

Fresh COVID case in New Zealand as it prepares travel bubble

April 8 2021



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New Zealand health officials confirmed a fresh community case of COVID-19 in Auckland Thursday, just two days after the country celebrated its largely virus-free status by approving a travel bubble with

Australia.

There was no suggestion New Zealand's largest city would again be thrust into lockdown or the travel bubble plan revised.

But Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern immediately announced a temporary halt to travel into the country from India, the departure point for most infected arrivals in recent weeks, shutting out New Zealand nationals for the first time since the pandemic emerged.

The new patient is a security guard at a coronavirus quarantine hotel for returning Kiwis.

He had not been vaccinated, but his only known contact outside the hotel was a co-worker who has received two doses of the vaccine, officials said.

The case highlighted the potential fragility of the travel opening, due to start on April 19 and which Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has cautioned could be disrupted in the event of new COVID-19 outbreaks.

Both New Zealand and Australia have largely contained the [coronavirus](#), with few community outbreaks in recent months which were all successfully eliminated after brief local lockdowns.

But authorities warned that future outbreaks could catch tourists on the wrong side of "the ditch", as locals call the Tasman Sea separating the neighbouring nations, potentially forcing them to undergo costly hotel quarantine on their return home.

There are currently 95 active COVID-19 cases in New Zealand—the [security guard](#) and 94 who were detected at the border—and all are housed in a special quarantine facility.

Most of the positive tests are from travellers from India who flew to New Zealand via Dubai.

Ardern said the suspension of entry to New Zealand for arrivals from India would run from April 11-28.

"During this temporary suspension the government will investigate options to manage risk," she said.

"We have never previously suspended [travel](#) to New Zealand citizens and residents and that's why I want to assure you this is not a permanent arrangement."

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Citation: Fresh COVID case in New Zealand as it prepares travel bubble (2021, April 8) retrieved 25 January 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-04-fresh-covid-case-zealand.html>

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