Australia suspends New Zea travel bubble amid new virus strain

🕐 18 hours ago

◁ Coronavirus pandemic

Australia has suspended a travel bubble with New Zealand after its first Covid case in months was confirmed to be the South African variant.

The infected patient had served 14-days in quarantine and tested negative twice before developing symptoms later.

Travellers coming from New Zealand to Australia in the next 72 hours will now have to go through hotel quarantine.

Health Minister Greg Hunt said the suspension was done out of an "abundance of caution".

"It is recommended all passengers from New Zealand with a flight scheduled in the next 72 hours reconsider their need to travel," he told reporters, adding that the decision was made following advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC).

Mr Hunt added that anyone who has arrived in Australia on a flight from New Zealand since 14 January would also be asked to isolate and get tested.

The infected patient, a 56-year-old woman who recently returned from Europe, is said to have visited almost 30 places in New Zealand before her case was detected. Local officials say she is likely to have been infected by a fellow returnee.

- **NZ reports first community Covid case in months**

- **South Africa coronavirus variant: What's the risk?**

The South African variant of the virus is believed to be more contagious, but there is currently no evidence that it causes more serious illness.

This particular strain is already the dominant variant in the Eastern and Western Cape provinces of South Africa.

The UK has identified 77 people with the South African variant.

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- **The Australians who are trapped in the UK**

The travel bubble between Australia and New Zealand had opened in October 2020, though it was a one-way arrangement. Australia currently has a travel ban in place preventing residents from overseas travel.

Australia and New Zealand were among the first countries in the Asia-Pacific region to loosen restrictions on international travel since Covid-19 travel bans came into effect earlier this year.