

Secret state report reveals swamped ICUs; Omicron will evade face masks

11:49am, Wednesday 19 January 2022. By Will Trafford



(Trafford, 2022)

The government is bracing itself for an Omicron outbreak that will swamp the country's health system and elude the precautionary measures which have prevented coronavirus transmission so far, according to a document leaked to Māori Television.

The classified *Across Government Situation Report* reveals advisers' fears of panic buying of food, protective masks and medication should Omicron eventually spread and says home-made face coverings are "unlikely to be effective".

"Facial coverings made from cloth materials are not sufficient in preventing or reducing infection of Omicron," the document prepared for the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet says.

The document from the Insights and Reporting Team in the Covid-19 Group says while community cases are decreasing, Omicron in MIQ is on a tear and given the variant's transmissibility, it's likely it will eventually make it through the border.

"In the event of community transmission of Omicron, community cases will almost certainly experience a sharp increase in a short time frame."

The report highlights concerns intensive care beds are 'limited' across district health boards, with just one-third, or 108 ICU beds (36%) available now.

No ICU on West Coast or Hawke's Bay

A chief concern is there is "no ICU capacity" at West Coast and Hawke's Bay DHBs.

The report says while vaccination rates are generally high, booster rates and tamariki vaccination rates are not. Omicron can more easily evade the vaccine, which means it's likely to reach at risk communities, such as Māori.

"Although two doses of vaccines have been shown to help against hospitalisation and severe disease, research shows it is less effective at preventing infection, which will likely enable the virus to spread to more vulnerable communities."

The report says the booster and child vaccination programmes will mitigate infections.

The report says given many haven't been exposed to previous waves of Covid-19 like Delta, New Zealand could be harder hit than the US and Europe, which are now battling their own Omicron outbreaks.

"Most will not have any protective immunity benefits that may arise from prior infection," it says.