



BRIEFING

Initial Advice on Short-Stay MIQ

Date:	27 September 2021	Priority:	High
Security classification:		Tracking number:	2122-1107

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon Chris Hipkins Minister for COVID-19 Response	Note this initial advice on short stay for your meeting with Reconnecting Ministers on Thursday, 30 September.	30 September 2021

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

The following departments/agencies have been consulted
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Ministry of Health, New Zealand Customs Service, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Justice, New Zealand Police, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Ministry of Social Development, the Treasury

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 Withdrawn |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

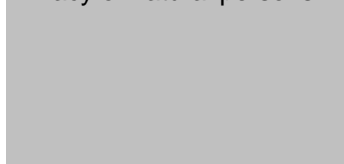
To provide you with an update on our developing thinking about short-stay MIQ (short stay) for your meeting with Reconnecting NZ Ministers on Thursday, 30 September.

Recommended action

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

- a **Note** that we are progressing work to understand the operational implications of introducing an MIQ short stay model in 2022 for some border arrivals; as noted by Ministers in July *Noted*
- b **Note** that the investigation of short stay is closely tied to work happening across government to develop a medium-risk pathway as part of the Reconnecting New Zealanders work programme *Noted*
- c **Note** that there are two categories of drivers of settings for short stay– some specific to MIQ which can be progressed independently of cross-government work, and some reliant on the work occurring across government to develop the medium-risk pathway *Noted*
- d **Note** that we will provide you with a further update in November 2021 *Noted*
- e **Note** that your office is scheduling a meeting with MBIE and Ministry of Health officials to discuss future MIQ settings *Noted*
- f **Agree** to not proactively release this briefing as it is under active consideration Agree / Disagree

Privacy of natural persons



**Manager, Implementation and Regulation
Policy**
Managed Isolation and Quarantine, MBIE

27 / 09 / 2021

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

30 / 09 / 21

Background

1. In June 2021, Cabinet first considered the *Reconnecting New Zealanders* approach. This approach would see New Zealand shift from a country-based approach with two entry pathways (quarantine-free travel zones and 14-day managed isolation and quarantine) to a risk-based approach based on the individual traveller's circumstances [CAB-21-MIN-0263 refers]. The Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group provided support for the development of the risk-based approach, and in its letter of 27 July (the Skegg report) briefly discussed short stay MIQ as a part of that new approach.
2. In August 2021, Cabinet agreed in principle to entry pathways for low-, medium-, and higher-risk travellers [CAB-21-MIN-3505 refers], as follows:
 - a. **Low risk** –fully vaccinated travellers from low-risk countries would be eligible for quarantine-free travel
 - b. **Medium risk** –vaccinated travellers from medium-risk countries may be eligible for reduced time in MIQ (short stay) or a form of self-isolation, potentially followed by post-isolation testing requirements.
 - c. **High risk** –for all non-vaccinated travellers or those travelling from high- or very high-risk countries, a standard (14-day) stay in MIQ would be required.
3. Cabinet was informed that MBIE was examining operational implications of short-stay MIQ as part of this medium-risk pathway, with a view to it potentially being available in 2022 for some border arrivals. Data gathered from the introduction of day 6/7 testing in MIQ is key to this analysis, with advice due in late 2021 to inform any decision of a move to a shortened stay for some border arrivals in 2022.
4. In order to be ready for Cabinet decisions on whether to introduce short-stay MIQ as part of medium risk pathway, MIQ has been working with the Ministry of Health to map out steps for implementation.

We expect short stay would have capacity and demand implications

5. A range of choices around settings for a reduced time in MIQ would need to be made to ensure it is a safe and effective public health response. There are a range of operational implications related to any changes from the current 14-day MIQ model.

Short stay would likely increase MIQ throughput...

6. Independent of other factors, including any decisions about numbers of rooms or facilities, we would expect short stay to increase the number of people that can go through MIQ in a given period (throughput). However, any increases in throughput will be impacted by factors such as the length of stay, levels of contingency required to managed risk and use of cohorting. Meanwhile, other elements of MIQ operations will take the same amount of time, even with a reduced traveller stay in MIQ. This includes, for example, time set aside for cleaning or maintaining rooms.
7. This means that even if the length of stay halved and other factors remain the same, total throughput will not double.

...however, it would also increase demand

8. We expect short-stay to reduce some of the deterrent factors of the current 14-day model of MIQ, thereby increasing demand. For example, it may be that some travellers are unwilling to isolate in a hotel for 14 days, but would be willing to isolate for a shorter duration.
9. We anticipate that the size of any increase in demand will be influenced by several factors, including eligibility criteria (particularly eligible countries), length of stay and any additional

conditions such as pre-departure testing, self-isolation after departure from MIQ, or testing after short stay has been completed.

There has been strong interest in trialling short stay this year

10. We are cognisant that no decision has yet been taken on whether or how short stay fits in a future system and that work on the Reconnecting New Zealanders programme is ongoing. It is also worth noting that in other jurisdictions, for example in Canada and Australia, the focus is on models of self-isolation rather than reduced MIQ models.
11. However, over the last few weeks there has been strong interest from participants in the Reconnecting New Zealanders Future Borders project for a short stay pilot before Christmas.
12. The Customs-led Future Borders project, involving a combination of government and private-sector partners (including airline and airport representatives) has a particular focus on identifying enabling factors for a risk-based pathway approach. This includes consideration of the medium-risk settings prospective travellers will experience before, during, and after their travel.
13. MIQ and INZ are actively involved in the Future Borders work, with representatives participating in the Pre-Travel, Arrivals, and Domestic Options work streams. Working collaboratively with industry has been a positive process and all work streams share a desire for there to be tangible outcomes from the process that will help NZ reopen our borders safely.
14. However, while we are investigating how to implement short stay, MBIE has advised the Future Borders project participants that a pilot of short stay is unlikely to be feasible this year. This is due to a combination of factors:
 - a. There is no public health advice currently available on a shortened MIQ stay as public health expertise has been required for other priorities, including responding to the current community outbreak of COVID-19;
 - b. The Ministry of Health will need time to gather sufficient data from day 6/7 testing to provide advice. Day 6/7 testing will be in place across the country by 30 September;
 - c. Other Reconnecting New Zealand work has been prioritised by agencies, as directed by Ministers, in particular progressing the self-isolation pilot; and
 - d. No work has been done on the wider settings that would be required to be agreed before implementing short stay either as a pilot or on a more substantive level (e.g. determining eligibility, how travellers change pathways if their risk profile changes).

At this stage we are still awaiting key information to advise on basic parameters as to how short stay could function

15. A key dependency in introducing a short-stay MIQ is the public health advice to give assurances that it is a safe and proportionate mitigation, and to determine the duration of stay (eg 5 or 7 days). The implementation of Day 6/7 Testing will help provide some of the evidence required to make that public health recommendation. The Ministry of Health has indicated that initial advice will be available in November.

There are other aspects of the system that need to be trialled

16. From an operational perspective for MIQ, short stay would be similar in many respects to 14-day MIQ. It will largely be variations on the current model – such as a different duration and testing regime – but this will still take time to implement.
17. The industry and government partnered work of the Future Borders project has identified a range of other interventions required to implement a medium-risk pathway which are as yet untested and would benefit from trials, arguably more than trialling short stay. These include

verification of foreign vaccination records and recent travel history and the operation of multiple separate pathways for travellers and their baggage in-transit and through airports.

We will be seeking decisions from you later this year

18. Over the coming months, the development of any short stay model will require a number of decisions. Some of these will be specific to short stay or MIQ and can be progressed separately, while others will be cross-governmental decisions on the medium-risk pathway, of which short stay would form a part.
19. We will provide you with an update on these settings in November.

MIQ-specific settings

Operational settings: duration of stay, cohorting and testing regimes

20. Some of the first short stay-specific policy decisions will be on the operating model of short stay, such as the duration of stay, cohorting, testing regime and location of short stay facilities. This will need to be informed by public health advice.
21. It may take some time to receive this advice, for two reasons. Firstly, the Ministry of Health has indicated that its resources are currently occupied dealing with the ongoing response and is unable to provide this advice until that is resolved. Secondly, this advice will require data from day 6/7 testing, which will be implemented by 30 September [HR20211967 refers].
22. Current data suggest that of individuals who are diagnosed with COVID-19 in managed isolation, 20 to 30 per cent are not diagnosed until after the day 3 test and 10 per cent are diagnosed at routine screening at day 12. Based on the known incubation period of the virus and the data obtained from cases in MIQ, it is unlikely that all cases will be diagnosed within the first 7 days of MIQ. It may therefore take several months until sufficient numbers of cases are diagnosed at day 6 to make a reliable estimate.
23. We expect to be able to provide you with further advice in November on the outcomes of initial public health advice.

MIQ charges

24. Short stay will likely require different fees to 14-day MIQ. We consider that short stay charges should be set through a comprehensive fees review of the MIQ system (with new regulations proposed to be in place by July 2022). We expect to propose an interim approach to charging for use before the review is complete.

Funding

25. Short stay may have different costs to 14-day MIQ. Some of this may be specific to short stay – eg a larger workforce (hotel staff, resolutions) as a result of increased throughput. Other costs may not be specific to short stay, such as funding for new IT systems.

Information technology

26. In order to operate under the risk-based approach, MIQ will require changes to its IT systems. This may take the form of new systems or changes to those that are currently in place (eg MIAS). New or amended systems will be required to allow travellers to select different pathways, to communicate with the Traveller Health Declaration System and to manage the allocation (or reallocation) of travellers between multiple pathways.
27. Officials have not yet determined timeframes for these changes but will provide advice in due course. Substantial funding is likely to be required for development to address any of these areas.

Allocation and planning

28. There are considerations around how many rooms are used for short stay and at which facilities, as opposed to those for 14-day MIQ, and also the staging of MIAS releases. Developing advice on potential allocation decisions will be reliant on an understanding of likely demand (informed by work happening across Reconnecting New Zealanders and the medium-risk pathway), and an understanding of the degree of volatility which may occur as a result of travellers moving into different pathways in unplanned ways.

Staffing/Workforce

29. We know from the introduction of cohorting that changes to the operating model of MIQ can have substantial impact on our workforce. Staff engagement, retention, and satisfaction can be altered with changes to our operating model, as can both MBIE-held and third party workforce contracts. The health workforce is likely to be heavily impacted given the limited scope to proportionately reduce service to length of stay (such as early health checks).
30. We will need time to understand, consult and negotiate with relevant parties, including DHBs in order to ensure any workforce and staffing implications are managed.

Settings reliant on cross-government work through Reconnecting New Zealanders

Eligibility criteria

31. The eligibility criteria for short stay, and how the criteria will sit alongside those for self-isolation (also under the “medium-risk pathway”) will be important to inform our understanding of demand for short stay. The Reconnecting New Zealanders work programme proposed an initial report back by the Ministry of Health to Cabinet in October, and the Ministry of Health has provided advice to you on proposed health requirements for the three pathways [HR20211933 refers].

Data verification for entry

32. The Customs-led traveller health declaration system will provide a platform for travellers to share required health information (such as vaccination certificate and pre-departure test results) with health and border agencies before they travel to New Zealand. The initial operating capability will be available in the first quarter of 2022. This initial phase will include digital verification of health documents from Australia as well as New Zealand with other countries’ documents being incrementally added to the digital system.

Next steps

33. Officials understand that your office is scheduling a meeting with MBIE and the Ministry of Health to discuss future MIQ settings.
34. Following that meeting, MBIE will continue to work on the elements of short stay that we can progress, and will provide further advice in November.