

Covid 19 Delta outbreak: 19 new cases; Deputy PM Grant Robertson on infected patient who walked out of hospital (Neilson, 2021g)

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October 1 2021 There are 19 new cases of Covid-19 today, all in Auckland. Of today's cases, only one is yet to be linked to another case, with nine unlinked cases over the past 14 days.



By: **Michael Neilson**

Political reporter, NZ Herald

michael.neilson@nzherald.co.nz

There are 19 new cases of Covid-19 today, all in Auckland.

Of today's cases, only one is yet to be linked to another case. There have been nine unlinked cases over the past 14 days, director of public health Dr Caroline McElnay has confirmed.

Many clusters are now contained. Any new cases are among known contacts isolating, or dormant.

There are five active sub-clusters.

It was this work that continued to give the ministry the level of reassurance it was finding the spread of the outbreak, McElnay said.

Delta's infectiousness underpinned the daily case numbers, she said. Of notified cases, there could be an additional 35 cases in coming days among household contacts, so fluctuation in daily cases was expected.

There are 23 cases in hospital, four of which are in ICU.

"We are finding and reducing the spread of the Auckland outbreak," McElnay said.

McElnay and Deputy Prime Minister Grant Robertson fronted today's update, after 19 new cases were also revealed on Thursday - and two overnight at Middlemore Hospital.

The patient who self-discharged after testing positive at Middlemore was being moved into quarantine today, McElnay said.

A further six patients have now been discharged.

Hospitals the 'solution, not a problem'

McElnay said the Covid-positive patients at Middlemore are not unusual, because there are many sub-clusters in south Auckland.

She said Middlemore could plan for their arrival, and clinical staff were "doing an excellent job".

Auckland hospitals were used to dealing with Covid patients, she said.

The MIQ worker mentioned yesterday is now in a quarantine facility, and the source of their infection is still unknown as genome sequencing is yet to come.

There were more than 11,000 tests across Auckland in the past 24 hours, and 19,000 were processed nationwide. Of these, 360 swabs were taken in Henderson and 292 in Papakura. A total of 1152 swabs were taken across seven suburbs of interest yesterday.

There had been reports of physical violence and abuse against essential workers, McElnay said.

"I'm asking New Zealanders to please be kind and treat our essential workers with courtesy and respect," she said.

Robertson said it was encouraging that there is only one unlinked case, adding it was important to note that case numbers have been stable and represent expected cases of household and other contacts.

Robertson said Middlemore is the hospital that services communities where the outbreak is, and some people are arriving at ED completely unaware they have the virus. Also, some cases arrive quite unwell and had to be admitted.

There would be some where testing did not occur, Robertson said, but it was not a problem at the hospitals; rather, they are the solution.

"We do also really want to make sure people retain confidence in our hospitals", Robertson said "and it's important they still go there if they are unwell."

Cases could stay at home with the agreement of the medical officer of health if they had a medical condition or disability, Robertson said. He was not aware of people who were granted that then moving around.

According to McElnay, contact with these individuals is made daily to check on their wellbeing and to contain any infection. It was "only a very small number of exemptions given", she said - adding restrictions around the possibility of any spread of infection are just as tight as if the patients were in a facility.

McElnay said there was a broad-base surveillance plan to target testing in areas to make sure there is a good representative sample of Auckland and targeting suburbs of concern and that plan changes.

Robertson said the reality was bubbles were mixing, but it's not a "hosting of parties" type approach, but larger family groups interacting on a minimal basis like delivering a food parcel. He said from time to time this would lead to transmission.

McElnay said unlinked cases allowed authorities to "go on a hunt" to find where other cases might be, and this could create daily tweaking of surveillance testing. McElnay said new cases were picked up in suburbs of interest.

NZ remains open for business - Robertson

Robertson said the fourth round of the wage subsidy scheme opened for applications at 9am, for the September 28 - October 11 revenue round, with 652,103 applications for border wage subsidy approved since the outbreak started and \$4.2 billion of economic support paid out since.

The air connectivity scheme was extended until March next year to help with peak summer cargo season, Robertson said. The scheme enabled 8800 flights with air freight since last year with 85,000 people returning to New Zealand on those flights, representing 45 per cent of people passing through MIQ.

The Government had tried over 18 months to support sportspeople to come and go through MIQ but there was high demand at the moment and this had to be balanced with New Zealanders wanting to come home, Robertson said.

"It's a tough balance," he said.

The 'Reconnecting New Zealanders' plan will be making it easier for people in Australia to return to Aotearoa if they are citizens and a "graduated" system for others, Robertson said.

Australia's new border plan - to bring forward the easing of restrictions around international travel - "absolutely does not" show that New Zealand's plan has been slow.

Despite dropping somewhat, business confidence was still ahead of where it was in 2020, Robertson said.

He defended the country's presence at the Dubai 2020 Expo, saying it is "one of the biggest international trade shows in the world" and it's important "to show New Zealand remains open for business and there is a plan to reconnect with the world".

Robertson said a number of cases within this outbreak were people who don't have stable housing conditions, not just transitional housing tenants, and that's why a specific programme had been set up to work with community agencies.

"We do not have widespread community transition," Robertson said. "We have clusters of cases."

The Government was looking at testing rates before making a decision about alert level changes, Robertson said, and they needed Aucklanders to get tested this weekend.

Robertson said with the deadly Delta variant, the total number of cases is consistent, but the Government wants to know whether there are non-household contacts emerging and to drill down on those to understand the risk.

Positive case confirmed in Albany

Today's briefing comes after the Herald revealed that a resident living at The Grange development in Albany has tested positive for Covid.

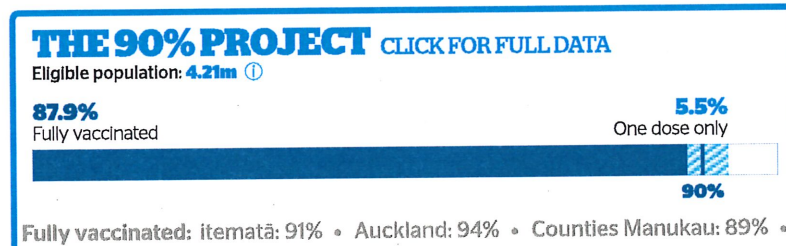
The daily number was a drop from 45 the day before, but still a vast increase from the days prior and experts say the Middlemore cases will make any move to level 2 in coming days "very risky".

The two people tested positive at Middlemore Hospital in Auckland's south on Wednesday night, and 66 patients are now deemed close contacts of the pair.

One of the patients then decided to self-discharge from the hospital after learning of their positive test.

When asked how many people, in total, had turned up to the hospital's emergency department for unrelated health conditions and then tested positive for Covid, Middlemore Hospital chief medical officer Pete Watson didn't give a figure.

However, he said: "There's a steady stream."



The two people from Wednesday arrived at the emergency department separately - and did not know each other nor were they connected in any way.

They were among six Covid-positive people arriving at the hospital that day.

The other four people already knew they had tested positive for the virus and were arriving for planned treatment, Watson said.

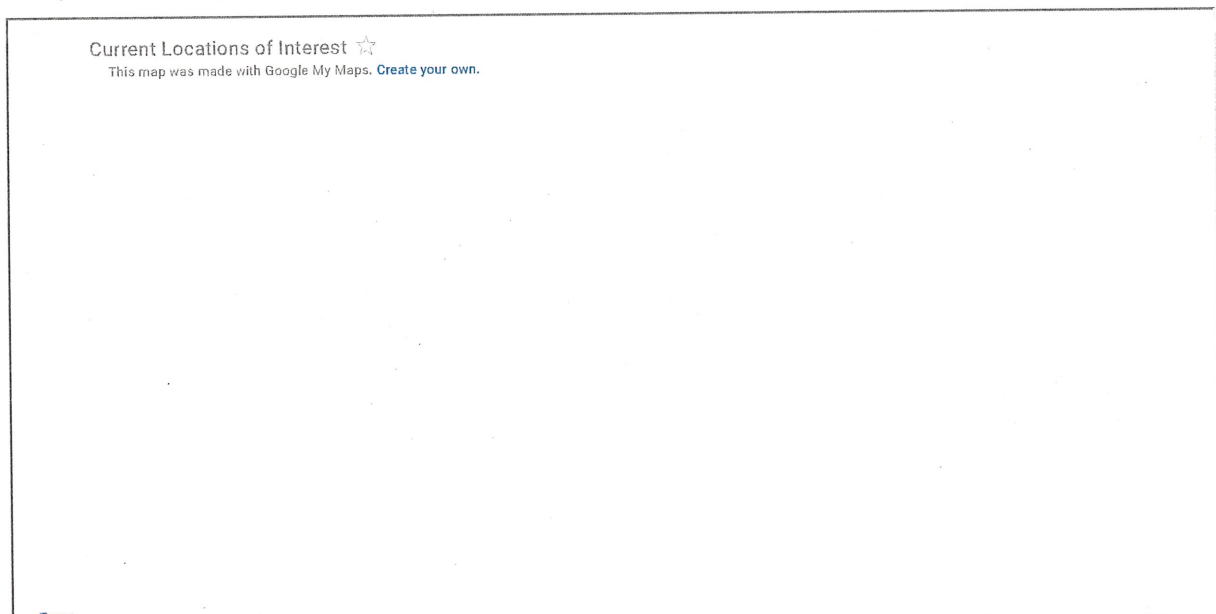
Middlemore currently has nine Covid patients admitted.

Covid-19 modeller Professor Michael Plank, meanwhile, told TVNZ's Breakfast show that there are "concerning signs" it is going to be difficult to keep this current Delta outbreak under control in alert level 3.

"There are worrying signs when you have cases popping up out of the blue and coming into hospital and then testing positive - that it is going to be difficult to contain the outbreak going forward," he said.

In terms of Auckland moving to alert level 2, Plank said doing so in the current situation - with cases still showing up in the community - could lead to more hospitalisation and ultimately more deaths.

Having cases show up in places and suburbs where you're not looking for them was worrying, Plank said.



"It could lead to cases growing very rapidly if we moved to level 2," he said.

"I think it would be extremely risky to move to level 2 at the current time.

"It is a dangerous time."

Meanwhile, leading microbiologist Dr Siouxsie Wiles has urged Kiwis to get vaccinated, warning that New Zealand could see "high levels of hospitalisations and deaths around Christmas-time" should the country's case numbers follow the trends in Australia.

Wiles shared a graph by chief science adviser Dame Juliet Gerrard comparing New Zealand's Delta outbreak to those in New South Wales and Victoria.

Where to get a vaccination in Auckland - without a booking

