



(RNZ, 2021g)

NEW ZEALAND (/NEWS/NATIONAL) / COVID-19 (/NEWS/COVID-19)

Auckland Airport worker has UK strain of Covid-19 - Hipkins

3:20 pm on 21 April 2021

Genomic sequencing has shown the strain of Covid-19 a border worker has is the UK variant and is most closely linked to a passenger that arrived 10 April, the Covid-19 Response Minister says.



Photo: RNZ / Samuel Rillstone

The border worker, who cleans high-risk planes at Auckland International Airport, tested positive for Covid-19 yesterday

(<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/440853/covid-19-worker-at-auckland-airport-tests-positive-plus-one-historical-case>).

Chris Hipkins told *Morning Report* he was awaiting confirmation that the worker cleaned the plane of the most closely linked returnee.

"The match is exactly the same, it's identical, so that would suggest it's person to person [contact]."

An investigation currently underway would uncover how the person picked up the virus, he said.

However, it was possible that with the air conditioning switched off in planes as they were cleaned, droplets from someone with Covid-19 positive could still be in the air, he said.

"The nature of a plane if the air conditioning is not going is that the air is quite stagnant. It's possible that that was still hanging in the air when someone went in to clean the plane, particularly if that happened quickly after it arrived."

The worker concerned was a very diligent worker, signed in regularly, regularly scanned QR codes and wore the appropriate PPE, Hipkins said.

"By all accounts this person appears to have done everything right."

It's believed the person was infectious from Saturday, he said.

The person's household contacts have all tested negative however 16 total close contacts were identified.

The worker was fully vaccinated early on in the campaign and were last tested on 12 and 19 April.

Ardern yesterday said people could still get Covid-19 after being vaccinated, but it would make them a lot less sick than otherwise. The Pfizer vaccine which is being used in New Zealand provides about 95 percent protection against the virus.

There is no change to the trans-Tasman bubble.

"Ultimately both sides of the Tasman ... our first expectation is that we look to see whether we can contain any cases using contact tracing. I'm relatively confident based on what we know at the moment that we should be able to do that in this case," Hipkins said.

"That shouldn't require any additional restrictions. The sorts of things that would escalate alert level restrictions are the sorts of things that might disrupt trans-Tasman travel."

Vaccinologist Helen Petousis-Harris told *Morning Report* the chances of getting Covid-19 when fully vaccinated was low.

"When you keep testing people you're going to see people throwing positive tests even though they're well."

It was important to point out the worker who tested positive was not symptomatic, she said.

Three locations of interest had been identified related to this case:

Westfield St Luke's Food Court, Saturday 17 April 2021 12:15pm to 2:30pm

Bunnings New Lynn, Saturday 17 April 2021 2:30pm to 3:50pm

Movenpick Dominion Road, Saturday 17 April 2021 5:15pm to 7:20pm

Restrictions on 'red-zone' countries

With a decision looming about resuming travel from India, Hipkins said it was not fair to say if a country had many cases they were automatically in the red-zone but it's important to look at the impact this has on New Zealand's risk.

"If you look at the US for example, yes there are a lot of cases there but actually the infection prevention controls that we're got in place are working very effectively from the US and we're not seeing a lot of cases coming into New Zealand from the US," he said.

"On the other hand from India, our concern was that we were seeing a lot of cases come in from India."

