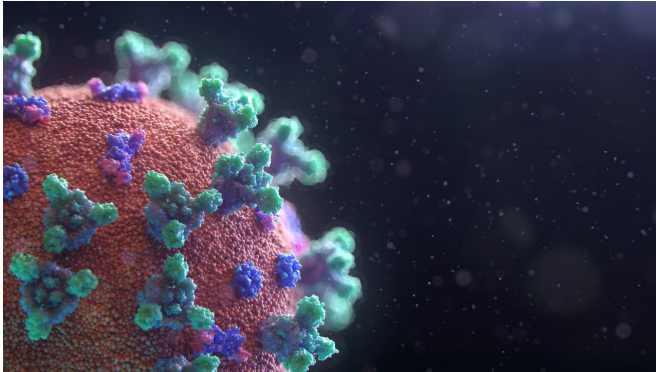


New Zealand pauses travel bubble with Western Australia after virus case

23 April 2021



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New Zealand on Friday paused arrivals from Western Australia, temporarily excluding the state's travellers from a quarantine-free bubble between the countries due to a COVID-19 outbreak.

"As set out in our Trans-Tasman bubble protocols, travel between New Zealand and Western Australia has been paused, pending further advice from the state government," a statement on the New Zealand government website said.

Earlier on Friday the Perth and Peel regions were sent into a three-day lockdown after Western Australia recorded its first community transmission of the virus in 12 months.

A man in his 50s, who recently left hotel quarantine, flew into Melbourne from Perth on Wednesday and tested positive for the coronavirus earlier Friday.

One of the man's close contacts in Perth also tested positive for the virus, raising concerns that it may have spread further into the community.

Despite testing negative for the virus before leaving hotel quarantine—a requirement for all international arrivals to Australia—authorities believe the man likely contracted COVID-19 from another hotel guest.

"He spent up to five days in Perth, and we now need to assume he was infectious," Western Australia premier Mark McGowan told a press conference.

Other Australian states and territories, whose residents are still able to fly to New Zealand under the bubble arrangement, moved to restrict arrivals from Western Australia following the outbreak.

The few instances of community transmission in recent months have been linked to hotel quarantine in major cities, and all the outbreaks have been successfully contained with similar brief lockdowns.

It is the first major snag since New Zealand and Australia opened their quarantine-free travel bubble on April 18, almost 400 days after both closed their international borders due to the pandemic.

The bubble, which followed months of negotiations between the largely coronavirus-free neighbours, was hailed as a major milestone in restarting a global travel industry that has been crippled by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before COVID-19 brought New Zealand's tourism industry to its knees, it was the country's biggest export industry, with Australians accounting for about 40 percent of the international visitors.

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APA citation: New Zealand pauses travel bubble with Western Australia after virus case (2021, April 23) retrieved 19 August 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-04-zealand-australian-covid-outbreak.html>

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