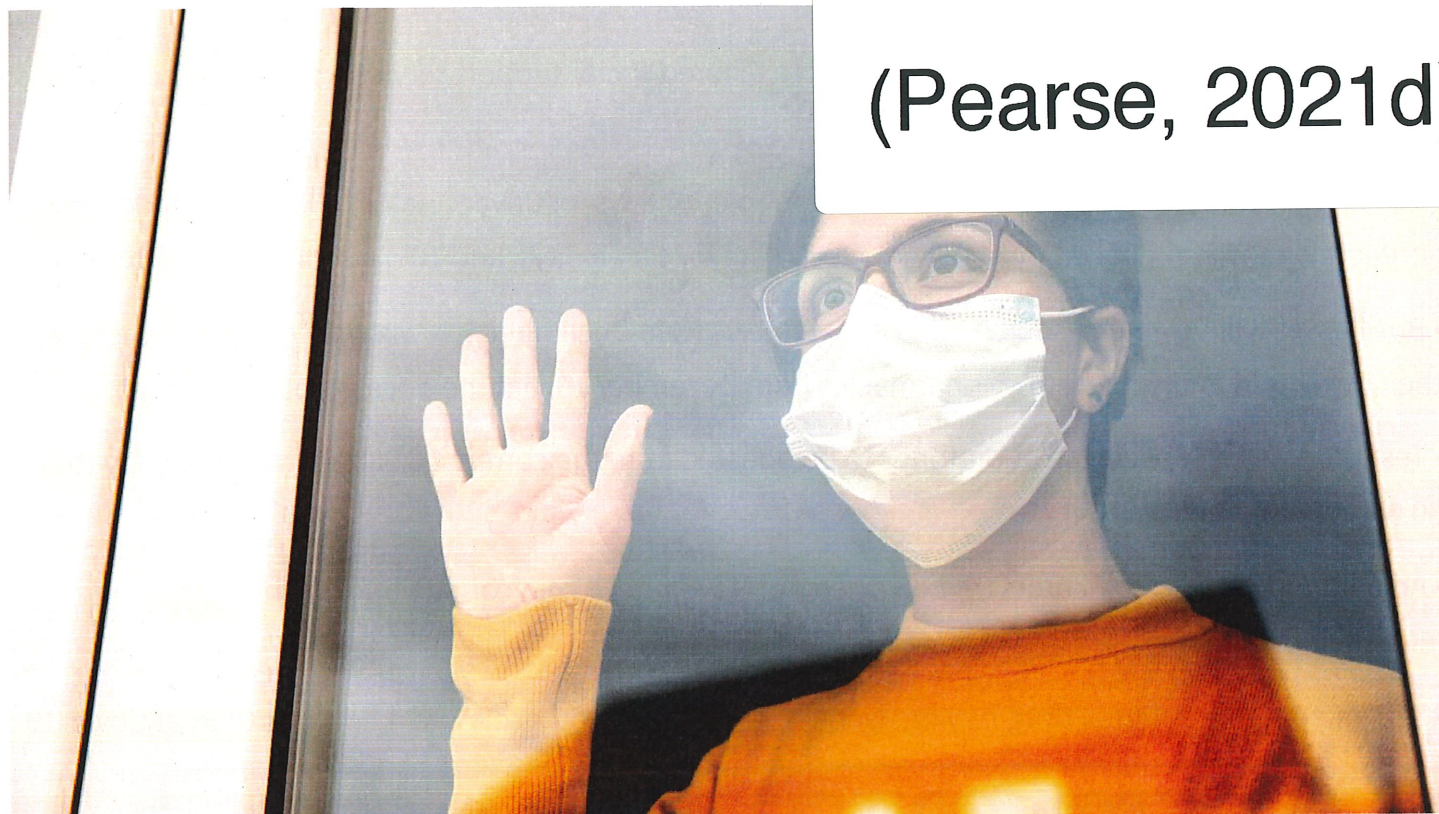


# Covid 19 Delta outbreak: Explainer - How \$1.5b will transform virus testing and home isolation

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(Pearse, 2021d)

A new framework for home isolation, which is to become much more common in New Zealand, was released on Thursday, named the Covid Care in the Community model. Photo / 123rf.com

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Questions still remain on what happens to summer travellers who catch Covid-19 away from home and the price of rapid antigen tests at pharmacies after today's \$1.5 billion investment into testing and home isolation.

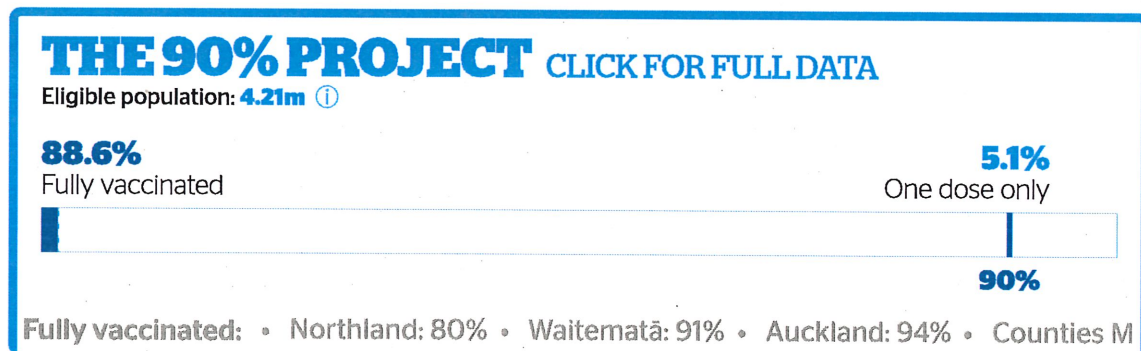
But one of South Auckland's most prominent health providers says the updated protocols around case management will give greater certainty to the growing number of whānau likely to isolate at home in the coming months.

As the National Party fell into chaos this morning, Labour ministers Andrew Little (Health), Carmel Sepuloni (Social development) and Ayesha Verrall (Associate health) revealed a range of announcements related to the Government's approach to Covid-19 under the traffic light system in a week's time.



## Key points:

- A person with Covid-19 isolating at home will receive a call within 24 hours from a healthcare provider and will receive a health pack tailored to their needs within 48 hours
- Local health providers to be involved earlier and on a greater scale for those who test positive for Covid-19
- Welfare teams set up in each region to facilitate tailored social support services for people isolating at home
- Ten days of self-isolation for fully vaccinated people, 14 days for unvaccinated. Fully vaccinated close contacts who weren't linked by household to isolate for seven days, and 10 days for unvaccinated
- Businesses will be able to source rapid antigen tests from December 1, Kiwis will be able to purchase their own rapid antigen test from pharmacies from December 15, but the price is not yet decided
- Test processing capacity at laboratories to be boosted from the current 16,000 PCR tests per day to 60,000 by early next year
- An additional 475 investigators trained by end of November to aid contact tracing and case investigation efforts
- \$300m boost for national drug-buying agency Pharmac to purchase more medicines to treat Covid-19



## Home isolation

Under the new Covid Care in the Community model, people who catch Covid-19 will receive a call from a healthcare provider - likely to be local - within 24 hours to discuss health and social needs.

"The idea is the person who makes that call knows enough about their circumstances and their health conditions, so that the person talking to them communicates in an effective way," Little said.

Within 48 hours, people will receive a bespoke health pack to aid their recovery.

Almost 1500 Aucklanders were isolating at home with Covid-19, a number which was expected to balloon across the country as social restrictions are lowered.

The duration of isolation was also confirmed by Verrall, who stated fully vaccinated people with the virus needed to self-isolate for 10 days, as long as they were asymptomatic for their final 72 hours.

For unvaccinated cases, they would still require 14 days. Fully vaccinated close contacts who weren't household contacts of a case only needed seven days of self-isolation, while unvaccinated contacts needed 10.

Household contacts required 10 days, regardless of vaccination as the risk of transmission was higher, Verrall said.

A key consideration with summer fast approaching was how holidaymakers could self-isolate if they couldn't return home without risking transmission.

Little outlined it wouldn't be possible for positive cases to fly home for isolation, which meant DHBs would need to house any visitors stranded who were unable to safely isolate but didn't require hospital care.

When pressed on what measures DHBs could use, Little said local health officials had devised plans on this matter and they were being stress-tested by the Ministry of Health currently.

However, he acknowledged some regions had "limited opportunities" for alternative accommodation.

## Testing and case investigation

From December 1, business will be able to order rapid antigen tests (RAT) for staff and by December 15, they will be available for Kiwis to purchase from their pharmacy.

Despite being less than three weeks away, Verrall couldn't say how much they would cost.

"The price is being actively worked through by the Ministry of Health," she said.

While they are less effective at detecting the virus than the nasal swab, RATs can provide an indicative result in about 15 minutes, and generally cost between \$10 to \$15.

Verrall was quick to clarify all rapid antigen testing used for public health services in hospitals, aged care facilities and community providers would be free.

The inclusion of RAT was a key component of the new national testing strategy which would see more surveillance testing of the asymptomatic done in areas where the virus was less prevalent.

The strategy also featured a significant boost in laboratory capacity to process tests quicker.

For months, the Government has copped criticism over test results taking days to be returned, struggling to meet its commitment to return 80 per cent of tests within 24 hours.

Verrall was confident the system could be further resourced to turn around 60,000 tests per day - almost four times more than the current capacity of 16,000.

Further changes had been made to the contact tracing system with the addition of 475 staff as part of a new national case investigation service.



Locations of interest would become less of a focus, as would the casual-plus contact definition, as both had proved less worthwhile in managing transmission in the Delta outbreak than previously thought.

## Welfare boost

More than \$200 million of today's package would be allocated to creating regional welfare teams to ensure whānau isolating at home had the necessary support.

The teams would work alongside other Government agencies, iwi/Māori providers and community providers for assistance with housing, food and income.

Sepuloni said funding hadn't been allocated by region as a more fluid approach was required.

"We can't pre-empt where the pressure points might be once we move to the [traffic light system] and that's why we do need some flexibility to be able to ensure we can support those locally-led responses in whatever way suits that area," she said.

While criticism had been levelled at DHBs earlier in the rollout for not engaging community providers, both Sepuloni and Little were confident such issues wouldn't hold back necessary welfare responses.

## What do providers say?

South Seas Healthcare chief executive Lemalu Silao Vaisola-Sefo said today's announcements reflected what health care providers had been requesting for months.

"It's got to be better than the current system," he said.

"It's a start but we've always been saying that the sooner our GPs are notified, it gives us that ability to respond a lot faster."

He cited an instance where the South Auckland provider went 10 days without being told one of its enrolled patients was isolating in the community - something which should change under the new model.

"This is a massive shift, we should be able to get [people] wrap-around support a lot faster."

Pasifika health leader Dr Collin Tukuitonga said the various measures appeared to be useful but implementation would be the key concern.

He pointed to the potential overload DHBs with excessive summer traffic - like Northland and Tairāwhiti- would experience if many people needed alternative accommodation to isolate.

"They're not big robust health services like Auckland, but anything over and above would stretch them."