

**ALL OF GOVERNMENT PRESS CONFERENCE: SUNDAY, 27 JUNE 2021
HANSARD TRANSCRIPT**

Hon Chris Hipkins: Alright, good afternoon everybody. I'll start with the good news: we have no confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 in the community to report. Results back from waste-water testing for Thursday and Friday of this week show COVID-19 has not been detected at any of the sites around Wellington, Hutt Valley, and Porirua from which samples were taken. As of yesterday, 2,444 potential contacts have been identified as a result of our investigations here in Wellington. That's a very large number of contacts for one individual case. It does highlight that we are spreading the net very wide here, and we are leaving no stone unturned to make sure that we are identifying any cases that may flow from the recent positive case detected in Australia. Of those 2,444 contacts, 2,067 have returned a negative result so far, and the remainder we're expecting in the next day or two. So that's good progress, but there is still more work to be done.

6,120 tests were processed in New Zealand yesterday, of which 676 were here in the Wellington area. That is a relatively low number. Community testing centres have been reporting that they were quiet yesterday and are quiet again today, and we do want to see more Wellingtonians coming forward to get those numbers up. So for everyone in the Wellington region who is huddled up at home because of this unusually bad weather, we do encourage you to go back and review your movements over last weekend, identify all of the locations of interest and whether you were at any of those locations of interest, and, if you were, please do get in touch so that we know that you should be on our potential contact list.

We'd also encourage those with cold and flu - like symptoms to contact Healthline and to also consider getting a test. I did indicate earlier in the week that we want testing to be prioritised for those who are our potential contacts. Now that that peak of demand has worked its way through, we are encouraging others in the Wellington region if they are showing cold and flu - like symptoms—bit achy, etc.—please come forward and get a test.

While the test results have been encouraging so far, overnight we did receive notification of a potential indeterminate result in Masterton. So that case is still under investigation. There is a possibility that it will turn out to be like our recent case on Stewart Island, or Rakiura, which turned out it wasn't a case at all; it was a cold. Dr Bloomfield will provide further details on that, but at this point we are not regarding that as relevant. We'll provide an update later today or tomorrow on that, once we've got further retest information and contact tracing information.

The Cabinet met this morning to consider all of this information and the advice from our public health officials. We do want to see more testing data, particularly for those later exposure events on Monday morning when the person travelled back to Australia. Some additional information has also come to hand, which the Cabinet considered. New South Wales health officials confirmed yesterday that the household contact, the partner, of the case who was travelling with them when they were in New Zealand, whilst initially testing negative, has subsequently tested positive for COVID-19. That shows that case A was able to transmit the virus, and it suggests that case A was infectious towards the end of their stay in New Zealand—those two people were isolated from each other on return to Australia, given case A's positive test result at that point. So the infection could have taken place in New Zealand or while they were travelling back together.

So we are now particularly focused on those who could have been exposed to case A towards the end of their stay here in Wellington. So a reminder of the key locations of interest: Countdown Cable Car Lane, from 6 to 7.15 p.m. on Sunday the 20th; One Red Dog, Customhouse Quay, from 7 to 9 on Sunday 20th; Wellington Airport food court from 8.30 a.m. to 9.55 a.m. on Monday, 21 June; the Wellington Airport men's toilet on level 1 at the northern end of the terminal, near the gift store, from 9.15 to 9.30 on Monday morning; and in addition, we're asking people who came through the Wellington Airport between 8.30

and 10.30 on Monday to monitor for symptoms and to get a test should they develop any symptoms at all.

It's clear that we are not out of the woods yet. More testing and more results are required for us to be confident in making a decision to lower alert levels as part of this process. The last thing that we want to do is find ourselves moving in and out of alert levels unnecessarily. We do know that the more we do that, the more uncertainty there is for people and the higher the consequences of that for business and for people. So Cabinet has agreed with the recommendation of the director-general and myself that we extend our level 2 restrictions in Wellington for a further 48-hour period, up until 11.59 p.m. on Tuesday. The rest of New Zealand remains at alert level 1. We ask people to remain vigilant and continue to follow the advice of health professionals, and, most importantly, we want people potentially connected to our case and who are unwell to come forward and get tested—all the people connected to the case to come forward and get a test, and all the people who are unwell to come forward and get a test. It's in all of our interests for them to do so.

A note for businesses who have been affected by this: the extension of alert level 2 triggers the Resurgence Support Payment. This is available to businesses or organisations that are facing a reduction in revenue due to the alert level increase. A business or an organisation needs to have experienced at least a 30 percent drop in revenue or a 30 percent decline in capital-raising ability over a seven-day period due to the COVID-19 increase in alert levels. The payment is calculated at \$1,500 per business plus \$400 per fulltime-equivalent employee, up to a maximum of 50 fulltime-equivalent employees. So the maximum payment is \$21,500. Sole traders can receive a payment of up to \$1,900. Further information on that is available through ird.govt.nz, and we'll finalise the date that applications can open as quickly as possible—we expect that to be by tomorrow morning.

Before I hand to Dr Bloomfield, I want to make a couple of comments about the decision that we made last night around the trans-Tasman bubble and our decisions to restrict flights arriving in New Zealand from Australia. The current situation with cases in Australia is the worst that it's been since the bubble started and, in fact, the worst that it's been for quite some time. There are now 82 cases in the Sydney cluster. The R value for the outbreak is calculated at 2.89—so, remember that an R value greater than 1 suggests that the virus is continuing to spread. We've also been made aware of a potentially significant event in a Northern Territory mine. A case has been deemed to have been infectious for five to six days whilst working at the mine, with over 700 close contacts having been identified, 100 of those considered to be very close contacts; 950 workers have left the mine during that period and are now scattered across Australia. We are working very hard to identify whether any of those miners have arrived in New Zealand since that time. We are aware the New Zealanders do work in the mines in that part of Australia and some of them come home between their shifts. There's also been a case of the Virgin Australia crew member who flew to various Australian states whilst they were infectious.

So, last night, a small group of Ministers with power to act decided to pause the trans-Tasman travel bubble. The last thing that we want to see is that we're having to respond to more cases like the one in Wellington, as we are now. That decision was endorsed by the Cabinet this morning. The three-day pause will give us time to look at whether we need to impose additional measures, as well as giving us time to further understand the situation in Australia and monitor their testing and contact tracing efforts. We are likely to impose pre-departure testing from all Australian states for a period of time, but we will make that decision based on final risk assessments and before any decision to recommence trans-Tasman travel is made.

I know a number of travellers have been affected by this. These decisions are not decisions that we take lightly. We acknowledge it leaves people separated from their lives, from their families, from their livelihoods, and it does cause significant disruption, but the overall protection of New Zealanders' health and the health of our economy also has to play a very significant part in our decision-making process.

The Delta variant poses a new and a greater risk, and we need to be very aware of that and ensuring that we don't lose the very hard-won freedoms that we've been able to secure over the last year and a half. I'll hand over to Dr Bloomfield for a bit more detail on the case investigations, and then we will open up for questions.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Thank you, Minister. Kia ora koutou katoa. So as the Minister has said, there are no COVID-19 cases in the community to report today, and there is one new case to report in recent returnees in our managed isolation facilities. Today is the eighth day since the person who tested positive on return to Sydney was out and about in Wellington. These next few days continue to be critical, and I would urge Wellingtonians and anyone who was in Wellington last weekend to adhere to alert level 2 restrictions.

As you are aware, on Friday night, New South Wales health officials confirmed the whole genome sequencing of the case who had been here did link that person to the current Sydney outbreak, which means that it is the Delta variant of COVID-19. I think that underscores the precautionary approach we have been taking. You'll be aware of the situation in the UK and Israel that shows that even with pretty high rates of vaccination across the population, they are seeing increased numbers of cases—in the UK, between 15,000 and 20,000 cases a day at the moment, and quite a big increase over the last couple of weeks.

So it's incredibly important that people who have been at those locations of interest in Wellington do continue to follow instructions. If you are required to stay for 14 days in isolation, even if that initial test is negative, please do so. If you are required to isolate until a negative test, please wait until you have that result. The instructions are clear and they are legally underpinned by a section 70 notice. If anyone has COVID-19 symptoms in Wellington, even if you haven't been in a location of interest, or indeed wherever you are in the country, please do get a test.

Finally, a comment around the Australian situation. Again, anyone who was in Australia from 21 June onwards should make the effort to minimise the number of people you are in contact with over this next period of time for 14 days since you were there. Scan in with the app wherever you go and monitor for symptoms for 14 days. There is a section 70 notice being put in place that requires people back in New Zealand who have been in Sydney since 21 June to act as if they are still in Sydney—that is, to abide by the restrictions on movement for lockdown requirements that are currently in place on people who are still in Sydney.

Please be aware that the number of locations of interest in Sydney continues to grow, and keep an eye on that if you have recently returned from Australia. Follow the instructions if you have been at one of those locations of interest, which will be, at the very least, isolating and being tested. For New Zealanders who are currently in Australia, follow the instructions of the state or territory that you are in, and don't forget to use the local COVID-tracing app for the region you are in.

Finally, with regards to our own app, there were more than 930,000 scans yesterday, but please don't wait until we have a case here in New Zealand or the situation we currently find ourselves in; use the app habitually. Thanks, Minister.

Hon Chris Hipkins: Happy to open up for questions.

Media: Minister, how difficult was that decision last night?

Hon Chris Hipkins: They're all difficult decisions. There are some days where COVID-19 throws up nothing but an undesirable slate of options, and we're certainly in that situation at the moment. There are no desirable decisions here; all of them have a risk and have a consequence attached to them.

Media: Could we see this pause with the Aussie bubble continue with cases on the rise again today?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, it's possible. One of the reasons that we pause is where there's a good degree of uncertainty, where we're concerned about the escalating risk, and we're certainly concerned about the potential for risk to escalate. As we know with COVID-19, it can escalate quite quickly. Therefore, being quick in making these decisions is really important.

Media: So what's your message to Kiwis who are stranded over there now, kind of, in shock and don't have any way of getting home?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Hold tight and follow public health advice in Australia. The Australian authorities are working very hard to do all of the things that we would do here in New Zealand to bring this back under control, particularly in the case of New South Wales, but just hold tight for now.

Media: You closed the travel bubble to three states that haven't had community cases for months. Did those states provide information to you that gives you concern?

Hon Chris Hipkins: One of the real areas of concern for us is the potential for exposure across Australia given the significant movement of people we're seeing from potential exposure. So if you look at the mine, for example, 900 people—950 people leaving there and spreading themselves across Australia does create an additional risk in our minds. Now, we will use the 72-hour period, though, to consider whether we can narrow that restriction down, and it may not be that we open up everywhere at the same time. It may be that we progressively re-open up, starting with the states where we think that the risk is the lowest. So we will be using this period to really actively lean into that.

Media: But have you got specific advice that they've gone to these places like South Australia, like Tasmania, that you wouldn't expect them to?

Hon Chris Hipkins: The feedback we've had is that they have spread all across Australia.

Media: Every place, at every—

Hon Chris Hipkins: Well, one of the reasons that we need some time is to identify exactly where they have been.

Media: Is this an abandonment, though, of the traffic light system that you've been using to guide these decisions?

Hon Chris Hipkins: No. We've already, as you will see, got positive cases in multiple different Australian states.

Media: But not in these other three states.

Hon Chris Hipkins: The extent of the potential spread is unknown, and so in those situations we are being precautionous and we are reducing the chances of having to escalate alert levels here in New Zealand by doing this quickly. And we will of course move very quickly to make sure we understand the extent of the risk in all of the states so that we can make decisions as quickly as we can as to how long that is going to continue for.

Media: You emphasise the need for people who are contacts of the Australian traveller to isolate. Have you had word that some people aren't doing that?

Hon Chris Hipkins: No, the feedback we've had so far is that people are doing what's being asked of them. Healthline report good compliance, and as you will see from the testing numbers, we're seeing a good number of people coming forward. We've got about, I think, 400 still to be tested. Most of those are not yet due a test or were not yet due a test as of yesterday. So I think we're seeing that people are doing what we're asking of them.

Media: Are those people in that 400 who you haven't got results for because they haven't been complying?

Hon Chris Hipkins: There are some who are reporting as overdue now, but that's only in the last 24 hours. So in some cases it could be that they've had their swab taken. I think it's 100 or 200 people in that situation. They could have had their swabs taken and it just might

not have made its way through the system or they may be booked in for a test. So nothing that I'm seeing in those testing numbers and the feedback I'm getting from the contact tracing team suggests that we're having any concerns about people not doing what we're asking of them or not getting tested when we're asking them to get tested.

Media: [*Inaudible*] said earlier in the week don't come in for a test unless you're symptomatic or unless you're sure you're a contact. Has that put people off? Because, as you say, we're now seeing almost no one at testing facilities?

Hon Chris Hipkins: What we've always said is: if you're showing symptoms, please come forward and get tested. I just really want to re-emphasise that at the moment. There'll be people saying "Well, I might have a cold. I wasn't in the one of the locations of interest so I won't come and get a test because it's probably just a cold and I'll leave that testing capability available for those who need to be tested." That's certainly what we were asking. We were asking people who weren't showing symptoms not to come forward. Now we're saying to people "If you are showing any sort of symptoms, whether it's a cold or just moderate symptoms that could be associated with COVID-19, come forward and get a test." That will help to give us all reassurance that there isn't COVID-19 out there in the Wellington region, Wellington community.

Media: The person in Masterton, who are they? What's the working theory for why there is an indeterminate result, and when will we know the outcome of that?

Hon Chris Hipkins: My understanding is that they are a health worker. They have been fully vaccinated, so received two doses of their vaccine. The CT value was very high, which is why—when you see a very high CT value, sometimes that can indicate a false positive; it can be that in fact it's not a positive at all. But I'll ask Dr Bloomfield to share any further information on that.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Just to add to that, we do see these results from time to time, most often where someone has got symptoms from another respiratory virus, and so what we do as part of the follow-up is, first, repeat the test, but we treat them as if they might be a case: isolate, we repeat the test, we isolate close contacts, but we also do what we call a respiratory panel to look for other viruses that could be causing those symptoms. This is, in our view, very unlikely to be a case. What I can also say is that while the person was in the Wellington region last weekend, there's no crossover or contact at all with the case who was here or any presence at any of the locations of interest.

Media: Do we know when there might be more certainty around that case?

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: We're expecting to have further test results later this afternoon, so we'll update as soon as we've got those.

Media: And on the alert level 2 decision, why not just extend it a full week so that you're two weeks out from when the Sydney person came?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, we keep it under review. If we're still seeing very good levels of compliance, good levels of testing, if we're confident we've isolated all of the potential risk, then that's something that we'll be looking for. I wouldn't rule out extending further, but at this point we want to minimise the amount of time we have these restrictions in place to that only that is absolutely necessary. We also don't want to increase risk by moving down alert levels too quickly.

Media: A lot of tourism operators have geared up ready for the Australian school holidays, for people to come over for that. Has Cabinet yet considered whether or not they qualify for resurgence payments if the Australian bubble remains closed completely, or even if only New South Wales remains closed?

Hon Chris Hipkins: No, we haven't had that discussion yet, but I imagine that we will have discussions like that when Cabinet meets fully tomorrow. The conversation this morning was relatively limited, but I imagine that tomorrow, being a regular Cabinet Monday, we will get into some more of the detail about that.

Media: On the time line, is it possible that the partner of the case was infectious during her or his stay here for any of this time?

Hon Chris Hipkins: The advice that we've had is no. Given that the onset of symptoms and the positive test result, the fact that they had previously had a negative test result suggests that they weren't infectious while they were here but could have been infected towards the end of their stay here or on the travel back home again.

Media: How concerned are you about the household contact of that person? Does that indicate perhaps late onset? Is that something that could perhaps be in New Zealand? Like, could we be seeing cases with late onset?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Doesn't necessarily indicate a late onset. I mean, the timing of that is, sort of, about average probably in terms of onset. But what it does show is that the one dose of the vaccine that the person had meant that that didn't stop them potentially spreading it to others. So you do see some cases where they get a positive result but they don't spread it. It's clear now that this person is not in that category. I'll ask Dr Bloomfield to—

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yeah, two extra comments there. Our public health and science adviser suggested that if we've got over 90 percent of our results from both our close contacts—those required to isolate for 14 days, and the other group, that're isolating and being tested at day 5. If over 90 percent in both those groups are negative, that gives us a very high level of assurance we've not picked up anything and it combined with the waste-water testing, if that's negative. I think the result from the household contact is interesting, and it suggests timing-wise that the case that came here was infectious once he became—more likely once he became symptomatic. What we have seen is the other two close contacts with whom they spent a period while they were here in New Zealand have returned day 5 negative tests as well. So that's encouraging.

Media: Does the partner have any separate locations of interest that they visited without the positive case?

Hon Chris Hipkins: From a New Zealand perspective, there is no additional risk as a result of this positive test result. Most of the places they visited they were visiting together. There might be a bathroom stop that might be different, for example, but given the infectious period, that's not created a range of additional sites of concern or locations of interest for us in New Zealand.

Media: Are the two travellers that kind of snuck through the quarantine-free travel—how can we be sure that they're low risk, given what's going on in Australia at the moment?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Those whom somehow make it to New Zealand who are not eligible for quarantine-free travel spend 14 days in our managed isolation facilities, which is what they will be doing.

Media: But what about on the plane? Could they have spread it on the plane?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, we do a contact-tracing exercise for them in the event that we need to. So we have good records of all of the people who were on the plane, where they are—so where they've gone—and so on. If these people subsequently tested positive, we would be able to do contact tracing for them.

Media: We understand the Prime Minister was on a flight into Wellington Airport on Monday morning around 10.30. Are you aware of this? Is she getting a test just as a precaution?

Hon Chris Hipkins: No, sorry, I haven't had that information at this point.

Media: And if she was there around 10.30 on Monday morning, would your advice be, the health advice to be, "Hey, get a test.", or "Just monitor your symptoms.", or—

Hon Chris Hipkins: That's right. So if you were there between 8.30 and 10.30, then we are asking you to monitor your symptoms. If you start to show symptoms, then please get a test.

Media: With regard to the small amount of Ministers that made the decision last night, who were those Ministers?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Myself, the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Minister of Transport are the group who make the decisions around, you know, short-term decisions on trans-Tasman. And then, obviously, we always refer those as quickly as we can to Cabinet. Given the significance of this, this is one that we would normally want to get to Cabinet very quickly. So had we not already been having a Cabinet meeting this morning, we probably would have done in order to discuss that decision.

Media: Was that decision taken on advice from Dr Bloomfield or someone—

Hon Chris Hipkins: Yes.

Media: —to quickly meet because of this?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Yes.

Media: Yes. And in that release you put out last night, there was a hint that pre-departure testing would come back, but you'd review that. Is that decision as good as made, and is there any other tweaks to the bubble that we can expect as a result?

Hon Chris Hipkins: As I've indicated, I think pre-departure testing will certainly be a feature of our reopening to Australia at the point that that happens. Whether that applies to absolutely every state or whether there are some states that are exempt from that, again, that all depends on what we uncover or what we learn over the next three days.

Media: Presumably that won't be out-bound from New Zealand; that would be in-bound from New Zealand?

Hon Chris Hipkins: That would be those coming from Australia to New Zealand.

Media: Have either of you received any modelling or advice indicating that if we were to experience an outbreak of the Delta variant like what we had in August or what Sydney's having now, level 3 wouldn't be enough to be able to contain it?

Hon Chris Hipkins: I haven't seen any modelling. We could speculate, I guess, but I'll invite the director-general to comment on that.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: No, we haven't seen any modelling of that. I dare say that the same principles apply here, and that is to move swiftly—it's the early action and early restrictions on movement that is the most important. Remembering that our February experience here, where we had potentially locations that could have resulted in a number of infections, by acting swiftly—and that was with the Alpha variant that at the time had a higher transmissibility than the initial Wuhan virus. It's acting swiftly and really going wide in that contact tracing that works well, so we would apply the same principles.

Media: Looking at future crop ups of the small number of cases in Australia after the bubble has reopened, will you be more cautious and more willing to pause it than you were with New South Wales in the past week?

Hon Chris Hipkins: It really depends on the nature of those cases. Where we see cases that are directly linked to a managed isolation facility, for example, and where we're confident that they've been contained, that in itself doesn't necessarily trigger a pause. But, it's clear that there are some things happening over there at the moment. I know the Australian states are working really hard and very efficiently to try and get on top of that. But this pause is a precautionary measure by New Zealand so that we don't find ourselves in the position of having to do more of what we're doing in Wellington at the moment.

Media: Do you believe our alert level system modelling is out of date? Michael Baker has been calling for a change in this alert level system, you know, it's out of date, and with this Delta variant it makes it more complex. Could we see a change in how we model our alert level system?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Well, I think it's wrong, first of all, to conclude that the alert level system hasn't been modified since we first introduced it over a year ago. If you look at the way we use alert levels now—what's required at different alert levels—there have been modifications to alert level settings over the last year. We've kept those under review, and we still do. So if you look at mask use, for example, that wasn't a feature of the alert level system at all previously; it now is very embedded in there. We've been able to make some pragmatic decisions on what you can and can't do under different alert levels, based on what we now understand to be the risk—and we understand that a lot more than we did when we first established that alert level system.

Where I probably do disagree with Michael Baker: I think he would prefer to see sort of a seven-plus level system. I think that would be much more difficult for New Zealanders to follow. New Zealanders do understand broadly what's required at each of the alert levels. We've had practice at each of those alert levels. There is real value in the simplicity of our alert level system. It has served us very well. I'd never rule out making further changes. And also what you'll see is as we step up and step down sometimes, we've made variations. So, when we don't necessarily go directly from, say, level 3 to level 2, we might do a sort of a level 2 with a few extra restrictions as we step down. So we do have the ability to make decisions that are a bit flexible based on the risks as we see them at the time. But I think developing a whole new system at this point could create some additional challenges.

Bear in mind too that it took us a long time to refine those alert levels. So working with business to identify exactly how alert levels 2, 3, and 4 work, you know, which businesses are open, exactly what are the restrictions required, what are the exemptions? That's actually quite an intensive exercise, and so if we suddenly moved to a different system with seven alert levels rather than four, we would have to repeat that all over again with all of the costs and all of the uncertainty that would go with that. We've got a system now that people understand and they know how to use it.

Media: Do you think that Air New Zealand and Qantas, the trans-Tasman carriers, have the right to be cheesed off with the Government given that they could be flying safely to several Australian destinations today?

Hon Chris Hipkins: When we opened the trans-Tasman bubble we were very clear with the airlines what to expect, and the airlines absolutely have known that from the beginning. We do work with them, but, also, they don't want to see the trans-Tasman bubble completely closed, and so a pause in order to ensure that we get the risk right and that we're not increasing the risk to New Zealanders is going to be better for them than delaying and potentially finding much greater shutdowns on both sides of the Tasman.

Media: Has public opinion come into this decision at all, because Kiwis hate the bubble and they want to see the bubble close. Does it impact your decision making as politicians?

Hon Chris Hipkins: I don't accept that Kiwis hate the bubble. Actually, our research on that shows that New Zealanders are reasonably comfortable with the trans-Tasman bubble. They're much more comfortable with the Cook Islands travel bubble; they are very nervous about opening up further afield to other countries. That doesn't actually play a role in our decision making, though. We made the decision to open the trans-Tasman bubble, and we remain committed to the trans-Tasman bubble, but we've also been very clear that we will continue to act in a way that keeps the risk to New Zealand as low as possible.

Media: Just back on alert levels quickly, would you consider introducing mandatory mask use inside, like what we've seen in other countries?

Hon Chris Hipkins: We're encouraging people to use masks where distancing is not possible at the moment. Mask use is absolutely one of those things that we keep under

review, as are QR codes, and what more we can do to really provide enabling tools to our contact tracers. So I certainly wouldn't rule out further changes to that as we come out of the other side of this, or even as we respond to the current situation that we're dealing with at the moment.

Media: That second Australian traveller that snuck through, how did they get past Customs, and does that indicate a weakness?

Hon Chris Hipkins: I haven't had a full report on that yet—I will get a full report on that, and I'm sure we can provide further details of that once we have.

Media: Did they come from New South Wales?

Hon Chris Hipkins: I actually haven't had that detail; I'm not sure whether the director-general has.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: I don't know.

Hon Chris Hipkins: Yeah. What I've had is that they were not eligible for quarantine-free travel, which, given their point of arrival, suggests that they would've been in New South Wales at some point during the pause, given that the other pause only kicked in last night.

Media: Considering some of the states don't have any cases, did you sort of go state by state through the traffic light system and then decide, "Hey, look, actually, let's close the whole bubble.", or did you sort of bin the traffic light system for this decision?

Hon Chris Hipkins: I'll invite the director-general to comment on that, but from my perspective we looked at the potential for COVID-19 to have spread to all of the Australian states given the level of movement we know exists between the mines and all of the other Australian states.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Just to add to that, it was that particular event in Northern Territory, and it was worrying, I think, the Australian states and territories themselves. The three days gives us an opportunity to look and see what comes from that but also, as the Minister said, to do a more nuanced assessment of each state and territory to help inform decisions about whether the pause continues, either in toto or just by state and territory.

Media: Further to the questions being asked earlier about the people who are put into MIQ, are you satisfied that that is a secure enough system, because it appears to be very high-trust.

Hon Chris Hipkins: We do pick people up who have not been eligible, so these are not the first people that we've picked up who have somehow managed to get to New Zealand. There is no 100 percent fool-proof system here, so if someone gets in their car, for example, and drives to a place that's currently subject to a restriction and gets on a plane at a place that is not, then, you know, there is always additional risk of that not being detected before they leave Australia. But we work very, very hard to pick up that risk, and we have identified people who have done that, and they've spent two weeks in our managed isolation facilities as a result of that. And if they're not eligible for a fee waiver, they find themselves having to pay for that, so it is not an insignificant consequence for them.

Media: That assessment you just provided before of how New Zealanders feel about the various bubbles, what research were you citing?

Hon Chris Hipkins: I think DPMC have released—if they haven't released it, I'm sure they will release it. They do regular research on overall public attitudes around COVID-19.

Media: Aside from pre-departure testing, what other measures, in restriction terms, are being mulled for the trans-Tasman bubble? So if you're thinking about pre-departure tests, is there anything else on the cards?

Hon Chris Hipkins: I think it's all sort of outlined in the trans-Tasman bubble flow chart or table that we released when we released the trans-Tasman bubble. Among the sorts of things that we could have, we could have a period of self-isolation on return for some

people if we thought that they were higher-risk. We do have some provision in our MIQ facilities set aside for trans-Tasman contingency, so we have the ability to use that. So we'll work through the modelling of all of that over the next few days before we make further decisions.

Media: Have any more decisions been made on the possibility of bringing people from Sydney home after two weeks of isolation or anything like that, like was done in Melbourne?

Hon Chris Hipkins: As I indicated when we extended that pause out to the two-week period, that if that was going to be extended beyond that, we would be releasing further guidance as to whether there were avenues for people who absolutely needed to return home to New Zealand. We'd release further information closer to that deadline.

Media: Nine hundred and fifty mine workers—you mentioned that there was work to see whether any had come here. How is that work being carried out?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Through our contact-tracing teams. They're working very closely with Australia. I think they're literally going name by name through those lists and identifying, with our Customs records, whether any of them have arrived here in New Zealand.

Media: Are you able just to give a bit of a rundown of how you found out about the developments in Australia yesterday and then made the decision regarding the bubble? So for the layperson, what happens behind the scenes?

Hon Chris Hipkins: If you're looking at it from my perspective, the director-general and I, I think, have been in multiple-times-a-day contact over the last few days, given everything that we have been dealing with. This has been one of the topics of conversation there, and so we've been regularly communicating about that. I think we probably had a few conversations late afternoon, yesterday afternoon, where further information was coming to light that caused both of us to be a bit more concerned. The decision was taken around about 7 o'clock last night and then communicated as quickly as we could thereafter. It's always a bit evolving. Happy to provide a further breakdown in due course, but through the course of the afternoon, I was in regular contact with the director-general and getting regular messaging updates from our incident management teams here in New Zealand. But I'll ask the director-general to comment on the country-to-country relationship as well.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield: Yes, something just to add to that is we're on daily stand-ups or teleconferences with our counterparts across all the states and territories and federal—that's the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee. In yesterday's meeting, this came up in particular, an early heads up prior to the media stand-up in the Northern Territory about the mine incident. The Director of Public Health called me and gave me an update on that, and I tossed that around with her, then got view from our Chief Science Advisor and others who are in the team, and meanwhile had talked about it with the Minister so he could talk about it with his colleagues. Really, then, as further information came in, that helped shape up the decision. I should say that, in parallel, immediately there was work under way across Government to look at what legal changes needed to be put in place, bringing our colleagues from Transport, Customs, and others to prepare if Ministers did make a decision to institute the pause.

Media: Is there any further certainty you can give to Kiwis that are over in Australia? I don't think "hold tight" provides a whole bunch of certainty for people who are over there at the moment, wanting to come home.

Hon Chris Hipkins: Yeah, look, as we indicated to New Zealanders when we opened the trans-Tasman bubble, there will be periods of uncertainty. And we did indicate to people that we expected them to be prepared for the fact that they may find themselves having to shelter in place for a longer period than they expected to be there. At this point, it's a three-day pause that we've put in place, so people should be prepared for that when they go to Australia, and we'll provide further guidance and advice as soon as we can.

Media: On the back of those communications yesterday, did you have a moment, sort of, where the penny dropped, where you went, “Actually, this is serious. We need to close the bubble.”?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, I think general levels of anxiety around the trans-Tasman have been growing for a few days, based on what we’ve been seeing in New South Wales. I think the mine situation, certainly when we understood the numbers involved there, certainly raised that anxiety up quite a bit. I think that there wasn’t necessarily a magic moment, though.

Media: If we still have no community cases on Tuesday afternoon, can you see us going down to level 1?

Hon Chris Hipkins: It’s certainly possible. I think, like we’ve indicated before, the director-general indicated, if we’re seeing, you know, 90-odd percent of those results coming back in—90-plus, you know, I’d be even more comfortable if it was 95 percent. But if we’re seeing a really high percentage of those numbers coming in, they’re all coming back negative. And particularly looking at those late exposure sites, so the people who could’ve been in that Monday kind of risk group, then again I think those are some of the things that we’ll weigh up.

Media: And when are we expecting test results from the two Australians that snuck through?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Sorry, which ones?

Media: The two that were, kind of, not eligible for quarantine-free travel that have come through.

Hon Chris Hipkins: They will be tested in managed isolation, and we’ll let you know as soon as we get test results from them.

Media: New Zealand’s on a 119-day streak, I think, without community transmission. Does the infection of the Sydney-sider’s partner here count as community transmission, since it happened—it was tested in Australia?

Hon Chris Hipkins: No.

Media: Have you had any communication with the Cook Islands, and how are they feeling about the travel bubble between here and there?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Not personally in the last 24 hours, but we will certainly keep in contact with them. The risk profile for the Cook Islands has not changed at all materially from a New Zealand perspective in the last 24 hours. And, in fact, if anything, our pausing of the trans-Tasman travel again helps to lower the risk of any cases making it from New Zealand to the Cook Islands, bearing in mind there are no community cases of COVID-19 in New Zealand today, and in order to travel from Australia to the Cook Islands, someone would have had to spend 14 days here in New Zealand before the Cook Islands would let them in. So therefore, the risks for the Cooks is very, very low. That’s it. All right, thanks everybody.

conclusion of press conference