



BRIEFING

Management of quarantine capacity in Auckland

Date:	20 September 2021	Priority:	High
Security classification:		Tracking number:	2122-0986

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Chris Hipkins Minister for COVID-19 Response	<p>Note that declining case numbers is resulting in increased quarantine capacity.</p> <p>Agree to convert the Novotel Ibis Ellerslie back into a managed isolation facility (MIF) and the Holiday Inn Auckland into a dual use facility.</p>	24 September 2021

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)			
Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Rose King	Head of MIQ	Privacy of natural persons	✓
Privacy of natural persons	Policy Manager, MIQ		

The following departments/agencies have been consulted

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 Withdrawn |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

This briefing seeks direction on whether to convert the two additional quarantine facilities (QFs) that were brought on to support the community outbreak back to isolation or dual use facilities when it is safe to do so.

Executive summary

Ministers decided that MIQ is required to accept community cases. Due to the sharp increase in the number of community cases new quarantine facilities were required at short notice, in addition to Jet Park Auckland. The Novotel Ibis Ellerslie and the Holiday Inn Auckland were converted from Managed Isolation Facilities (MIFs) to quarantine facilities (QFs) in three and a half days.

Community case numbers in QFs have been steadily declining (see Annex One), leaving the QFs with unused capacity. We are seeking your agreement to convert the two additional QFs that were brought on to support the community outbreak back to isolation or dual-use facilities when it is safe to do so.

The Novotel Ibis Ellerslie is no longer taking new cases, and can be converted back to a MIF when it is empty. Modelling projects that the number of quarantine rooms required will be close to pre-outbreak levels by the end of September, with quarantine capacity being primarily required by border cases, with a few community cases (see Annex One). At this point, maintaining three facilities as quarantine facilities would be disproportionate to the risk level in the community. Public health advice agrees converting the Novotel Ibis Ellerslie back to a MIF at this point would be a proportionate approach.

Public health advice suggests that the Holiday Inn can be converted to a dual purpose facility once the following public health criteria are met:

- any new cases are expected and contained¹
- there are no unlinked cases
- this would need to be an ongoing state for a period of 18 days, as this is the timeframe that an exposure event is considered 'live'

The Holiday Inn would then have a flexible number of quarantine rooms available to be able to support Jet Park Auckland with any community cases in the future.

There will be no change to Jet Park, which provides 202 quarantine rooms, approximately 50 of which are usually occupied by border cases.²

¹ An expected and contained case is one where the exposure is known (e.g. household contact) and they have been self-isolating.

² In the three months prior to the outbreak, the average number of rooms occupied in Jet Park Auckland was 53, which is 26% of capacity. Occupancy was relatively consistent in this time, with between 45 and 62 rooms being in use 90% of the time.

Recommended action

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

- a **Note** declining community case numbers mean the additional quarantine facilities we have brought on during this outbreak are beginning to have lower rates of occupancy.

Noted

- b **Note** that where possible new cases are already being directed away from the Novotel Ibis Ellerslie, with the intention of enabling its conversion back to a managed isolation facility.

Noted

- c **Agree** that, subject to discussions with the hotel, the Novotel Ibis Ellerslie be converted back to a standard managed isolation facility when it empties of community cases at the end of September.

Agree / Disagree

- d **Agree** that when the recommended public health criteria are met and subject to discussions with the hotel, the Holiday Inn be converted to a dual purpose facility.

Agree / Disagree / Discuss

- e **Note** that we would initially use half of the Holiday Inn for managed isolation (approximately 84 of the 168 rooms) with the remainder continuing to operate as quarantine rooms, and to review this operationally at two week intervals to maintain proportionate quarantine capacity to the remaining community risk.

Noted

- f **Note** there will be no change to Jet Park Auckland, which has 202 rooms, and maintains an approximate contingency of 150 rooms³ once border cases are accounted for.

Noted

³ See above. Jet Park has 202 quarantine rooms, between 3-5 of which are being cleaned at any time based on occupancy levels over the last three months. There are on average approximately 150 available rooms.

g **Agree** that, as recommended by public health advice, the conversion of the Holiday Inn Auckland will commence once all new emerging cases in the community outbreak are expected and contained (e.g. household contacts who are isolating), and there are no unlinked cases for a period of 18 days.

Agree / Disagree

h **Agree** to proactively release this briefing with appropriate redactions consistent with the Official Information Act 1986.

Agree / Disagree



Brigadier Rose King
Head of MIQ

20 / 09 / 21



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

23 / 09 / 2021

I agree that preparations for this conversion should start now. However before new cohorts of returnees are placed in the Ibis I would like to be consulted.

We need to preserve the ability to expand community MIQ at reasonably short notice should an increase in community cases require that.

Background

1. At the beginning of the current outbreak, in response to growing case numbers, two of our Auckland isolation facilities were converted into additional quarantine facilities at pace. The Novotel Ibis Ellerslie has 235 rooms, the Holiday Inn has 168, in addition to Jet Park's capacity of 202.
2. As case numbers decrease and cases from earlier in the outbreak recover and leave quarantine, there are lower levels of occupancy in these additional quarantine facilities. The current data shows that across the Auckland quarantine facilities, 150 rooms are occupied, 234 are offline for cleaning maintenance or repair, and 227 are available, as of 0730 20 September 2021. Occupied quarantine capacity is projected to return to lower levels over the next few weeks, until it is primarily driven by border cases with a few community cases.

The MIQ system is under strain

3. MIQ has served New Zealand well for over a year, with more than 171,000 returnees accommodated, supported by a workforce of over 4,000 at any one time from across the private and public sector.
4. People from the community in quarantine as a result of the current Delta outbreak have pushed quarantine facilities to higher levels of occupancy and concentration than ever experienced before. For scale, there have been over 1000 community cases in MIQ over the last month, whereas there have been approximately 1300 border cases since MIQ began operating.
5. The Delta outbreak has also directly impacted the MIQ workforce. Over 194 staff have needed to self-isolate across the network during this outbreak, not including the health workforce.
6. Planned arrivals from the border have remained steady while MIQ has accommodated these additional intakes, but new voucher releases have been paused and some groups were cancelled or rescheduled.
7. In addition to community cases and regular border returnees, MIQ has also managed concurrently to the outbreak:
 - a. 2,696 people, using 1,991 rooms as part of the New South Wales (NSW) managed returns, of which ended on 5 September.
 - b. Just under 500 people from Afghanistan, including evacuees, Defence Force staff and Government officials, a small number of which have been positive. This is a large group of people, with complex and varied needs.
8. Managing these concurrent urgent demands, has resulted in a number of impacts. These include:
 - a. Increased risks in respect of infection prevention and control. IPC protocols have increased in stringency with the introduction of daily saliva testing for quarantine workers and day 6/7 testing for returnees on the same floor as a positive case. However other factors beyond our control create an increased IPC risk, such as staff fatigue, new operating models and less experienced staff can increase the risk of incidents, particularly given the protracted period in which MIQ has been operating at increased capacity.
 - b. Workforce capacity across the system has continued to be impacted due to staff testing positive and being close contacts associated with the community outbreak, and from in-

MIF transmission events. This in turn elevates the infection prevention and control risks associated with staff operating under pressure.

- c. The hotel network becomes increasingly fragile the more pressure placed upon it. We are working closely with hotels to address any concerns, Commercial information
Commercial information
- d. MIAS voucher releases have been paused, and some group bookings have been rescheduled or cancelled, reducing pressure on the system.

Management of quarantine facilities in current outbreak

9. Case numbers in the Auckland outbreak are likely to continue to decrease (see modelling in Annex One). As the case numbers decrease, we have an opportunity to reduce the pressure and risk on the rest of the MIQ system by converting the recently converted QF facilities back into MIFs or dual use facilities again.
10. This will enable us to return to a more sustainable use of the MIQ system that has been under extreme pressure for months. It will also support the ongoing release of vouchers for New Zealanders overseas wishing to return home.
11. Public health advice supports this approach. It will be possible to do this while maintaining adequate quarantine rooms if unforeseen clusters at the tail end of the community outbreak emerge. In the unlikely event that the planned contingency cannot cope with any clusters at the tail end of the outbreak, it would be possible to convert rooms back.
12. The IPC protocols around the conversion of QFs to a MIF or dual use facility will be signed off by the Auckland Regional Isolation and Quarantine Command Centre Infection Prevention and Control lead.

Options

Keeping both recently converted QFs as QFs (not recommended)

13. Both new quarantine facilities can be emptied out as current cases recover (with new cases directed to Jet Park Auckland) and kept as contingency.
 - a. This would allow any unexpected increase in community case numbers to be accommodated, up to 605 rooms in Auckland.
 - b. It prevents those rooms being used for border returnees, and therefore would reduce the number of MIQ vouchers we can release, by over 400 rooms worth.
 - c. The hotels will need to be compensated as if the rooms were occupied, or it is likely that they would not agree to continue to be designated as QFs. It is also likely that they will not retain staff for an empty hotel, which may cause workforce issues if the rooms need to be utilised.
14. This option is likely to result in a high number of unused quarantine rooms, and does not take any pressure off the rest of the MIQ system. It is therefore not recommended.

Return one facility to a MIF and change the other recently converted facility to a dual use facility (recommended)

15. We recommend converting one facility back into a MIF (Novotel Ibis Ellerslie) when the current cases recover (with new cases being sent to Jet Park), and converting the Holiday

Inn into a dual use facility, when public health criteria are met. We will retain Jet Park Auckland.

Novotel Ibis Ellerslie

16. We recommend that the Novotel Ibis Ellerslie is converted when current cases recover (with new cases being sent to Jet Park). The Novotel Ibis Ellerslie is less suitable for quarantining cases longer term as it has smaller rooms, making it less suitable for family groups, and therefore better suited to border returnees than community cases.
17. Modelling suggests that by 30 September, we will have returned to levels of quarantine occupancy see prior to the outbreak, primarily driven by border cases with a few community cases (see Annex One). At this point, it will be disproportionate to maintain an additional two quarantine facilities. We suggest that the Novotel Ibis Ellerslie is allowed to empty, and once empty, we recommend it is converted back into a MIF. At this point, there will still be two quarantine facilities, Jet Park Auckland, and Holiday Inn Auckland, with a combined capacity of 370 rooms. These facilities will be able to contain fluctuations in case numbers at the tail end of the outbreak.
18. If there is a major unforeseen increase in case numbers, then Novotel Ibis Ellerslie can be converted back to a quarantine facility.

The Holiday Inn

19. We propose that the Holiday Inn is maintained as a dual purpose facility, initially operating half the rooms as managed isolation and half as a quarantine. The Holiday Inn has separate wings, enabling best practice in operating dual purpose facilities. We recommend that the trigger for the conversion of the Holiday Inn to a dual purpose facility be tied to public health indicators that the outbreak is well contained. The criteria required are as follows:
 - any new cases are expected and contained (e.g. household contacts who are isolating)⁴
 - there are no unlinked cases
 - this would need to be an ongoing state for a period of 18 days, as this is the timeframe that an exposure event is considered 'live'
20. Once the above public health criteria are met, the Holiday Inn will move to a dual use facility (subject to discussion with the hotel). Initially the facility would be half managed isolation and half quarantine, with QF room numbers being reviewed operationally every two weeks and reduced as appropriate. This option allows a proportionate amount of the facility to be held as quarantine or isolation, dependant on the level of risk in the community at the time. Converting the Holiday Inn to a dual use facility provides more flexibility in terms of the number of quarantine rooms held in contingency vs the number of rooms available for border returnees.
21. We think this recommended option represents a flexible approach and works within the public health advice and current modelling for the community outbreak. However, in the event of an unforeseen cluster, or a super spreader event, it remains possible to return these two facilities back fully to QFs. This may require breaking cohorting and use of MIF contingency which does carry some public health risk. We would only consider this if there was a major unforeseen event.

⁴ An expected and contained case is one where the exposure is known (e.g. household or workplace contact) and they have been self-isolating.

Keeping one of the two most recently converted QFs as a QF (not recommended)

22. It would be possible to keep one QF (likely the Holiday Inn, 168 rooms) as a contingency quarantine facility, instead of a dual purpose facility. This would facilitate the accommodation of unexpected clusters not accounted for in the modelling on the tail end of this outbreak, with no lead in time.
23. However, projections suggest that the facility would likely be empty from around the end of September, at the same time as the wider MIQ network is experiencing high demand from returnees.

24.

Negotiations	
Negotiations	There would also be significant workforce complications which would need to be worked through, as empty hotels mean they do not have work, which may result in workforce attrition. This would be problematic when rooms are utilised again.

Return both recently converted QFs back into MIFs without quarantine rooms (not recommended)

25. Returning both recently converted QFs back to MIFs without retaining any additional quarantine capacity to supplement the Jet Park Auckland if needed is not recommended. While the facilities could potentially be converted back to a QF, this would only be fast if the facilities do not have border returnees in them or it happens to occur at the end of a cohort leaving the facility. If they are already occupied, returnees would need to be moved, breaking cohorting. While this is possible, it carries associated public health risk and is therefore only recommended as a last resort.

Next steps

26. Subject to your agreement to our preferred option, we will seek agreement for conversion from the Holiday Inn Auckland to a dual use facility and the Novotel Ibis Ellerslie to a MIF.
27. We will closely monitor for conditions set out in the public health criteria to determine when to implement the change to the status of the Holiday Inn Auckland.

Annex One: Modelling

Expected Quarantine Rooms Required in Auckland for Community Outbreak
 14 day occupancy; 1.8 people / room for community cases

