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Reconnecting New Zealanders to the World Forum, 12 August 2021

Key Messages

Topline messages

- We have a plan to safely re-open our borders and drive our economy forward, while sticking with the stamp it out strategy that has led our strong COVID response so far
- The first step in the plan is everyone in New Zealand aged over 16 getting vaccinated this year
- Getting vaccinated is the number one thing you can do to ensure you're protected against COVID-19, and our economy is open and strong
- We are speeding up the vaccination process to ensure everyone is at least partially vaccinated as soon as possible to avoid the risk and impact of Delta
- Once all eligible New Zealanders have had the opportunity to be vaccinated, and we are confident we have vaccine coverage across key populations and good regional spread, we will be able to start the next step: a phased approach to the reopening of the border
- We will move to new individual risk based border settings that will establish low, medium and high risk pathways into the country from 2022.
- The low-risk pathway will provide quarantine free entry to vaccinated travelers who have visited low risk countries
- The medium-risk pathway will provide reduced quarantine or self-isolation to vaccinated travelers who have visited medium risk countries
- The high-risk pathway will be full MIQ for all travellers from high risk countries and non-vaccinated travellers
- Testing requirements will be in place across each of the pathways.
- So we can move to the new risk-based settings as soon as it's safe, we will trial a self-quarantine pilot in the second half of this year, and set up new testing and vaccine checking systems at our borders

1. Elimination remains our best strategy

- Getting vaccinated is the number one thing you can do to ensure you're protected against COVID-19 and enable our economy to be open and strong.
- Delta is a gamechanger in our risk calculation. It is more transmissible and makes people more sick and could be devastating if it took hold in New Zealand before we are fully vaccinated.
- Other countries that have opened up too soon are seeing increases in cases. Even if we had the same success as the UK, where there is high vaccination uptake, we would be experiencing the equivalent of 48 deaths a week from COVID – nearly double the number we have had in the entire pandemic to date.

- If we give up on elimination too early there is no going back, so we want to keep as many options open until we have as many people vaccinated as possible.
- If we open our borders now we will lose the freedoms and advantages we have achieved so far.
- The virus keeps changing, so an elimination strategy means we are better placed to protect New Zealanders and our economy from dangerous new variants that might be more transmissible and more resistant to the vaccine.
- New Zealand's approach to date puts us in a strong position with low infections and deaths and an economy more open than most, giving us more choices and options than other countries. It's too soon to give up that advantage.

2. We need the team of 5 million vaccinated before we can safely open the border

- In the same way the team stopped COVID last year by staying home, this year we will stop it by getting all those eligible for a vaccine vaccinated.
- We have a plan to speed up the vaccine rollout and ensure more New Zealanders are protected from Delta. We will move to a six week period between doses, meaning more people can get their first dose quicker and ensuring everyone is at least partially vaccinated in the coming months to reduce the risk and impact of a Delta outbreak.
- We are bringing forward the eligibility dates for the remaining groups to be vaccinated. As already announced 50 plus will be open from Friday 13th August. Now, 40 plus will be open on Wednesday 18th August, 30 plus will be open on Wednesday 25th August and from 1 September we will be open for all eligible ages.
- Getting vaccinated not only protects you from getting sick, it means you're helping to protect those you love like friends and whānau from getting sick too. Overseas, many people have died from getting COVID from a family member.
- Our team is only as strong as our weakest link. The science shows that even with small numbers of unvaccinated people the virus can get in and take hold. We need to close off as many pathways for the virus to get into New Zealand as possible.
- We need the support of everyone to get New Zealand vaccinated. Encourage your family, friends, workmates, sports teams and congregations to get vaccinated as soon as they are able.
- The vaccine is good for business as it helps avoid the need for lockdowns, meaning businesses can stay open, jobs are protected, and more people will be able to come to New Zealand, supporting tourism and other industries. The more people that are vaccinated, the greater the possibilities for freer movement in future.

3. We are committed to a phased approach to open our border

- We want our border open as soon as it is safe to do so.
- We will not be making any significant changes to border settings until 2022 when all eligible New Zealanders have had the opportunity to be vaccinated.

- So we can move to a new risk-based settings as soon as it's safe, we will trial a self-quarantine pilot in the second half of this year, and set up new testing and vaccine checking systems at our borders.

4. We will gradually introduce new low, medium and high risk entry pathways when our border and health systems are ready

- We want our border settings to change as soon as it is safe to do so so more Kiwis can come home, people can start to travel again, we can accelerate our economic recovery even more, and we can reduce pressure on MIQ. Once New Zealand has high levels of vaccination in place, we will shift from a largely closed border where the majority of travellers spend 14 days in MIQ to a risk-based travel approach based on a number of factors, including vaccine status and the COVID status of the countries you visited.
- This risk-based travel approach will include three entry pathways, based on where the traveller is coming from and their vaccination status. Each pathway will have testing and isolation requirements depending on their level of risk.
 1. **Low risk:** Quarantine free entry for vaccinated travellers who have been in low risk countries.
 2. **Medium risk:** will provide reduced quarantine or self-isolation to vaccinated travelers who have visited medium risk countries. A pilot is being undertaken in the second half of this year to test processes and systems for the safe use of this tool.
 3. **High risk:** Full 14 days in MIQ and testing for unvaccinated travellers from medium risk countries and all travellers who have been in very high risk or high risk countries.
- To stamp COVID out at the border, we will continue to utilise pre-departure testing, and work is underway to develop a range of rapid testing options at the border for all three pathways on arrival in New Zealand.
- A traveller health declaration, which includes vaccination certification, will be an important factor in determining the travellers' risk entry pathway on arrival.
- A pilot to safely test self-isolation for the medium risk pathway will take place this year with a selected group of vaccinated travellers from New Zealand. The pilot will start small, with an expressions of interest process identifying people who meet strict criteria, including being able to self-isolate for 14 days at a location away from families and other people.
- This will be a phased process. Ultimately our goal will be to allow as many travellers as possible to enter quarantine-free, supported by travellers being fully vaccinated and testing.



5. **Once we are confident of our safety, we will carefully start to reopen.**

- Moving to a risk-based approach once vaccination is in place will keep New Zealanders safe and is the key to gradually reconnecting New Zealanders to the world.
- The alert level restrictions including lockdowns will be deployed as we need to in future to quickly stamp out the virus, but greater vaccination coverage will also ultimately reduce the need to use lockdowns. .
- Reconnecting gradually with safe systems and processes in place will enable business growth – from exports/imports and essential workers - as well as providing greater possibilities for our culturally diverse population to reunite friends and whānau, as well as travel to the places we love.
- A strong health approach has been the best approach for our economy so far. Our phased approach will protect the gains we have made so far while beginning to drive further expansion.