



27 October 2021



Ref: OIA-2021/22-0188

Dear 

**Official Information Act request for briefing relating to Pre-Departure Testing for Travellers from Australia who have Been in Victoria**

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request received on 31 August 2021. You requested:

*DPMC 28/05/2021 Pre-Departure Testing for Travellers from Australia who Have Been in Victoria*

The time frame for responding to your request was extended under section 15A of the Act by 20 working days because consultations to be undertaken before a decision could be made on the request. Following this extension, I am now in a position to respond.

I have decided to release the briefing you have requested subject to information being withheld as noted. The relevant grounds under which information has been withheld are:

- section 9(2)(a), to protect the privacy of individuals; and
- section 9(2)(h), to maintain legal professional privilege.

In making my decision, I have taken the public interest considerations in section 9(1) of the Act into account.

You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision under section 28(3) of the Act.

This response will be published on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's website during our regular publication cycle. Typically, information is released monthly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

Yours sincerely



Amber Bill  
**Acting Deputy Chief Executive, COVID-19 Response**



# Briefing

## PRE-DEPARTURE TESTING FOR TRAVELLERS FROM AUSTRALIA WHO HAVE BEEN IN VICTORIA

To: Hon Chris Hipkins  
Minister for COVID-19 Response

Date	28/05/2021	Priority	High
Deadline	28/05/2021	Briefing Number	DPMC-2020/21-1029

### Purpose

This briefing provides advice on options for requiring travellers that have been in Victoria between 11-25 May to only travel to New Zealand from outside of Victoria if they have evidence of a negative pre-departure test result.

## Recommendations

- 1 **Note** that officials consider there is some risk of COVID-19 transmission from people who were in Victoria between 11 May and 19 May, and are now in other parts of Australia and able to return to New Zealand under Quarantine Free Travel (QFT).
- 2 **Note** that risk of COVID-19 transmission from people who were in Victoria after this period is mitigated by Victoria's lockdown measures preventing people moving to other States after 11.59pm on 27 May.
- 3 **Agree** that to prevent risk of COVID-19 transmission in New Zealand from Australia that either:
  - 3.1. People who have been in Greater Melbourne between 11 and 19 May be required to produce evidence of a negative pre-departure test before leaving Australia for New Zealand; or YES ☒ NO
  - 3.2. People who have been in the State of Victoria ~~between 11 and 19 May~~ *on or after 20 May and who are not otherwise prevented from travelling to NZ.* be required to produce evidence of a negative pre-departure test before leaving Australia for New Zealand; or YES ☒ NO
  - 3.3. Every person who seeks to come to New Zealand from Australia through Quarantine Free Travel be required to undertake a pre-departure test. YES ☒ NO
- 4 **Agree** that a negative pre-departure test taken within 72 hours prior to departure. YES ☒ NO
- 5 **Agree** that people travelling to New Zealand within 3 days from the jurisdiction where pre-departure testing is introduced be permitted to undertake either a PDT prior to departure or test on arrival to avoid disruption to people either already in transit or travelling imminently. YES ☒ NO
- 6 **Agree** that this briefing is proactively released, with any appropriate redaction where information would have been withheld under the Official Information Act 1982, in July 2021. YES ☒ NO



 Ruth Fairhall Head of Strategy & Policy COVID-19 Group	 Hon Chris Hipkinis Minister for COVID-19 Response
28/05/2021	28/5/2021

**Contact for telephone discussion if required:**

Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Ruth Fairhall	Head of Strategy & Policy, COVID-19 Group	s9(2)(a)	✓
Sarah Walsh	Special Adviser	N/A	

**Minister's office comments:**

- ☐ Noted
- ☐ Seen
- ☐ Approved
- ☐ Needs change
- ☐ Withdrawn
- ☐ Not seen by Minister
- ☐ Overtaken by events
- ☐ Referred to

# PRE-DEPARTURE TESTING FOR TRAVELERS WHO HAVE BEEN IN VICTORIA

## Background

1. Following identification of positive cases of COVID-19 in the community in Melbourne on 24 May, you paused Quarantine Free Travel (QFT) between Victoria and New Zealand on 25 May for 72 hours. On 27 May Victoria went into lockdown for seven days and the QFT pause was extended for the same period. Legally people cannot travel from Australia to New Zealand without going into managed isolation if they have been in Victoria at or after 7:59pm on 25 May (NZ time).
2. There are people who were in Victoria between 11 May and 27 May (when Victoria went into lockdown) and are now in other parts of Australia. These people can return to New Zealand, quarantine free. Some members of this group pose a risk to the New Zealand community on their return as they may have been exposed to COVID-19 while in Victoria. We have no information about the size of this group and therefore the potential risk.
3. There have already been public communications by both the Australian and New Zealand governments for people who have been in locations of interest in Victoria to undergo self-isolation. Taking an abundance of caution, we could further mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission in New Zealand from this group by requiring pre-departure testing.

## Proposal

4. It is proposed that either
  - a) People who have been in Greater Melbourne between 11 and 19 May be required to produce evidence of a negative pre-departure test before leaving Australia for New Zealand; or
  - b) People who have been in the State of Victoria between 11 and 19 May be required to produce evidence of a negative pre-departure test before leaving Australia for New Zealand; or
  - c) Every person who seeks to come to New Zealand from Australia through Quarantine Free Travel be required to undertake a pre-departure test
5. A PDT should be within 72 hours before a flight and comply with existing specifications for testing as set out in the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order (No 2) 2020. As with current pre-departure testing requirements for other jurisdictions, the test could be either a PCR test (including RT-PCR), LAMP or antigen test.
6. People who are travelling to New Zealand within 3 days from the jurisdiction where PDT is introduced be permitted to undertake either a PDT prior to departure or test on arrival to allow some flexibility for people either already in transit or travelling imminently.

## Public health advice



7. The Ministry of Health considers that a pre-departure test before or after arrival from Australia is an appropriate option for managing COVID-19 risk from a public health perspective (in place of isolation and testing on arrival).
8. This PDT should be within 72 hours before a flight and comply with existing specifications for testing as set out in the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order (No 2) 2020.
9. Officials propose that for travellers who are travelling within three days of mandatory pre-departure testing coming into force from a particular jurisdiction, we could accept either a PDT or test on arrival (instead of test on arrival and isolation) to allow some flexibility for people either already in transit or travelling imminently.
10. Ministry of Health recommend PDT for those arriving from Greater Melbourne area and locations of interest as an approach that mitigates risk, without substantive burden on travellers. There is no evidence of COVID-19 spread (including from the four cases announced today – 28 May) beyond the Victorian 'locations of interest' and greater Melbourne area.
11. Given exposure events outside of Greater Melbourne have been identified and well contained, Ministry of Health are of the view that it is not necessary to require PDT from people who have been in Victoria beyond these areas.
12. If the Government is concerned that the risk of COVID-19 to New Zealand from Australia is too great to require all travellers from Australia to undertake a PDT before travelling to New Zealand, Ministry of Health's advice would be to suspend QFT for the whole of Australia. There is no evidence of widespread transmission of COVID-19 in Australia.
13. In addition Ministry of Health note that if people have been in Australia, are a casual or casual plus contact, but have already met local testing and self-isolation requirements, they should be able to travel on to NZ without the need for further testing and isolation.

### **Implementation of a pre-departure testing requirement**

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14. At check in for flights from Australia currently, passengers are required to confirm they have not been in Victoria since 7:59pm NZ time on 25 May. That could be changed to passengers confirming they have not been in Victoria between 11 May and 25 May (when the latest pause in Quarantine Free Travel from Victoria took effect). Passengers who confirm they had not been in Victoria in this period would be allowed to board.
15. This is a high-trust model relying on travellers being honest about where they have been. It would be accompanied by communications setting out that:
  - a) passengers must keep evidence of a negative PDT on their person at all time;
  - b) they would be subject to checks before departure and on arrival; and
  - c) failure to produce evidence could result in denied boarding or penalties on arrival in NZ.
16. PCR testing in Australia is done by private clinics. Most clinics advertise 48-72 hour turnaround for pre-departure testing on their websites. In practice most results are produced within 48 hours to meet requirements of other countries, but there are no

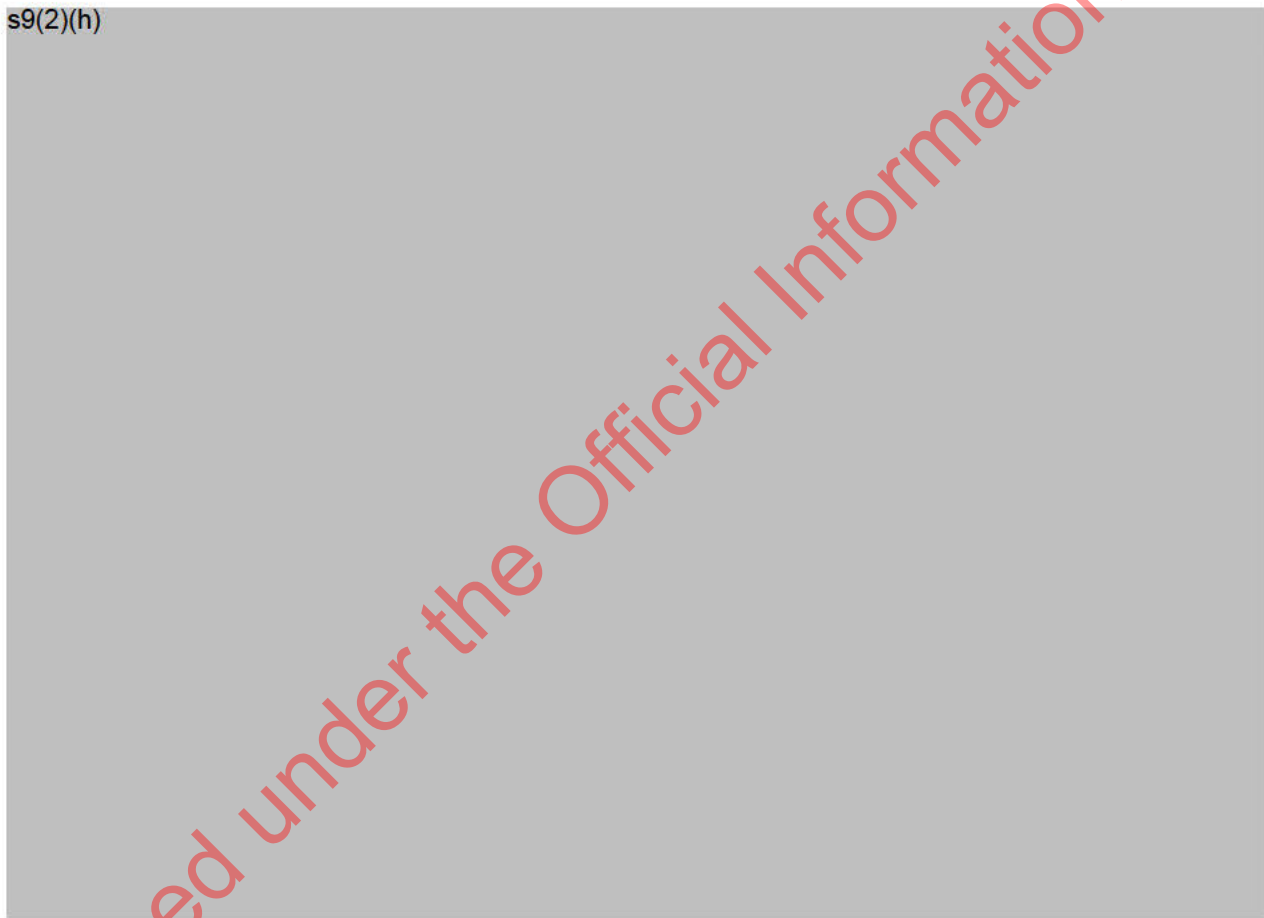
guarantees. Officials recommend passengers undertake pre-departure testing within 72 hours in line with advertised turnaround times of Australian clinics.

17. Consistency with existing PDT requirements in the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Air Border) Order (No 2) 2020 will be retained as far as possible. Importantly all current exemptions from PDT requirements would apply including children under 2 and all air crew.

## Financial Implications

18. We understand that the cost of a COVID test in Australia is in the order of \$250-\$400 per person. This expense would be significant in the context of a ticket for trans-Tasman travel (particularly for a family). The need to get a test could also add considerable inconvenience to a short trip.

s9(2)(h)



## Consultation

23. This Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Transport, and Crown Law were consulted in the process of preparing this advice.

## Communications

24. Communication and engagement in relation to these recommendations will be coordinated by the COVID-19 Communications and Public engagement team working closely with relevant Government agencies including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of

Transport, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Customs New Zealand, and key industry stakeholders (i.e. airlines).

25. All information will be hosted on the Unite Against COVID-19 (UAC) and Ministry of Health websites. The public announcement will be shared via Ministers and through UAC social channels, which will be closely monitored.
26. Public-facing messaging and FAQs will also be circulated to key stakeholders for wider distribution.
27. Officials recommend this paper is proactively released, with any appropriate redaction where information would have been withheld under the Official Information Act 1982, in July 2021.

Released under the Official Information Act 1982