

**ALL OF GOVERNMENT PRESS CONFERENCE: TUESDAY, 5 OCTOBER 2021
HANSARD TRANSCRIPT**

PM: Kia ora koutou katoa. Good afternoon, everyone. Firstly, I'll hand over to Dr Caroline McElnay for the latest update, before making an announcement on vaccination certificates. Then I'll hand over to Shayne Hunter, the Deputy Director-General of Data and Digital at the Ministry of Health, and Michael Dreyer, the General Manager of National Digital Services, to run through how the vaccine certificates will work, which is why we have the screen here with us today. But, first, Dr McElnay.

Dr Caroline McElnay: Thank you, Prime Minister, and kia ora koutou katoa. We have a detailed 1 o'clock statement today; so I'll keep my update on today's cases short. There are 24 new community cases today. Eighteen of these cases are in the Auckland region and six are in the Waikato, with three of the latter cases being formally reported today; they were made public yesterday. There are also two cases to report in recent returnees in our managed isolation facilities. Of today's 24 cases, seven are yet to be linked to a current case, but interviews are ongoing. And, for yesterday's cases, there are eight cases that remain unlinked at this point, and, again, investigations continue. However, I do want to say that all of the Waikato cases are linked. There remain 12 active sub-clusters where there have been recent cases, and these are the focus of our public health response. Looking ahead, we estimate, from the number of already notified cases and their contacts, we would expect an additional 48 cases to come through in the coming days amongst those contacts.

The two best tools we have in the continued fight against COVID-19 are testing and vaccinations, and the numbers for both continue to be steady. Yesterday, 14,905 tests were processed nationwide; 12,595 swabs were taken in Auckland, with more than 84,000 swabs taken across Tāmaki-makau-rau in the past seven days. There are 22 community testing centres open across Auckland today. And, in Waikato, additional testing capacity has been stood up at the testing sites around the region, and teams there continue to see high demand. So testing is under way across Hamilton sites, and pop-up sites are continuing at Raglan and Huntly. Testing locations nationwide can be found at healthpoint.co.nz.

And just a little bit more about Waikato, Waikato District Health Board has not identified any locations of interest of significance in Hamilton City at this stage. All potential exposure events have had direct interactions between individuals, and they have been followed up directly. However, as the Waikato continues to undertake their investigations with the new cases reported, there may be additional locations of interest, and they will be added to the Ministry of Health's website as they come through. The DHB has informed us that indications so far is that, prior to receiving positive tests, the households affected had been following guidance about mask wearing and social distancing.

And, just lastly, today marks seven weeks since our first case of COVID-19 associated with this outbreak in the community and when New Zealand moved to heightened alert levels. I'd just like to thank New Zealanders for their efforts during these challenging times, but we do ask that everyone keeps up good habits that have helped us deal with cases of COVID-19 and has got us to where we are today. That includes getting tested, staying home as much as possible, wearing face coverings, and keeping track of where you've been. We know from experience overseas that COVID-19 is becoming a disease of the unvaccinated. So, please, book yourself in today at bookmyvaccine.nz if you haven't already had your vaccine. Thank you, and back to you, Prime Minister.

PM: Thank you, Dr McElnay. Yesterday, Cabinet decided to keep Auckland at alert level 3. I know many people were hoping to move down to level 2, but the number of cases and our level of vaccinations are not in a place where we can do that safely. Instead, we shared what a phased step down from restrictions will look like, beginning with what the public health experts advise us are the safest measures: meeting outside with one other household, up to

a maximum of 10 people; allowing outdoor recreation; and resuming early childhood education—again, with infection control measures that include maintaining bubbles of no more than 10 children.

These measures are aimed at carefully and safely relieving some pressure on Aucklanders to make level 3 just a little bit more bearable while we keep fighting hard to contain Delta and get our vaccination rate up as high as possible. Even with these changes, Auckland will continue to have amongst the toughest restrictions of anywhere in the world. I know that's hard work, but it is hard work that has literally saved lives while we have vaccinated hundreds of thousands of people. Now we just need to keep going.

As we've said from the start, the vaccine is a ticket to freedom. It is the most effective tool we have to lower restrictions and bring back some of the things that we have missed. We can already see how the vaccine is protecting people in this outbreak. Delta is literally bypassing vaccinated people and latching on to the unvaccinated. A recent case highlights this. We had an individual who was unvaccinated in their household; not one of their family members, who were vaccinated, got COVID. Only 3 percent of cases in this outbreak have been vaccinated, and modelling suggests that the vaccine has reduced infections by around half of what they could've been. So the evidence is clear: the vaccine works and is safe.

From conversations we've had with a range of providers across different DHBs, those who are working with iwi, Pasifika, our young people, you hear the reasons why people may be reluctant or are taking a bit more time. Some are waiting to see the long-term health impacts. Some have questions they just haven't found a trusted person to ask. Some do not believe COVID will ever affect them and it's not important enough. I want everyone to be able to satisfy themselves that the vaccine is safe, but I want them to do that now because the impact of waiting is just too great. Waiting puts people at risk. It also makes it harder for those parts of our lives that during COVID have been considered higher risk to come back to life.

To overcome this issue, and to make these events safer, many countries have used something that is often referred to as a vaccine pass or a vaccine certificate. Simply put, it's proof that you are fully vaccinated and that you would therefore pose less risk to the people around you and that an event you attend is less likely to become the source or the site of a large superspreader event. These are now common overseas, and they make good sense. That's why Cabinet has agreed to the use of vaccine certificates in New Zealand as a way to help give more certainty and ensure greater safety of high-risk events and venues.

The question that everyone will, rightly, have is: how widely will these be applied? That is work that Ministers and agencies are currently undertaking and will form the basis of a new framework for us to use as a nation once we have higher vaccination rates. We're consulting on this framework now, and I'll share more detail in the coming weeks. Here are a few points I can share now. We will use them as a tool to lessen the risk in what are currently considered high-risk settings, including large-scale events. We are also consulting on their use in places like hospitality. There are areas we will not apply them, so that people are not restricted from accessing things like essential health services or, for instance, food from the supermarket. The certificate will take the form of a physical document that you can download and print or carry in digital form on your phone. And, finally, we'll release the detail of the framework in advance of it taking effect so people will have time to prepare, but, indicatively, we're likely to begin using them in November.

These points form the draft framework we're now consulting on. But while we finalise details on where the certificates will be used, Cabinet has agreed we will be using them. It's one of the best ways we can assure that summer plans can go ahead uninterrupted. It will help us to keep people safe, and it will help the industry with as much certainty as possible. And so here comes my ask: please get vaccinated now. Summer is close, and so to be fully vaccinated and fully protected and enjoy the things you love, you need to be vaccinated this month, not in December. I encourage you to talk to your doctor or someone you know who has had their vaccination. It is OK to seek advice, and vaccine centres are incredibly welcoming, informative places and there are nurses and health professionals there who can

answer your questions. The best Christmas present your family this year is to bring forward your vaccination immediately.

I'm now going to hand over to Shayne and Michael to run through how the vaccination certificate will work, and then we'll look to take questions. We'll start with questions for Shayne and Michael, and then we'll bring Dr McElnay back on to the podium. So we'll just front-end those questions if we can. Shayne and Michael.

Shayne Hunter: Kia ora koutou, and thank you for the opportunity to just run you through just some slides, a couple or three slides, and then we'll give you an actual demonstration of My Covid Record, and just take you through some of the features of what we built, and let you know what's coming.

So I have someone driving the slides down there, so if you can move that forward, that would be great. So just to let you know the phases that we intend to roll this out. So, firstly, we will be making available, soon, access to your COVID vaccination record. Within a few weeks of that, sort of late this month, we intend to make test results accessible via My Covid Record, and then, through November, we will be making the vaccination certificates that the Prime Minister referred to accessible in downloadable form. So those are the current dates that we're working towards. In order to access your vaccination record information, you will need a My Health account, or if you already have RealMe, you'll be able to use RealMe to access your vaccination records.

Now, we're going to give you a quick demonstration on somebody who's logging in using the My Health account. We won't go through the process of actually creating one, but I can tell you that it's a nice, simple process to get one. So here we go. You'll arrive at a website, which we will publish when its formally released, and up the top-right—just before we do that, you will see in the middle, roughly, that if you don't have an account, then there's a start button which will take you through the process of getting one; if you do have one, then we can log in, which we'll do now. So this is running live at the moment. So this is already set up with a login, and, as you can see there, you do have the option of RealMe, if you have it, otherwise you log in with the account that you create in the first place.

And, once you've logged in, it will, obviously, know who you are. It's just retrieving the data and it will present your vaccination record. You'll see there that this particular person has one vaccination and they have the opportunity to actually have a look at the detail behind it. So you will see the name of the person vaccinated, there will be a batch number, there will be a location of the vaccination, there will be the arm or the site of the actual vaccination, and which vaccination was actually used—which, of course, in New Zealand, it's the Pfizer vaccination at this stage. And you can, at that point, if you haven't already booked yourself a second appointment. And then we have, at the bottom there, just links to be able to get an actual travel certificate, if you need one at this stage. And, also, if you find anything that's incorrect in the details, then there's a link there for you to, you know, communicate, and we have a team of people that look at any sort of errors that we may find.

Just pointing out one of the other features that we have on here, and that is the ability to get your NHI number in a scannable form. We've done that because the NHI number is used quite widely in the system, but, in particular, at the moment, for testing, this will help speed up the testing process for people that are being tested and maybe haven't been vaccinated. So that's why we put that there. It's just your NHI number in a scannable form.

We're just switching back now. Oh, I should point out that, at the bottom, there is some information there around COVID vaccines, COVID tests, and also we have access to a privacy statement for people that are particularly interested in the privacy of the system.

And this picture here, really just to say: you can download that certificate, as was mentioned before. You can print that or carry it in a digital form. You'll present it. We are building a little app that will actually verify it. So that's to make sure that it hasn't been, you know, fraudulently created. So that will actually be part of what we're delivering. That will, essentially, confirm that it's a valid certificate, and you'll get the tick and away you go.

And then, the last slide here is really just to say that it's designed to, you know, work on a mobile device, as well as on a regular screen on a website. So it's mobile-friendly, and then you'll see, essentially, the four components that we've talked about today. So that's the demonstration, and we can take some questions.

Media: Why not incorporate it into the—

PM: Sorry, I'll moderate on behalf of the team here, just to assist today. So sorry, Tova had a question.

Media: Thank you. Why not incorporate it into the existing QR code scanning app?

PM: A very, very useful question with a clear explanation.

Shayne Hunter: Yeah, so we in New Zealand use Bluetooth for the COVID Tracer app. The privacy aspects of that app mean that we are not allowed to, as part of the Google-Apple agreement, incorporate it into the app. There will be a link from within the app. So if you go into the app today, you can find, for example, locations of interest, and it will take you to an external site. You can get to it from inside the app, it's just not in the app, if that makes sense.

PM: Yep, yep, so we're trying to make it as user friendly as possible, whilst complying with the rules of engagement for the app as it stands because of Google and Apple.

Media: Do you intend to keep it on the mobile web long-term, and eventually would you be able to use the mobile web, which is essentially what you've got there, to show vaccinators that it's not [*Inaudible*]?

Shayne Hunter: Sorry, I was having a little problem hearing that question.

Media: Sorry, would you intend to keep it on the mobile web long-term—so just a web app, not an IOS or Android native app?

Shayne Hunter: Oh look, do you want to answer that Michael?

Michael Dreyer: Yeah, at this stage it's a mobile site. Probably in January, we'll move it to being a full app, once we've learnt a little bit more about how it works.

Media: Right, and are you keen at some point to eliminate the paper form of it and just have it as something you can scan on your phone, or is that not in the development pipeline?

Shayne Hunter: No, I think at this stage we need to keep the paper form available to people that may not have access to digital technology, so that's probably here for a while.

Media: As available, but would it be necessary in the long term, or will you be able to just have the device?

Shayne Hunter: Oh, look, I mean, at the moment, if you have it in electronic form, it's the equivalent of paper, you don't need both. The paper's there for people that don't have it in digital form.

PM: And one of the things just it might be useful for us to point out is that because we are very mindful of people being able to access the website in order to create the account and print off these documents, that we are looking for really easily accessible ways for someone who might not have these forms of technology to go and visit a health provider and have it provided for them. So we'll look at multiple ways that people can make sure they get it, whether or not some of those options may be GPs or pharmacies.

Media: What sort of uptake are you expecting on this when it rolls out and how quickly—or the projection of how many people are going to jump on?

PM: Well, for the use of the vaccine certificate, anyone who may need to use it for access to what we're loosely calling at this stage high-risk settings. So you've already heard me say that we will use them for large-scale events. We're consulting on their use in wider venues such as hospitality, so essentially the use will be dictated by the people who require them to access those venues.

Media: Is that going to be a Government decision or whoever runs those events?

PM: Good question. Sorry, for large-scale events there will be areas that we will look to mandate the requirement. And so I would put things like large-scale events under that category. But what we're also looking at is circumstances where we may not mandate their use but an organiser who might sit out of that mandate may wish to be able to use them. So we're looking at how we can create a level framework so if people want to use them for their purposes they're able to.

Media: So everyone who wants to go to a summer festival, for example, will need to have this?

PM: Yes. This is us forewarning you that if you are booked to go to a summer festival, that whilst we're continuing to work on the framework and some of the details, this is a warning to you or a heads up as it were—go out and get vaccinated now, because you will need that vaccination certificate to be a part of that large-scale event.

Media: Can I just have a quick follow-up on that, please? There's been some of the smaller businesses who, perhaps, aren't those high-risk venues have been expressing concern to us about their staff being put at risk because they'd have to enforce that compliance. They'd actually prefer it to be Government mandated in gyms and parks. Can you speak to that?

PM: Yep, yeah. So that's why we've said, look, we are out talking to those industries—and you can already see from the alert levels the groupings of what is considered low risk versus high risk. So the likes of hospitality, there we are out talking to the industry to ask them, you know: (a) is this something that you would find useful as a tool to keep your workforce safe, and also to ensure greater continuity, that you can stay open; and (b) how can we make sure that we implement it in a way that makes it as easy as possible for you? So those are some of the conversations we're having with the industry now.

Media: So hospo and gyms could be Government mandated?

PM: Look, today, what I'm indicating is there are some areas where it will be very clear: large-scale events, absolutely. Other high-risk settings like hospitality, we're out consulting at the moment, and some of those other close personal services. Final decisions in those areas have not yet been made.

Media: Sorry, just a last one on that line of questioning. Churches and—

PM: Yeah—so there's some areas that, actually, it is much more sensitive, and I would put, you know, social gatherings that are privately organised as church events in that category. You'd see that overseas, they haven't tended to be used in those spaces. So there, that's where we're going out and having conversations around, you know, what kind of measures do those organisations want to have in place to keep their people safe, and if it meant you could have more people, is that a tool that you would like to use? So they're very open conversations, but that is an area where we're going to be very cautious, and also learn from overseas.

Media: Prime Minister, are you looking to make it mandatory for teachers and/or early childhood teachers to be vaccinated?

PM: So you will have heard me say—do you mind if I just finish off vaccine certificates, so that we don't unduly detain our ministry officials.

Media: On the legal framework you mentioned here, for a company that might not be required by the Government to use this vaccine certificate to see who can enter its premises, will they still have the option of doing so if they want?

PM: Yeah, and so that comes to Derek's question. So there are three things that we're currently working through, and one of the reasons we've wanted, even while we're working through that, to give you a heads-up, is we're trialling this piece of tech, and it's being widely used with some individuals, so it's likely that you would hear about it, as you have today. The second reason is that we know we're going to use it for large-scale events, so we need to

give people fair warning of that. But in the meantime, the three things that we're working on are, yes, areas where we would likely mandate those higher-risk settings; (b) how do we create a legal framework where we haven't mandated that someone wants to use it—how do we create a legal framework for them to be able to if it's within certain parameters; and the third is areas where you cannot use it. So there are some areas we'd want to be very explicit that you should never withhold services that are considered essential: food, access to health services, pharmacies, and so on.

Media: But that line of category would be pretty limited, so perhaps retail, for example, might not be mandated, but would still have the option to do so?

PM: And that's what we're working through at the moment, and that's a really good example—yes.

Media: The general advice is it takes about two weeks after your second dose for immunity—

PM: Yes.

Media: —to fully set in. What's the point at which, you know, the applicant is considered fully vaccinated, or how do you—

PM: Yeah, so it's 14 days after. So that's one of the things that we would want to consider as well around the implementation date. We've broadly said November, but what we would do then, at that point, is give clear advice as to what point we are going to consider you fully vaccinated: is it that you've had your two doses, or will we wait for that extra two weeks after? You're right, though—and this is a good reminder—it's not just a matter of people thinking, "I've gone and got my first dose." Fully vaccinated is 14 days after your second, so that's why we're encouraging people now.

Media: What provisions are going to be in place specifically if you can't get the vaccine, or are other vaccines going to be made available—because I saw on there, it had Pfizer as an option before summer—if people can't specifically get the Pfizer vaccine?

PM: Yes. So we'll build in the ability to take into account alternate vaccines as approved within New Zealand—we're already, of course, as you will have seen, taking into account overseas vaccinations through some of our requirements for people coming in at the border, and, yes, we will have provision for those—the very limited circumstances—very limited circumstances—under which someone could not be vaccinated.

Media: Would a small private healthcare provider or grocery store, for example, not be able to require that—

PM: Yeah, and so this is where—and this is where we're going to put out very clear advice on where we believe that you cannot and should not apply a vaccine certificate. When you look overseas, though, you do see their general use around where they're mandated tend to be those higher-risk settings. You see them less inclined to be used, and some of it's practical, of course—having to produce a vaccine certificate every time you go into a corner dairy, for instance. So there is a mixture of what is actually high-risk and what is practical.

Media: Will you integrate it under the alert level system—will some events be able to run at level 2 which wouldn't be able to run at level 1 if they use vaccine certificates?

PM: So, the way that I would just—although we're working, obviously, on the vaccination framework as we speak, but think of them as two different pieces of work, and the reason for that is if we have an environment in the future where, heaven forbid, we have a form of COVID that does not respond to vaccines, then you need to revert to your alert level framework. And so this is something that sits very squarely around a vaccine framework where vaccines are effective in dealing with and reducing the risk of COVID—so a separate piece of work.

So you had a question on boosters, Tova, and then I'll come to Ben.

Media: Oh yeah, I'm just kind of following up from Marc's question. If your vaccine efficacy rate drops and you haven't had a booster shot will your certificate expire at a certain point?

PM: Yeah, we will be able to incorporate any variation into the way that that app works, keeping in mind, of course, no decisions there on boosters at this stage.

Media: Will it only proof of a vaccine that will be able to be used? Some places overseas have said that you can produce negative tests instead at the likes of a festival.

PM: All of these are issues that we are currently considering within our framework but I do note that some countries that have previously used tests as an alternative—so, if you want to access a place that has a vaccine requirement and there is a testing alternative, you have to have a test within 72 hours. Some of those countries have subsequently removed that, for multiple reasons, some of which because they want to encourage vaccine, others the ongoing cost. So all of that evidence we're looking at ourselves.

Media: But likely for summer festivals—would that testing option be available?

PM: For summer festivals, the best way to guarantee your entry to a summer festival is to be vaccinated.

Media: Do foreigners use this system or do they have another way to prove that they've been vaccinated—they've been vaccinated overseas?

PM: Yeah, well, we, of course have a way to—once a New Zealander comes back, we're working through documentation for New Zealanders who have been overseas.

Media: Because they have NHIs, right?

PM: Sorry?

Media: They have NHIs. Australians arrive as well.

PM: Someone who's visiting, we would need to make sure we that we have within our health orders the ability to factor in their documentation. I know, for instance, in some places in the United States they require vaccine certificates—there they have accepted New Zealanders carrying their Pfizer card. So we would make sure that we adapted our system to take that into account in the future.

Media: This is a question about booster shots, unless anybody has more on—

PM: OK, let's just keep trucking around on certificates.

Media: Just in terms of the detail that will be held in the system, what guarantees can you give to ensure security, that it's secure?

Shayne Hunter: I'll answer that one.

PM: Yes, please.

Shayne Hunter: We've taken, obviously, advice. We've worked very closely with the Privacy Commissioner on the amount of information that we hold in the system and make available. Obviously, we've tested it thoroughly from a security point of view. I mean, ultimately, it will be your record and therefore your login and password, so you'll need to look after it, but we've taken every step we can to make sure that the system is secure.

Media: Prime Minister, are you expecting this to be rolled out at places like Waitangi in February and then the big kapa haka festival in Auckland at Te Maketū?

PM: Yeah, actually I know that even now Matatini and the like are having their own conversations around what they can do to ensure a safe event, and so this is where, really, I see that we're providing an extra tool for organisers who are already considering ways to keep those events safe. So I would fully expect that if we weren't moving on this, those events would have anyway. So, yes, we're considering all sorts of events and we'll have to make sure that what we do is fit for purpose for those that are larger-scale outdoor and indoor events. Of course, very different again if you've got an event that is not a ticketed event. So

we're having to think through all those details and make sure that what we're doing is practical and workable. That's why we're talking with the sectors.

One thing I should correct myself on: you are fully vaccinated after two doses. You are fully immunised two weeks after the second dose.

Media: Prime Minister, do you expect to have to legislate to ensure this framework is going to be up and running?

PM: I do expect that that's likely, yes.

Media: And there's time to do that?

PM: Within, I believe, the COVID orders. So don't hold me to some of the finer details of that yet because that's still being worked through.

Media: So it may not need to go through Parliament—it could be using the existing orders?

PM: I don't want to be too premature in the process that would be required for the use of the vaccine certificates and the process that we'd need to go through at this stage.

Media: A question for your officials about what controls will be on venue organisers in terms of recording QR codes, taking lists of names of people who are coming in and out—that sort of thing.

Shayne Hunter: I think it would be fair to say the detail of that's being worked through in terms of what the expectations are and how it will work. I would expect that privacy would feature very highly in all that, so.

PM: Yeah. So in terms of, I mean, some of the checks that you might have in place, of course, is if you're providing at an event a vaccine certificate, the ability to cross-match those names against ticketing information. At a venue, someone may wish to just simply check that your name is as you present it and so on. So basics like that. Those are things that we're talking to the sector about how can we make any process like that as seamless as possible so it doesn't lead to undue congestion for large events or for venues.

Media: The danger is that someone will, you know, in reading the QR code, connect it up to the ticketing information and put a sign next to it saying, "This person's vaccinated."

PM: So, of course, we would need to make sure that, in those circumstances, we're very clear on what information can and cannot be retained. Yeah.

Media: And how do you safeguard against someone downloading their vaccine certificate and sharing it with someone else, and that person who isn't vaccinated then using that certificate? Will it need to be checked against a Government form of ID, or what safeguards—

PM: So for some of the protections around what the QR code provides in terms of certifications, is that—

Shayne Hunter: One of the things that we're creating is a verifier app, which will allow event organisers, for example, to scan that QR code and to confirm that it's valid, so in case it's been fraudulently created. When it comes to those sorts of checks and balances, I think that's all part of what needs to be worked through with the venue organisers.

PM: Yeah. As I've just talked through, working through mechanisms to allow there to be a check against someone's identity, that's the kind of thing that we are working through in a bit more detail. Yeah. Keeping in mind, we're not the first to do it, so it does mean that we can look at overseas examples on how they've added those verification processes in a way that protects privacy but also allows you to move through a group quickly.

Media: Will you offer any support for festival organisers who could see a lot of people asking for refunds as a result of this?

PM: Well, I'm hoping that you won't see that, because it's a very simple action that people can take in order to ensure that they're still able to attend. The vast bulk of the feedback that we've had so far, though, from event organisers is that they would welcome

this. In some cases, they have been considering whether it would be applied themselves, but it's very straightforward for them if it's something that is Government mandated. One of the reasons I think, though, that we've seen that very open-minded position from event organisers is because (a), it's been used overseas. Some who are connected to overseas organisations and event organisers are familiar with it. Parent companies have already used it. And (b), it just gives a greater degree of certainty—not perfection, but a greater degree of certainty that those events can go ahead.

Media: And can you just give us some guidelines on, 500 people-plus, is that about where it becomes a mass event, or—

PM: So as I've said, you can expect it for large-scale concerts, festivals—you know, a number of those events that occur across summer. That is where absolutely we intend to use it. We are looking, then, at the application of numbers across both indoor and outdoor and where that threshold would sit. That's one of the things that we're consulting on. And then we're looking at alternate venues as well—hospitality and so on.

Media: Is tertiary education an essential service or could tertiary providers require this?

PM: I see education and access to education very separate to what we're considering here with high-risk settings.

Media: Agencies such as Oranga Tamariki and Kāinga Ora are looking at the possibility that they could be denied entry to a private dwelling if they don't have a vaccine certificate. Is this something that private dwellings could be used at, or, you know, would the Government introduce mandated vaccines for staff where they have to do at-home visits?

PM: Yeah. So this issue of where people have contact with vulnerable members of the community and whether they should be vaccinated; a very separate issue. Using vaccine certificates for people to access public housing; no.

OK. I'll just check: how are we going on vaccine certificates? Can I just—

Media: One more on the—

PM: Jenèe—yeah. And Marc, you've got one more? And then we'll finish with that, and we'll bring Dr McElnay back. Jenèe.

Media: Apologies if you've already answered it, but just to be clear, if you want to go to a festival, you need both doses, and you need to wait 14 days after the second one?

PM: So that was the point that I was just making. We have not yet made a final decision on whether or not it will be fully vaccinated or fully immunised at the point that we're using it. That is something that we are continuing to work to. Yep.

Marc.

Media: Two quick questions: one, if you do allow a testing requirement instead of a vaccine, would those tests still be free, or would you expect that people would have to pay for them?

PM: Yeah. So that's the interesting journey that I think it was Germany went through where at first they allowed a testing exemption., then they started requiring people to pay for it, and then eventually they got rid of it. I believe it was Germany. And you can see, I mean I think we are either on the cusp, or have just past—Henry will correct me on this—first doses for Germany. So you can see their level of vaccine, they're obviously using it as an additional tool to try and drive up vaccinations. Personally, I think we'll be looking for something that is both workable and simple, and we know that being tested within the previous 72 hours is not a guarantee, and so I think we will be looking for some simplicity.

Media: I have a question for Shayne?

PM: Yeah, go ahead, and then we'll finish there—Shayne.

Media: For the verifier app that the venue operator might use, what will show up when they scan that QR code? Is it just going to be a check mark—this person is vaccinated, or names or, you know, what sort of information appears there?

Shayne Hunter: It'll be a check mark, and there will be a name, but there'll be no detail that you can actually see on My Covid Record. It's a good question, because My Covid Record is for you. The certificate is ultimately to give you access, for example, to an event, so it'll have the bare minimum information needed to support that.

PM: OK, so thank you very much, both of you. And I'll ask Dr McElnay to join us again.

Media: Prime Minister, with vaccinations, will you be looking to make it mandatory for teachers and early childhood teachers?

PM: We are very conscious of the need to provide parents, students, and children with as much safety as we can. So at the moment the Minister of Education is looking at the suite of tools available to us: how are vaccinations used in an education environment—particularly, obviously, we're thinking here about staff, how do we use masks; and how do we use testing. He's getting some advice at the moment, but we'll be looking to make announcements on that over the coming week in preparation for the future opening of schools.

Media: So will you be looking to make it mandatory—is that one of the options?

PM: As I've said, we are looking at all three of those tools that we have, and vaccines are a tool. We are, however, considering all of the impacts of whether or not we have requirements in that space. Top of mind for us, though, we've got a group of children here that can't be vaccinated, so we need to do everything that we can to keep them safe—and so with the three options that exist for us: so the way we use vaccines, testing, and masks.

Media: Yesterday, when you made the announcement, we got a lot of feedback about people being confused and having too much detail but not having specifics. Do you feel like you would have done a different job of communicating that, or do you think you should have done a better job communicating that?

PM: I think what we've set out, and I think what people were looking for was the “what's next?” And so we presented the “what's next” but, ultimately, the very important piece of information for Aucklanders is that they are still at alert level 3. There are three changes within that, but we will not be moving beyond that until, of course, we continue to assess both the outbreak and vaccination rates. So I think people ask for both, often—they want to know what's happening immediately and they do want to know what the future might look like, even if we're not ready to move to that place yet.

Media: Can I ask a question to Dr Caroline McElnay: we've had reports from the Wairarapa Trust that they're wanting data and information about Māori who are not vaccinated; is there a reluctance to hand over or share that data, and isn't that the kind of thing that we should be doing, given our reliance on vaccination rates now?

Dr Caroline McElnay: I'm not aware of any reluctance—obviously within the constraints of privacy that exist. I'm not aware of any reluctance on the part of the provider. Certainly, our providers are very focused on getting our vaccination rates up for our most vulnerable groups—very focused on getting Māori rates up. I'm not aware of any particular issue there.

Media: Following up on Jess's question before, do you at least acknowledge that confusion, and are you concerned about it? Because it's important, isn't it, that people have clarity around the rules?

PM: Yeah, and so my job is to continue to convey the information that people need right now. Auckland is at level 3. There's only three variations to that now, the ability to meet another household outside, the ability to engage in a bit of recreation across Auckland, and ECEs, that's it. And so we're not asking anyone to do anything different than those things,

they remain at alert level 3 because at the moment we are still working very hard to control that outbreak and, of course, vaccinate people.

Media: And Australia is about to buy 300,000 doses of the COVID wonder drug from Mercks to reduce hospitalisations—and, perhaps, Dr McElnay, if you address this as well—is New Zealand looking at doing the same?

PM: Medsafe have been in talks with that pharmaceutical company and have been for some time. Of course, for commercial reasons, we won't get into any more detail than that on that negotiation, but those talks predate the more recent announcements that you've seen publicly around the success of that drug in clinical trials. That's a correction to, unfortunately, information that the Ministry of Health put out, which was simply different.

Media: Just again on boosters, can you give us a bit of an update around where the Government is at with that? Have they been purchased, and if so, when do you expect them to be rolled out in New Zealand?

PM: So, of course, taking into account the number of vaccines that we have ordered would actually serve us for the purposes of boosters were they to be approved, particularly given we've ordered enough for New Zealand's entire population and those aged under 12, if they are approved in the future, are likely to have a paediatric dosing, which would be a third of the usual dose of an adult.

So that provides us, already, with additional shots that could be used for boosters were they to be approved. In addition, we are in talks with the pharmaceutical companies we may choose to purchase from to ensure that if they're approved that we are able to secure those vaccines in a timely way.

Media: You say "were to be approved", what's the time line on this approval process?

PM: That's not something I can answer. It's something that we use a group of expert advisers to give us their perspective. I know that they have been reviewing the evidence out of Pfizer and looking internationally at the evidence. You'll have seen that, actually, there's a limited number of countries that are using boosters, and where they are, they've often been for those in older age groups. I don't think they'd be inclined to call an additional dose for immunocompromised as a booster, because actually, that's just used to provide the usual immunity of someone who would otherwise require two shots.

Dr Caroline McElnay: That's right. In that setting, that would be a third dose.

PM: As opposed to a booster.

Dr Caroline McElnay: That's right.

Media: Given what you previously said about 90 percent and the move to level 3, do you consider that Auckland needs to get to 90 percent eligible population before it can be moved to Delta level 2, and can you explain the difference between Delta level 2 and step 3 of level 3? Is there a difference?

PM: So the reason that we have not put firm vaccination numbers alongside each of the phases is because for the very reason—one of the issues that was raised yesterday—we have a duty to make sure that we aren't just looking at crude numbers overall; that we are looking at the vaccination rates across different suburbs, across different population groups, across different ethnicities.

One of the reasons for that is, of course, if you said simply 90 percent and it's fine, you could have, for instance, only 50 percent amongst 15 to 19 year olds and that would then cause, potentially, outbreaks amongst a particular age group, because you always assume that certain age demographics tend to move together and mix together.

So we've been a bit more nuanced than that; what we've said instead, we will look first and foremost at the outbreak. We'll do that to consider both downward movement, but equally, if we find that people are not following the rules, or we're concerned about where the outbreak

is heading, we equally reserve the right to remove some of those changes as well. So if that means saying, “Look, we have to take away something we’ve given.”, we’ll keep that option on the table. So it will be both the outbreak and vaccination levels.

Media: Does that essentially mean you don’t see it as safe enough to move to level 2 in Auckland until there is enough blanket coverage across all those groups that [*Inaudible*]?

PM: No. I’m saying that it will be both, us looking at the levels of vaccination, but also the status of the outbreak. If you’re continuing to drive it down, those numbers are low, then, of course, you’ve got less reliance then on the vaccine. So both of those things that we will be looking at.

In terms of where those different phases—it’s not unusual for us to move into different levels slowly. We’ve done it before. What we’ve simply signalled here is how we would do it. So we’ve set out three phases where, essentially, if you look at them, they are Auckland slowly moving into Delta 2. So the third phase is essentially, as you’d recognise it, it’s Delta 2. The only thing we’ve done differently is say that we’ll still allow the wage subsidy to apply.

So it’s a stepped process to get to 2. Because everyone was asking to go there, and our view was there was not a likelihood we’d be able to do it in one go, just in the same way when we moved from lockdown in the first instance for the first time for New Zealand, we didn’t either.

Media: And can you say at all, with abandoning elimination how—if that has an effect on the phased reopening plan?

PM: So I think I’m not quite as black and white as you on that, because that implies that we are not continuing to take that “stamp it out” strategy with every single case, and we are. So despite the fact that we have not yet reached zero, it changes nothing about the way we are treating COVID right now. We still contact trace everyone. We genome sequence. We source investigate. Everything we are doing today is the same as we were doing yesterday and the same as day one of the outbreak. What we’ve simply acknowledged is: seven weeks of very hard restrictions have not got us to zero. And so we need to plan around that but continue on with our very aggressive approach.

Media: Yeah, there’s a claim that’s circulating on social media at the moment that at least three Destiny Church members are in MIQ, and one man tested positive after going to the protest on Saturday. Is there any validity to those reports going around?

PM: I cannot answer that.

Dr Caroline McElnay: I’m not aware of the details there.

PM: No, I can’t answer that. Obviously, some of the cases, when we do our 11.30, are still being interviewed. So I couldn’t respond to that at this stage. It’s not something that’s been flagged with me.

Media: We have a query, as well, from one of our listeners who’s booked a bach in the Auckland boundary, and they wanted to know if that’s allowed under the recreational outside activity—

PM: Yeah, I’m sorry to disappoint people; we are asking them not to engage in overnight activity, ultimately because there’s a whole raft of additional things that are open up there. Yes, we are saying recreational activity, but the principles are really simple here: try and maintain social distancing; keep using your mask outside; of course, we’re telling people to, please, keep it to two households, as well; and, because, of course, with the recreational activity that people might be able to engage with, to keep it simple, so that people aren’t drawing on extra shared facilities or essential services. We’re asking the rec activity just to be day trips rather than overnights. Sorry to Auckland.

Media: Just back to Derek’s last question: I mean, in terms of the reopening of New Zealand, though, what does this transition mean for the thousands—

PM: Oh, sorry, forgive me. I intended to pick up the second part of your question.

Media: Yeah, so thousands piled into the MIQ system [*Inaudible*] today, in hope of getting back. Is there any budge before the end of the year given that—

PM: None of it changes that approach. And, in fact, even with Professor Skegg, at that time when we announced it, we said that elimination was our approach for now. And that's what we said at the beginning of this outbreak. But we also indicated that, over time, we would continue to assess our approach and that nothing about the reconnecting strategy was affected by that. First quarter of 2022 is when we continue to say that we'd look to have those varied options around the way we manage the border—so self-isolation, shortened isolation, and so on.

Media: So while you've given yourself a sort of eight week runway here. For the people overseas, there's going to be no reprieve before Christmas or anything like that? No [*Inaudible*]?

PM: That is no different to the position that we've always maintained, and I'm not sure why setting out a stepped approach for Auckland to get into alert level 2 would change that.

Media: Prime Minister, do you think you're putting pressure on Pacific and Māori communities to get vaccinated? You have easing of restrictions up in Auckland, there's a vaccine passport that's been unveiled today, you also acknowledge that there are concerns among those communities about why they're not getting vaccinated. Do you think that between this time period, they can stamp out those concerns about getting vaccinated up until the vaccine passports are released?

PM: That's a job for all of us. I guess, the point that I would make here is, actually, I want everyone to be vaccinated, but I want people to feel supported as they're vaccinated. You'll hear me talk a lot about people having questions, and it is absolutely legitimate to have questions. I just want to encourage people to seek their answers. Rather than waiting, go out and find that health professional that you trust or that provider you trust. Even if you don't have a doctor or you're not enrolled with a GP, at our vaccination centres we have health professionals who are more than willing to spend a bit of time talking to you about the vaccine. So, really, here I want to encourage everyone to take that next step, and if they have concerns, to get help to address them.

Media: Prime Minister, given the stats for Māori and Pasifika in the current outbreak, what assurances can you give to Māori and Pasifika communities that their interests were considered when the three-step phase was developed?

PM: Well, the first thing I'd say is: we're still in level 3. So most, of course, thought the question yesterday was: "Would we be in 2 or not?" And the answer to that was no to 2, still yes to restrictions because we need them, because of the very reason that you raise. The other reason why we have not put time lines on any of the other phases, despite that, I know, causing a huge amount of frustration, is because we need to continue to assess whether what we're doing is safe at every step. So I cannot tell you when we'll hit phase 3 because it will all be guided by what's happening with the outbreak and how well we're doing with vaccinations.

Media: Te Whānau o Waipareira took to Twitter and said that they had developed a vaccination roll-out for Whānau Ora providers across the North Island but it was dismissed by the Government and the Ministry of Health. Can you explain why that was?

PM: Well, I'm not familiar with that. In fact, the last time I had a conversation with representatives from Waipareira, we were all working quite closely together. So I can't speak to that, but I would be happy to go away and look at what may have happened there. I know they were doing some work with TPK as well, so if you wouldn't mind, I'd like to follow up on that.

Media: New Zealand Rugby have gone back to the Government to try and relocate three NPC teams outside of Auckland. That's already been turned down twice. What's the likelihood of the Government agreeing a third time?

PM: That's not something that I'm involved with, thankfully, and I'm not involved with making decisions around that. Ultimately, that sits at arm's length from me, and I think that probably is where it needs to sit. Ultimately, though, our officials there are working with a set of criteria over who needs legitimately to continue to cross between our Auckland border on a regular basis, and they'll be using that framework to make those decisions.

Media: On the Pandora Papers, are you comfortable with companies like Asiatici continuing to operate in New Zealand given some of the clients that they're working with?

PM: Rather than say anything specific about any given company or individual, broadly I do think there's more work to do to ensure that our settings around foreign trusts are in keeping with the transparency and the rules that New Zealanders would expect.

Jessica, and then I'll come over here, and then, actually, I'm then going to finish with Bernard.

Media: I've got one, too.

PM: Let me give you one just because of that malfunctioning mask that you're having to grapple with today, Ben.

Media: Prime Minister, do you feel a bit of a shift change from yesterday? People are feeling frustrated that this is kind of a middle ground. There's criticism that it leaves vulnerable communities exposed; on the other side, there's criticism that businesses can't get back to normal, ECE centres say they don't have the specifics. Do you feel like you're kind of getting that criticism from all sides, and do you feel that frustration from Auckland?

PM: I think probably you've just described the job of being a politician in a pandemic. There are competing, and always have been competing, desires from everyone: those who are in the middle of restrictions, those who live outside of them. But, actually, the job that we have is the same, and it is to keep people safe. Auckland continues to be in level 3, and I know that will be a frustration to many, but that is because that is the safest option for us right now while we continue to vaccinate. Yes, we've made some small changes—small changes—that come into effect this evening, but they are deemed by our public health experts, the ones we've relied on all along, to be the lowest-risk options to continue to support and sustain Aucklanders as they continue with what are some of the toughest restrictions in the world.

Yeah, I'm going to come here and then Bernard—Ben is going to be my last.

Media: Thank you. So considering—obviously, the plan's to ease restrictions while Pasifika and Māori vaccination rates are still considerably lower. What extra sort of practical steps will be taken to increase Māori vaccination rates, other than, you know, talking to a trusted provider? Will there be, like, extra outreach, buses, for example?

PM: Yes, yes—all of those things. And I think one of the issues that you keep asking for a national approach—we've actually taken the national approach, in many ways, as far as it can take us with the fact that we've got very accessible centres, we've got the ability for people to walk in, drive through, drop into their pharmacy, their GP. The next stage, the hard bit, for Auckland—you know, the next 5 percent—that requires a varied approach community by community, and there that's where those different initiatives across different DHBs from Māori providers, Pasifika providers, those who know their communities best, that is where we have to give them the space and the support and the funding to tailor their approach for what they know is needed locally, yep.

Media: And just a question on public health unit capacity, so considering the public health units are supporting Auckland now with the Delta outbreak, are you confident there's enough capacity around the country to—

PM: That's one for the Director of Public Health.

Media: Are you confident there's enough capacity to meet demand in the face of extra community cases that we're expecting?

Dr Caroline McElroy: Well, we've had a fantastic response across all the public health units, and yes, they are focusing to support Auckland, but, of course, we've also got Waikato Public Health Unit involved, and we are confident that we do have that capacity for the cases that we've got, yes.

Media: And going forward?

Dr Caroline McElroy: I think that's a crystal ball in terms of, you know, you'll never be able to meet full capacity, but certainly in terms of our surge planning, we are at a comfortable stage at this point in time.

PM: And it is why, as I say, as much as people wanted us to put dates on every single move that we may make in Auckland in the future, we absolutely have to assess what continues to happen with the outbreak as we go. And so we'll look every week but, for now, alert level 3 it is.

Media: Prime Minister, there's quite a few business leaders who have called for urgent guidance on vaccination mandates for both their staff and for customers. Can you really achieve the vaccination thresholds that you want without quite urgent vaccination mandates?

PM: So, of course, we have entered into mandates when we believed that there was a principled basis on which we, as the Government, could require them. We've done that across our border workforce. You'll see we're out talking with our health workforce at the moment. And there may well be others in which we believe that those principles would be met. Otherwise, MBIE have provided, for employers, guidance on how they can go about undertaking, essentially, workplace health and safety assessments to determine whether or not that is something they require within their own workplace as well. So we're doing our bit, and then workplaces have the ability to make an assessment for themselves, too.

Media: But, given the urgency of the issue, why not be more urgent about providing them with mandates?

PM: Well, because we are not in the position of mandating that every single New Zealander be vaccinated. That has never been our approach in this country on vaccines. And that, therefore, means that the job that we have to do is to provide the assurance that the vaccine is safe, to assess where there are areas that, reasonably, other New Zealanders could expect someone working alongside them, for instance, to be vaccinated—for instance, a healthcare setting—and ensuring that we are doing our bit to apply that kind of principle where it is required and encouraging everyone else, with as many carrots as we can, sticks where required, to be vaccinated. Vaccine certificates, I think, slot into that frame as well.

Media: Does that mean a lot the business leaders and directors are going to have to wait for the courts to make case law?

PM: No, I disagree with that. I mean, MBIE is already providing advice on where people can use mandates. And, look, you've seen an example of a company who's embarked on that for customers, in Air New Zealand, and you've seen workforces that are already working through mandate issues themselves based on their health and safety assessment of risk within their workplace, and that's where the guidance exists around that.

So I did say I was going to finish on Ben.

Media: Prime Minister, you did say that you rely on public health experts to take on risks, but some of those people have been some of your most strident critics for yesterday's announcement. Siouxsie Wiles says she was gutted by it. Michael Plank said it is now a matter of time before COVID finds its way into all corners of New Zealand. Have you been surprised by the depth of criticism that's come for you since then?

PM: My job is to field the views of everyone, but I do rely on public health advice and will continue to do so for every single decision that we make, and so that includes whether or not or when we move to phase 2, which we have not set a time line for, and the ongoing advice around every single step we take, but, again, I would highlight the announcement we

made yesterday was that Auckland remains at level 3. We've not set out when Auckland will move into level 2, which was ultimately the decision of yesterday. What we acknowledged is what everyone will have seen: that, after seven weeks of some of the toughest restrictions that are applied globally, we haven't been able to get to zero at this point. So my job is to therefore set out what that means, and so that is, in part, what we started to do yesterday, talking about the fact that we will continue, very different to other countries, to take a very aggressive approach with COVID. We always have, and we will continue to do so, but also talking about the roles that vaccines can play if we're not going to use level 4 and level 3 in the future. The thing I should also point out is that all New Zealanders, not just Aucklanders, have asked us to find ways not to use those restrictions in the future. So, essentially, what we've set out is what it will take for us to be in that position. I'll let you finish with a supp', Ben.

Media: And, just on the issue of the day, are you still a personal supporter of four-year parliamentary terms?

PM: Yes, I am, but you'll see we're going through a bit of a process on that now.

Media: Will you support it through that process?

PM: Yes, I still continue to support it, but I also said that I'd like to find a way to get a bit of consensus across Parliament on it as well. All right, thank you, everyone—five past; we won't make anyone endure more than an hour! Thank you.

conclusion of press conference