

## Releases (/releases)

# (Hipkins, 2021h)

SHARE THIS

21 DECEMBER 2021

## Omicron: Government's plan to minimise risk



HON CHRIS HIPKINS(/MINISTER/HON-CHRIS-HIPKINS)

COVID-19 Response (/portfolio/labour-2020-2023/covid-19-response)

- The interval between the second dose and the booster shot reduced from 6 months to 4 months
- Over 82 per cent of vaccinated New Zealanders eligible for a booster by end of Feb 2022
- Eligible border and health workers required to get booster dose
- Pre-departure test requirement to enter NZ reduced from 72 hours to 48 hours before travel
- Phased border re-opening pushed out to the end of February
- Temporary change to MIQ – length of stay increased to 10 days for all travellers, with no self-isolation component
- Everyone on an international flight with a positive case to be treated as a close contact
- All countries removed from Very High Risk country list
- Cabinet confirms decision to roll out paediatric doses of Pfizer for 5-11s. Rollout to start from 17 January prior to school returning in 2022.
- Cabinet confirms use of traffic light system to manage outbreak and in the event of Omicron outbreaks areas will move into the red traffic light setting

Cabinet has agreed a suite of precautionary measures to keep Omicron out of the community for as long as possible, COVID-19 Response Minister Chris Hipkins said today.

"All of the evidence so far points to Omicron being the most transmissible COVID-19 variant yet and public health advice says that soon, every case that comes into MIQ will be Omicron," Chris Hipkins said.

"But experts still don't know how severe it is. So while it's sweeping the globe at a bewildering speed and appears to be the dominant variant, how sick it makes people and the impact it has on health systems is not yet fully understood.

"With over 70 countries around the world reporting Omicron cases and its high transmissibility, our plan is to get as prepared as we can by speeding up boosters and strengthening our border to keep Omicron out of the community for as long as possible.

"We start our response to Omicron with a number of advantages on our side. We have over 90 per cent and rising of the population fully vaccinated, we still have our border protections and MIQ in place, school has finished for the year and we are heading into summer when we are outdoors more.

"But we need to do more. Parts of the world are going back into lockdown and experiencing major disruption, and with these extra steps we aim to keep Omicron at bay to ensure New Zealanders get the break they deserve and businesses can remain open.

### Boosters

"The first step in our plan is accelerating the booster rollout, following advice from the Director-General.

"The advice from the COVID-19 Technical Advisory Group is that shortening the period between the second and booster doses of the Pfizer vaccine is an appropriate and pragmatic step and is in line with what other countries are doing.

"Data is emerging that a booster dose with Pfizer provides better protection than two-dose course against the Omicron variant.

"While two doses is likely to hold a good degree of protection against severe disease from Omicron, a third dose is likely to offer great protection against transmission of COVID-19 and reducing the chance of more serious infections.