

NEW ZEALAND

Covid 19 coronavirus Delta outbreak: 'Piece of the puzzle we're looking for' - outbreak linked to Sydney returnee; 11 new cases, 2 in hospital

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A daily wrap of all the main developments in the Covid-19 Delta outbreak as New Zealand is plunged into lockdown for the fifth time. Video / NZ Herald

NZ Herald

KEY POINTS:

- There are a total of 21 Delta Covid cases, an increase of 11
- The NZ outbreak has now been linked to a traveller from Sydney
- Two infected people are now in hospital in a stable condition
- Police confirm arrests for lockdown flouters

There are now 21 Delta Covid cases in Auckland, including two in hospital.

Nineteen are in the Auckland quarantine facility.

Twelve of the 21 have been confirmed as part of the same Auckland cluster. A further eight are being investigated and are expected to be part of the cluster.

The other - an air crew member - is not expected to be linked because it is a border-related case.

Two people were taken to North Shore Hospital overnight. One had worsening symptoms and the other had underlying conditions. One is in their 20s and one in their 40s. Both are stable.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and director general of health Ashley Bloomfield updated the nation on the latest cases this afternoon.

Five new cases are a family group and at first glance there is a connection to Avondale College, Bloomfield said. Interviews are ongoing.

The group of five cases and a separate case are connected to the school.

STORY CONTINUES AFTER LIVE BLOG

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Updated Auckland locations of interest (up to 148 visits to 123 locations):

- Bus 95B or 95C Glenfield Mall to Northcote College
- Bus 926 15 Bently Avenue to Glenfield Mall 17/08/2021
- Church of Christ Mt Roskill

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A Lynfield College student has also tested positive. ARPHS sent an email to parents stating the student had tested positive for the virus and had attended school on August 16 and 17.

92

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It seems most flights into Auckland tonight were cancelled,.



STORY CONTINUES

It is not unusual to see cases in a school community, Ardern said.

The Government is trying to make it as easy as possible for anyone connected to the school to get tested.

The new community cases are not unexpected, Bloomfield said, and he said numbers will continue to grow. He is now expecting cases to reach around 50, according to updated modelling data.

There are 362 individuals already categorised as close contacts of positive cases, but by the end of today "well over 1000" people will be contacted, Bloomfield said.

Earlier locations of interest included on the list, such as August 3, are "precautionary" but authorities are confident all community cases are "very acute infections", Bloomfield said.

There are eight new cases among recent returnees in MIQ - two are historical.

Crown Plaza

Some people due to leave the Crowne Plaza overnight were held back after three people there tested positive at day 12 of their stay.

Some returnees now have to stay longer while CCTV footage is examined.

Genome sequencing results are expected today. Returnees on other floors at the hotel scheduled to leave today will be able to do so.

Wastewater sampling shows positive results

Wastewater testing from sampling on Monday returned positive results from Rosedale, and Western and Eastern interceptors.

More results will be available today for wastewater samples taken across Auckland, Coromandel and Thames.

Sampling taken in other parts of the country have all come back negative.

Alert levels

Ministers will announce tomorrow an update on alert level 4 restrictions for the rest of the country.

Ardern wants high levels of testing to lift confidence there isn't nationwide spread of Covid before moving alert levels.

Bloomfield and Ardern are urging people in the South Island to get tested if they have symptoms, to help them decide on alert level changes.

The PM said New Zealanders are largely complying with alert level 4 requirements.

Arrests for flouting lockdown

Police Commissioner Andrew Coster says police have received 684 online breach notifications since lockdown began. A third were from the Auckland area.

"Of those reports, 322 were about a gathering, 320 about a business and 42 about an individual."

Of the four people arrested during protest activity in Tauranga yesterday, three were issued with formal warnings, Coster said. A woman, 56, is due to appear in Tauranga District Court next week facing one charge under the Health Act 1956.

Two men, aged 49 and 36, were also arrested at a protest in Auckland yesterday. Failed political candidate Billy TK was one of the pair due to appear in Auckland District Court today, each facing two charges under the Covid-19 Public Health Response Act 2020, and one charge under the Search and Surveillance Act 2021.

"Police reiterate that so far we have seen the overwhelming majority of people doing the right thing, staying at home and keeping themselves, their whānau and communities safe by doing so," Coster said.

"Where, however, people engage in activity that endangers public safety during this outbreak, police will respond quickly and decisively to prevent any risk to our communities."

More pop-up testing centres

Four additional pop-up testing centres are available in Auckland today. Additional testing at Avondale College is also available.

Pop-up testing sites remain open in various parts of the Coromandel Peninsula.

There were 16,000 swabs taken across Auckland, the busiest day since August last year, including around 10,000 in urgent care clinics and practices.

Bloomfield urges people to be kind to staff while they wait to get tested.

Sydney link

The PM said the current positive cases are a close match with a recent returnee from Sydney on a managed red zone flight on August 7.

That person returned a positive result on August 9 and was transferred from Crowne Plaza to the Jet Park quarantine facility that same day.

They were taken to Middlemore Hospital on August 16.

The current cases most likely came from the traveller.

Additional information could emerge, and there could be other possibilities, Ardern said. However, the balance of evidence gives the Government confidence to start searching for the missing link, she said.

Te Pūnaha Matatini Covid-19 modeller Professor Shaun Hendy said the discovery of a possible link to the border was good news.

"If it holds up under further investigation then the later arrival date means we are looking at a much shorter chain of transmission and fewer cases than the early results suggested."

Experts react

Te Pūnaha Matatini Covid-19 modeller Professor Michael Plank said the fact that the person arrived from Sydney on August 7 meant the virus probably wasn't in the community for more than 10 days before it was detected.

"So that's probably the sort of least worst scenario we could have hoped for."

But Plank said location was another factor.

"We've just learned there's been about 2000 close contacts across the SkyCity Casino, so there's still the potential that we could have had a number of big super-spreading events," Plank said.

"And that's going to be the next big thing to look out for as the results of testing those close contacts come in."

Plank said alert level 4 will have stopped the virus for now.

"Although we're seeing these huge numbers of contacts at the moment, going forward, we should see less of that."

Some of the big questions remaining, he added, were how many close contacts would test positive, which would help determine how serious the outbreak was, and just how the lockdown would affect transmission.

"We've seen in Sydney that if it gets into essential workers, it can be really difficult to stop it from spreading," he said.

"The fact that we've acted quickly here and gone into a strict lockdown will definitely act in our favour."

"But we'll just have to wait and see - particularly when it comes to the second part of next week - to see what effect lockdown starts to have on case numbers."

MIQ staff

There were 208 staff at Crowne Plaza when the individual in question was there - only one is overdue for testing and by less than 48 hours. Of the 200 staff working at Jet Park, only two are overdue for testing.

There are 407 staff members across these sites who have been compliant with vaccination order. Only four had one dose.

Compliance has been high, but the search across both sites will continue, Ardern said.

A family adjacent to a case at Crowne Plaza has now tested positive on their day 12 test.

The Government is chasing down every possible point at which the infected Crowne Plaza returnee had contact with others.

Middlemore Hospital is not a line of investigation at this stage. All Auckland City Hospital staff tested to date have returned negative results, which is encouraging, Bloomfield said.

Swabs and vaccinations

Bloomfield urges people to be kind to staff while they wait to get tested.

There were 360 close contacts identified this morning of the positive cases. This will increase significantly as it does not include Avondale College, Bloomfield said.

People who visited a location of interest are being told to self isolate and call Healthline for advice.

About 1.3m people accessed the Ministry of Health website yesterday.

Anyone over the age of 40 can book a vaccination now, Ardern reminded people. There were 195,537 bookings made yesterday, the highest for one day.

A phased approach to reopening vaccination sites began today. Anyone with a booking, and who had no communication from provider, should still go, Ardern said.

Plans are under way to vaccinate customer facing workers, such as supermarket staff, Ardern said.

Cabinet has agreed to make Pfizer vaccine available for 12-18-year-olds. They can book along with everyone else from September 1.

From tomorrow morning, parents will be able to book their child's vaccine.

There are more than enough vaccines for everyone, Ardern said.

Some DHBs are looking at drive-through vaccinations.

Earlier, it was revealed a teacher, 25, from Avondale College tested positive after her flatmate contracted the virus from a co-worker.

She was at school for two days last week and on Monday this week when she was infectious.

All students and staff were told to get tested and self-isolate for 14 days, even if the rest of the country moves out of alert level 4.

Health authorities had been working with the Ministry of Education through the morning to help the school communicate with students.

So far 10 cases have been confirmed in the Auckland community - eight are connected to Tuesday's case, a 58-year-old man from Devonport, and one is connected to the border.

They include an Air New Zealand air crew worker who visited Japan this month, an AUT student who attended a lecture with more than 80 other people, an Avondale College teacher, and Auckland City Hospital nurse who worked four shifts while infected.

Coromandel residents are anxiously waiting to hear if the virus has spread to their town, after Tuesday's case and his wife visited the area at the weekend.

Bloomfield said modelling shows cases could jump to as high as 120, especially because most of those who have already tested positive visited a number of highly populated areas including night clubs, a casino, a church and restaurants.

The Ministry of Health has identified more than 75 potential exposure sites, more than 60 across Auckland and 14 on the Coromandel Peninsula. The earliest location of interest dates back to August 3 - potentially signalling a much wider window of exposure.

New locations of interest have been added to the ministry website this morning, including Countdown Lynfield.

Bunnings Warehouse in Glenfield is also now on the list.

The latest locations of interest update shows 109 visits to 89 locations.

An update on wastewater testing results is also expected.

Daily samples are now being taken at Rosedale on Auckland's North Shore, where many of the cases are linked.

ESR has also increased the number of wastewater samples taken at other sites around Auckland.

Composite sampling of Whitianga and Coromandel Town was set up yesterday with further samples being taken in Coromandel at Pauanui, Tairua and Whangamata. Sampling at Thames will be under way today.

The first results from these samples can be expected tomorrow.

Wastewater testing is continuing at ESR's other 26 sites across the country.

Scores of people are continuing to get tested across Auckland, causing major traffic congestion near testing sites and up to 30-minute delays. Hundreds of cars have formed lines kilometres long for a second day at testing centres on Auckland's North Shore, as people wait hours for a test. Some people waited 90 minutes before the testing site even opened to get their spot in the queue.

Meanwhile, some people fear they might not have enough time to get home before the 48-hour grace period ends tonight. Some people in Queenstown are reporting having trouble getting flights home.

It was confirmed yesterday that New Zealand's community cases are linked to the Delta outbreak in New South Wales, but it is still unclear how.

NSW today recorded 681 new cases as its outbreak continues to worsen.

The Government is contacting all travellers from Australia into New Zealand during the relevant timeframe to find whether the first case is linked to them.

New Zealanders are being reminded wearing masks is now compulsory when visiting an essential service such as supermarkets and pharmacies, and while waiting at bus terminals and in taxis.

Some supermarkets warn people will be turned away if they are not wearing a mask.

The country was placed under alert level 4 restrictions from midnight on Tuesday for three days. It is likely Auckland and the Coromandel will be in lockdown for at least seven days.