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Covid-19: Auckland's Grand Mercure MIQ to reopen after inquiry into virus spread

Hannah Martin · 10:45, Jun 18 2021



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Reports finds aerosols responsible for Covid-19 MIQ hotel

Quarantine Brigadier Jim Bliss confirms a case of Covid-19 at the Grand Millennium Hotel was transmitted via aerosols.

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On Friday, Joint Head of Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ), Megan Main, announced the facility had been deemed safe to reopen, following a “thorough” investigation and remediation of its ventilation system.

The hotel was emptied in April after two separate breaches, which saw three returnees catch the virus during their stay.



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It comes as Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) [released the first independent assessment](#) of MIQ on Friday.

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One of the Grand Mercure cases involved [two positive returnee cases who were genomically linked](#), “strongly” indicating transmission occurred inside the facility.



ABIGAIL DOUGHERTY/STUFF

The Grand Mercure Hotel in Auckland CBD will reopen to returnees this weekend after months sitting idle.

The second involved a Covid-19-positive returnee who was able to take a [bus ride to go for a walk](#) while in isolation. This resulted in 14 other returnees on the bus being deemed close contacts and [having to remain in isolation for another 14 days](#). There was no community transmission linked to the breach.

A report released by MIQ and Director-General of Health Dr Ashley Bloomfield earlier in the month found the spread was likely due to aerosol transmission.

While aerosol transmission via the fresh air supply cavity seemed "unlikely", it was "nonetheless the most plausible transmission pathway", it found.

The risk of downward airflow between rooms appeared to be unique to the Grand Mercure but the overall risk of transmission to returnees at the facility was deemed "low".

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The Grand Mercure's ventilation system has been rebalanced, and there is "negative pressure" within returnee rooms. When room doors are opened, the air moves from corridors (shared spaces) into rooms, not from rooms to shared spaces.



MARK TAYLOR/STUFF

Megan Main, one of the joint heads of managed isolation and quarantine (MIQ).

The risk presented by ventilation systems has always been assessed by health experts as very low, Main said.

Because of the range of infection prevention and control measures in place, the review found the overall risk of transmission to returnees staying at the Grand Mercure was also low.

A report requested by MBIE chief executive Carolyn Tremain after the first six months of MIQ operation, [made 82 recommendations](#) to ensure the system is sustainable and continues to improve.

Eight of these were deemed high priority, including involving iwi following a "significant omission" to consider [Treaty](#) obligations while MIQs were being set-up.

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