would significantly limit the impact of accommodating community close contacts in MIFs by using rooms that are otherwise unable to be used, it would entail suspending the cohorting model, albeit in a limited manner, across a large number of MIFs.

Recommendation: The Crowne Plaza

53. Officials recommend that the Crowne Plaza provides the best option to accommodate community close contacts in MIFs.
54. This conclusion is based on the Crowne Plaza's IPC standards and that ventilation has recently been remediated. It can provide significant capacity immediately, and avoids the need to break cohorting across more than the single facility.

Impact on cohorting approach

55. Placing community close contacts in the Crowne Plaza will entail not strictly adhering to the cohorting model in this facility. While international returnees will be placed in the MIF according to the cohorting model, community close contacts will be arriving outside the 96 hour cohorting window.
56. Officials have considered whether the cohorting model could be maintained under these circumstances. The only way this is possible would be to keep community close contacts either in the Holiday Inn, reducing the capacity able to be repurposed to provide additional quarantine rooms, or to keep these individuals in the community until 9 September. Neither of these alternatives are considered appropriate.
57. Plans are in place to mitigate the risk created by suspending cohorting at the Crowne Plaza. In particular, significant physical separation will be maintained between community close contacts and international returnees, with the two groups kept on separate floors in the facility, with floors between the two groups also kept empty where possible. The groups will also be provided separated exercise and smoking times, removing the possibility of interaction between the two groups at these times.
58. This approach has been informed by the fact that all recent in-MIF transmissions between returnees has occurred between returnees on the same floor. Keeping these two groups on separate floors and with separate exercise and smoking times will significantly mitigate the risk of transmission between them.

Next Steps

59. If you agree to the hosting of community close contacts in the Crowne Plaza, MIQ officials will immediately implement plans to begin to place these people in the facility.
60. If you do not agree to continuation of the Crowne Plaza as a MIF, officials will urgently prepare further advice on options, if any, are available to accommodate travellers due to be accommodated in the Crowne Plaza from 9 September.

Annexes

Annex One: MIQ Technical Advisory Group advice on the continuation of Crowne Plaza as a MIF

Annex One: MIQ Technical Advisory Group advice on the continuation of Crowne Plaza as a MIF

From: Privacy of natural persons <[@health.govt.nz](mailto:Privacy of natural persons@health.govt.nz)>
Sent: Thursday, 2 September 2021 4:40 pm
To: Privacy of natural persons <[@health.govt.nz](mailto:Privacy of natural persons@health.govt.nz)>; Privacy of natural persons <[@health.govt.nz](mailto:Privacy of natural persons@health.govt.nz)>; Privacy of natural persons <[@health.govt.nz](mailto:Privacy of natural persons@health.govt.nz)>
Cc: Privacy of natural persons <[@health.govt.nz](mailto:Privacy of natural persons@health.govt.nz)>
Subject: RE: MIQ TAG advice - Crowne Plaza reopening.

Dear all – great work on this -

Good to go noting that this needs to be wrapped into the MBIE advice on reopening – I recommend this full email is attached as an Appendix

Privacy of natural persons

Kia ora koutou,

Please see below the final advice from the MIQ TAG regarding the Crowne Plaza following this morning's meeting.

Note that this advice was not formed by the full MIQ TAG membership – it was provided by a smaller sub-set of the TAG that has been meeting daily to provide advice and support outside of the IMT. The members involved in the formation of the advice below were: Dr Richard Jaine, Dr Gregory Evans (ODPH), Emma Hickson, Dr Jeremy Tuohy, Emma Prestige, Dr Josh Freeman (CDHB), Shayne Gray and DJ Hunt (MBIE MIQ), Privacy of natural persons

Privacy of natural persons reviewed the advice below via email after the meeting.

Use of the public atrium adjacent to the Crowne Plaza MIF lobby:

- The public health case investigation from Auckland Regional Public Health Service (ARPHS) to determine whether transmission could have occurred from the source case to a member of the public walking through the public atrium at the Crowne Plaza has determined this is highly unlikely. The members of the public walking through the public atrium at the time the source case was in the MIF lobby have been identified and have tested negative for COVID-19.
- Modelling by engineers at the University of Canterbury suggest that the risk of infection to members of the public if an infectious case were standing in the MIF lobby is very low (<1%), even under 'high risk' ventilation and air flow conditions.
- Air flow measurements between the MIF lobby and public atrium also demonstrated that the public atrium was positively pressurised comparative to the MIF lobby, meaning air is more likely to move from the public atrium into the MIF lobby than the reverse. This further supports the assessment that it is highly unlikely that members of the public were – or could be – infected while passing through the public atrium.

- As a precautionary measure and to alleviate any perception risks associated with the shared air space between the MIF lobby and public atrium, the gap between these two spaces has been sealed with a partition. This partition has been inspected by engineers and smoke testing carried out to provide further assurance that air will not be driven from the MIF lobby into the public atrium.
- Additionally, the MIF has revised their plans for providing returnees with access to fresh air. Previously, returnees could access both a car park space on the 15th floor of the building as well as a walking space at the front of the hotel on the ground floor. Access to this walking space requires transit through the MIF lobby. The MIF plans to no longer operate this walking space at the front of the hotel – this space will now only be used to park the buses upon arrival/departure of returnees. Further commentary from the MIQ TAG on this point is provided in the paragraphs below.
- As a result, returnees will only be present in the MIF lobby during their scheduled arrival and departure, and if they are required to be transferred out of the facility for any reason (e.g. to access medical care, or to be transferred to a quarantine facility if they test positive for COVID-19), strict IPC measures will continue to be adhered to.

Advice:

- The MIQ TAG advises that the risk of infection to members of the public walking through the public atrium is negligible, due to:
 - the complete partitioning of the MIF lobby from the public atrium, in conjunction with air flow measurements and modelling data prior to complete partitioning demonstrating the very low likelihood of air transfer and subsequent infection;
 - the infrequent presence of returnees in the MIF lobby (only during arrival, departure, and/or transfer) – noting that the risk of infection to those in the public atrium is considered to be negligible irrespective of returnee presence in the MIF lobby, due to the above.
- From a public health and IPC perspective, there is therefore no rationale or justification for shutting the public atrium for any period of time to members of the public.
- However, the MIQ TAG acknowledged that there may be other reasons why MBIE may wish to explore options to close the public atrium, even temporarily (e.g. during arrivals, departures, and transfers), to alleviate any residual public perception of risk.

Risks associated with the proximity of the MIF arrival area and entrance into the public atrium:

- When returnees arrive at the Crowne Plaza, the bus will park directly outside the entrance to the MIF lobby. This area is fully fenced to ensure separation from the public, and returnees wear medical masks. The distance of returnees from members of the public (behind the fencing) is in excess of 2 metres.

Advice:

- Evidence suggests that fleeting long range exposure leading to infection is most likely to occur in poorly ventilated indoor environments, rather than outdoors. Infections that occur outdoor generally require very close contact, which is not possible in the outdoor MIF arrival

area given the precautions in place during the arrivals of (masked) returnees at the Crowne Plaza e.g. fencing enforcing distancing from the public.

- The MIQ TAG therefore advises that the risk of exposure to members of the public walking past returnees outside during this arrivals process is very low. The risk of exposure to members of the public walking past returnees who are getting fresh air in the walking area out the front of the hotel (if this was in operation) is also very low, for the reasons detailed above.

The 15th floor fresh air space:

- After the closure of the walking space on the ground floor at the front of the hotel, the remaining fresh air space for returnees is on the 15th floor in a car park connected to the hotel. Note that this fresh air space has been operational prior to the transmission events at the Crowne Plaza.
- The recent IPC audit (1 September 2021) noted that the process for returnee movement to and from the 15th floor fresh air space requires review, as it involves passage through narrow corridors and stairwells where ventilation may be poor and where physical distancing may be difficult to monitor and enforce. The audit also noted that placement of air filtration units in these corridors may be required.
- The MIQ TAG has requested further information (floor plans and photographs) of these corridors and stairwells, as well as the 15th floor fresh air space itself, from MIQ Operations to inform any further advice about risk mitigation in these spaces.
- The MIQ TAG will provide any further advice on this matter by Friday 3 September 2021.
- The MIQ TAG notes that closing the walking space on the ground floor at the front of the hotel has operational implications and may raise alternative challenges by reducing the options available for fresh air. With only the 15th floor fresh air space available, the frequency of returnee access to fresh air will be further restricted to ensure physical distancing can be maintained at all times when travelling to and from the fresh air space, and while in the fresh air space. This may be in conflict with the Ombudsman's recommendations regarding frequency of access to fresh air for returnees and will require further consideration from MIQ.

Advice:

- Given the risk associated with use of the walking area on the ground floor is considered to be very low (see above), the MIQ TAG advises that there is limited public health or IPC rationale for closing the walking area on the ground floor. However, it is acknowledged that use of the walking area may carry a perception of risk.