

(Ainge Roy, 2020)

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## Coronavirus

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# New Zealand's three-week streak without local Covid case ends as port worker falls ill

Jacinda Ardern says case is an example of the system working, as Dr Ashley Bloomfield urges continued vigilance

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New Zealand's latest local coronavirus case was a man who worked at the ports of Auckland and Taranaki. Photograph: Hannah Peters/Getty Images

## Eleanor Ainge Roy in Auckland

Sun 18 Oct 2020  
03.45 BST

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After 22 days of no new Covid-19 cases in the community, a port worker in New Zealand has tested positive for the coronavirus.

The case is a New Zealand man who worked at the ports of Taranaki and Auckland and began showing symptoms on Friday, before testing positive on Saturday evening.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield, the director general of health, was alerted to the positive test in the final hour of voting on Saturday in New Zealand's election – in which prime minister Jacinda Ardern was rewarded for her success in twice eliminating the virus.

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The man and his family are now in isolation, and Bloomfield said the case was being treated as an isolated encounter that had most likely seen the man infected on the border, rather than through widespread community circulation.

“The risk is contained,” Bloomfield said on Saturday. “The emergence of a new community case is unsettling, and we need to remain vigilant.

“The case is another reminder that Covid-19 is not going away any time soon.”

Bloomfield said New Zealanders should not become complacent, as Covid-19 continued to devastate the US and many parts of Europe.

Ports of Taranaki and Auckland will now face increased testing, Bloomfield said. The infected man wore personal protective equipment (PPE) while working on foreign ships, and had been tested for Covid four times.

“While we have eliminated community transmission in New Zealand ... that is not the case overseas, where the virus is spreading and there are significant restrictions in place,” Bloomfield warned.

In August, Auckland went into a second, three-week lockdown after a large cluster of the disease emerged in south Auckland, with more than 100 people infected. The last confirmed community case in New Zealand was on 25 September.

Associate Professor Siouxsie Wiles, from the school of biological sciences at the

University of Auckland said it was unlikely the latest case had led to community transmission, and the swift identification of the disease showed border protections appeared to be working.

"It is most likely that the person became infected after being on an international vessel to carry out maintenance sometime in the last two weeks. Genomic sequencing may help further identify the source of his infection," Wiles said.

Ardern assured New Zealanders on Saturday there was nothing at this stage to suggest a change of alert levels was needed.

"There's nothing to suggest to move any of the restriction levels, this is an individual who was working in a high-risk area and was tested multiple times," Ardern said. "This individual was already tested as part of routine testing four times. This is an example of the system working."

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