

Office of the Minister for COVID-19 Response

Cabinet

COVID-19 RESPONSE: 20 SEPTEMBER REVIEW OF ALERT LEVEL SETTINGS

Proposal

- 1 This paper seeks Cabinet's agreement to:
 - 1.1 move Auckland to Alert Level 3 at 11.59pm Tuesday 21 September until at least 11.59pm Tuesday 5 October;
 - 1.2 keep the rest of New Zealand at Alert Level 2 until at least 11.59pm Tuesday 5 October; and
 - 1.3 review these Alert Level settings on Monday 4 October.
- 2 The paper also contains proposals for permitted movement across Alert Level boundaries and testing requirements. Adjusted Alert Level 2 and 3 settings are also proposed.

Relation to government priorities

- 3 This paper concerns the Government's response to COVID-19.

Summary

- 4 As at 9am Monday 20 September, there have been 1,071 confirmed cases detected since 17 August 2021, of which 1,054 are in Auckland and 17 in Wellington. There were 22 new cases in the 24 hours to 9am Monday 20 September, all of which are in Auckland and Waikato.
- 5 As at 5pm 19 September, the Director-General is confident that the outbreak in the Auckland region is contained. The outbreak appears to have peaked on Saturday 28 August, with daily numbers generally decreasing or remaining static at low levels as the expected tail of the outbreak manifests. There has been no indication of any widespread community transmission outside Auckland and Wellington. However, I am concerned about the cases reported last night in the northern Waikato.
- 6 On this basis, the Director-General's interim public health advice is that Auckland can move down to Alert Level 3 from 11.59pm Tuesday 21 September. He also recommends that the remainder of the country should move down from elevated Alert Level 2 settings to normal Alert Level 2 settings (with some minor changes, as outlined in Appendix 2) from 11.59pm Tuesday 21 September. The Director-General recommends that these Alert Level settings remain in place for two weeks, and a strong focus on vaccination and enhanced testing continues across the country.

- 7 Assessment of the proposed Alert Level options against non-health factors indicates ongoing and increasing challenges related to financial support, economic, social and wellbeing impacts. Public attitudes of general fatigue are intensifying and willingness to comply with some public health measures is reportedly reducing. A reduction in Auckland's Alert Level restrictions to Alert Level 3 is likely to alleviate some of these concerns.
- 8 Last Monday, Cabinet agreed in principle to move Auckland to Alert level 3 from 11.59pm Tuesday 21 September, subject to further public health advice and review at Cabinet today. On the basis of the Director-General's advice, I am confident that we can safely move Auckland to Alert Level 3 as planned. While Auckland remains at a higher Alert Level, with active clusters of COVID-19 in the community, I do not suggest moving any other part of the country to Alert Level 1 at this time. Keeping the rest of New Zealand at Alert Level 2 is consistent with the risk assessments that underpin our Alert Level framework and reducing the risk of community transmission outside of Auckland. I agree with the Director-General's proposal that the levels are next reviewed in two weeks. However, in light of the cases in the northern Waikato reported last night, further advice will be provided today on moving the affected community to a higher Alert Level by extending the Auckland Alert Level or use of a section 70 notice.
- 9 I propose to consider implementing any changes to Alert Level 2 over time. Initially, I propose to increase the indoor gathering or capacity limits and remove the no standing rule on public transport. I am seeking Cabinet's views on progressing two of the Director-General's other proposed changes today, related to physical distancing and face coverings.
- 10 The remainder of the Director-General's recommended adjustments to the Alert Level 2 settings (see Appendix 2) are more complex and require more detailed consideration. I am therefore proposing officials undertake further work on these and report back to Ministers with Power to Act on options to progress them in the week of 27 September.
- 11 We previously agreed that permissions for moving across an Alert Level 3/2 boundary remain consistent with the permitted movements under an Alert Level 4/2 boundary. I propose revoking the additional permissions for travel to visit the dying, accompany a tūpāpaku or attend a funeral or tangihanga that Cabinet agreed to on 13 September. Permission to travel in these situations will instead be dealt with by exemption requests to the Director-General.
- 12 The paper also details the testing framework for personal movements and the use of saliva testing as part of testing requirements. It confirms that people moving across an Alert Level 3/2 boundary for permitted personal reasons will need a test. Where the travel may be regular people will be required to carry evidence of having been tested in the last seven days prior to travel. Where travel is more likely to be one-off, a negative COVID-19 test, returned in the 72 hours prior to travel, will be required. The Director-General of Health will also require a negative pre-departure test as a condition of any personal exemptions granted for one-off travel, e.g. travelling to attend the funeral of a close relative.

PART 1: SITUATION REPORT, ALERT LEVELS, AND ASSESSMENT AGAINST HEALTH AND NON-HEALTH FACTORS

How we make Alert Level decisions

- 13 Cabinet has previously agreed to use eight factors to guide decisions on the appropriate Alert Level settings for New Zealand [CAB-20-MIN-0199; CAB-20-MIN-0387 refer]. This includes the Director-General's assessment of a range of health factors; evidence of the measures' impact on society, at-risk populations, and public attitudes; and our ability to operationalise the restrictions.

Situation report

- 14 Following detection of a case of community transmission of COVID-19 on 17 August, Auckland is currently at Alert Level 4, and the rest of the country is currently at Alert Level 2.
- 15 As at 9am Monday 20 September, there have been 1,071 confirmed cases detected since 17 August 2021, of which 1,054 are in Auckland and 17 are in Wellington. There were 22 new cases in the 24 hours to 9am Monday 20 September, all of which are in Auckland and northern Waikato.
- 16 As set out in the Director-General of Health's interim health advice, the ongoing decline in cases, lack of unexpected wastewater testing results, and reduced proportion of cases infectious in the community suggest that the current outbreak in Auckland is gradually coming under control. There is no widespread COVID-19 transmission outside of Auckland and close to 100 percent of known contacts have been reached and had at least one test.
- 17 Targeted testing and communications around testing if symptomatic continue, to gain reassurance that all chains of transmission have been identified and interrupted. Daily tests are tracking considerably higher than the 7,000 tests per day target in place earlier in the outbreak. The testing strategy remains flexible, focused on a mix of surveillance and targeted testing at areas of concern. In addition to usual testing, over the coming weeks a pilot of rapid antigen testing will commence at Middlemore Hospital ED, further testing will be considered in high-risk locations where people intermingle, and a more granular level of testing will be undertaken around specific cases and high-risk locations.

Updated modelling in relation to the current outbreak

- 18 Te Pūnaha Matatini (TPM) has continued to provide updated modelling results from its "branching process" and "contagion network" models in relation to the current outbreak.

Simulating a move to Alert Level 3

- 19 With the low number of daily new cases, stochastic (random/chance) events will start to dominate outcomes in both models and the real world. An individual case's circumstances (size of household, number of other close contacts, whether they are Alert Level 4 workers, distancing behaviour of those people, etc.) make a big difference to the transmission risks associated with the case.
- 20 Further scenarios for a relaxation to Alert Level 3 have been modelled, assuming a move to Alert Level 3 on 22 September, with "very optimistic", "optimistic" and "pessimistic" parameters for transmission under Alert Level 3. These scenarios are calibrated to represent higher or lower potential transmission in communities and workplaces. The "optimistic" scenario is judged to be consistent with behaviours during Alert Level 3 in 2020 (prior to the emergence of the Delta variant).
- 21 In the "very optimistic" scenario, the range of potential trajectories under Alert Level 3 is similar to those likely under a continued Alert Level 4, with "complete case isolation" achieved by 16 October in around 50% of simulations.¹
- 22 In the "optimistic" scenario, the median case numbers continue to decline, though the modelling results suggest a "longer tail" to the outbreak than at Alert Level 4, and therefore a greater risk that cases may begin to rise again. By 16 October "complete case isolation" is achieved in around 25 percent of simulations.
- 23 Under the "pessimistic" transmission assumptions, there is a slow increase in the median number of simulated cases by early- to mid-October. The modelling suggests that a clear signal of growth from daily case numbers would not be expected until around 10 days after the shift to Alert Level 3, and by 16 October "complete case isolation" is achieved in fewer than 20 percent of simulations.
- 24 Figure 1 displays the simulations in each scenario. The left-hand side of the vertical dashed line is the same in each plot. To the right of this vertical line, each plot shows the simulated trajectories under the very optimistic, optimistic and pessimistic transmission assumptions. Emergent case-specific

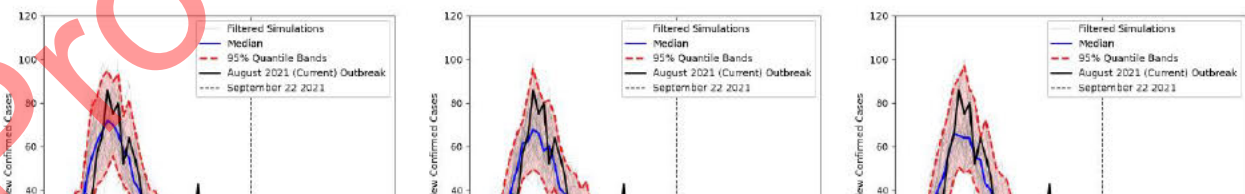


Figure 1 – Daily new reported cases from an ensemble of contagion network simulations where Alert Level 3 is introduced from 22 September 2021. From left to right, these graphs show the "very optimistic", "optimistic" and "pessimistic" scenarios.

¹ "Complete case isolation" refers to a state where all active and future cases are in quarantine or isolation (which is effectively equivalent to being on a path to elimination with all cases identified and managed).

information should be used as an early indicator of whether downside scenarios are becoming more likely.

- 25 As with the previous Alert Level review Cabinet paper, officials continue to advise that the modelled scenarios should be considered in conjunction with case-specific information. Case-specific factors should inform Cabinet's consideration of whether "very optimistic", "optimistic" or "pessimistic" simulations are more likely in the current circumstances. Under Alert Level 3, the higher R_{eff} scenarios (and the poorer simulated outcomes within these) are more likely to eventuate where:
- 25.1 there remain a significant number of undetected cases in the community;
 - 25.2 new cases have periods where they are likely to be infectious in the community; and
 - 25.3 new cases are infectious in the community – more likely in higher-risk settings where there are numerous, hard to trace, contacts.

Director-General of Health's assessment against the health factors

Likelihood that the Auckland outbreak is contained

- 26 The Director-General's interim assessment is that he is increasingly confident that the outbreak in Auckland is being contained. At the time of the assessment, all recent cases had been reported in the Auckland region, with one recent case (reported on Saturday 18 September) suspected to have been infectious in the community in Waikato since Saturday 11 September. Three household contacts have subsequently tested positive near Mangatangi school in the northern Waikato (an Alert Level 2 area). Swabbing has been set up at the local marae, the school has been closed and is being deep cleaned, and pupils and families have been notified to get a test and isolate until they get a negative result. All students at the school are being treated as close contacts at this time. The Director-General expects to see more positive cases related to this family.
- 27 Another case (truck driver) visited Mt Maunganui and Cambridge. The events outside of Auckland were considered to be low risk at the time of the interim advice. The last time a case was infectious in the community in Wellington was on Friday 20 August.
- 28 The outbreak in Auckland appears to have peaked on Saturday 28 August. The number of new daily cases reported in the Auckland region have been decreasing but have plateaued at around 10 to 20 cases in recent days. An update on any recent positive cases of interest will be provided verbally by the Director-General of Health at Cabinet today.

Update on unlinked cases and sub-clusters of concern

- 29 According to Ministry of Health risk assessment data, there are currently 32 cases that have not been epidemiologically linked to the initial cluster. Only seven cases are unlinked within the last 14 days with investigations for a link ongoing.
- 30 There are currently 9 epidemiologically linked subclusters within this outbreak and 10 epidemiologically unlinked subclusters (as defined by ARPHS). Most subclusters are now dormant (no new cases for over a week) or controlled (any new cases are known household contacts in isolation). There are two clusters of particular concern that are being closely monitored due to welfare and social compliance issues. These are the Māngere-Manurewa households (73 confirmed cases) and the South Auckland Households 2 (24 cases). The continued identification of cases in unknown contacts in these sub-clusters suggests that their edges may not yet be contained.
- 31 All other sub-clusters appear to be contained. s9(2)(b)(ii)

Testing rates

- 32 Overall, testing rates have been very good across the Auckland region. The majority of known contacts have been reached and over 98 percent of these contacts have had at least one test. Close to 100 percent of known contacts outside of Auckland have been reached and have had at least one test.
- 33 In the last seven days to Sunday 19 September, 92,264 tests were completed. There were 8,084 tests across New Zealand in the 24 hours to 9am Monday 20 September. Approximately 3.2 million tests have been completed since the country shifted to Alert Level 4 in August, with a seven-day rolling average of 13,177 tests.
- 34 Targeted asymptomatic testing is also currently underway in the Auckland region focussing on DHB staff, health care workers and other Alert Level 4 workers. This targeted asymptomatic testing will continue over the next few weeks, particularly in affected communities. Testing in affected suburbs has been especially high with ten percent of the population being tested in the last two weeks. People with cold or flu symptoms in high-risk suburbs are being asked to get a COVID-19 test regardless of how mild their symptoms are.
- 35 Since 1 September, 25,429 Alert Level 4 workers have been tested. This has included 8,475 DHB workers, 5,280 other healthcare workers and 11,674 other Alert Level 4 workers.
- 36 There have been no unexpected wastewater detections outside of the Auckland region since last Monday 13 September.

Health system capacity including surveillance and contact tracing systems

- 37 As at 9am Sunday 19 September, there were 13 current hospitalisations associated with the current outbreak (10 are active cases and three are recovered cases). Of these 13 cases, seven are in Middlemore (including three ICU patients), one is in North Shore Hospital and five are in Auckland City Hospital (including once ICU patient). Three patients require ventilation.
- 38 There are no issues with the supply of laboratory testing equipment and personal protective equipment despite the surge in demand during this outbreak.
- 39 As at 9am Saturday 18 September, there were 39,341 contacts identified in relation to the Auckland community cases recorded in the National Contact Tracing Solution. Of these 39,341 contacts, 1,282 are Close Plus contacts (98 percent have been contacted and advised to isolate and be tested), 34,309 are Close contacts (90 percent have been reached and advised to isolate and be tested) and 3,750 are Casual Plus contacts (49 percent have been contacted and advised to isolate and be tested).
- 40 Over the last two weeks, case and contact management has become more complex. This is based on the communities that have been affected and the associated level of support that is required to ensure the necessary engagement with the public health advice.
- 41 In response, public health units from outside Auckland have supported overall contact tracing service by leading specific tasks (including source and case investigations). The National Investigation and Tracing Centre (NITC) has activated surge capacity from two primary call centres and there is sufficient capacity to manage a large increase of contacts if required.
- 42 Although there has been good progress over the past week to share work across the country and to identify additional staff for Auckland, the workforce is stretched and fatigued. Further recruitment is underway to find critical resources and ARPHS has developed resourcing plans for the next two months.

Director-General's of Health's conclusions

- 43 Based on the most recent public health risk assessment completed on 19 September, the Director-General's interim health assessment is:
- 43.1 Auckland cases have been decreasing or remaining static at low levels as the expected tail of the outbreak manifests.
- 43.2 There is no widespread COVID-19 transmission outside of Auckland and close to 100 percent of known contacts have been reached and had at least one test.
- 43.3 The risk of community transmission in Auckland is medium, with the risk being low for the rest of New Zealand.

- 44 Based on this assessment the Director-General's interim public health advice is that:
- 44.1 Auckland moves down to Alert Level 3 from 11.59pm Tuesday 21 September for a period of two weeks;
 - 44.2 The remainder of the country moves back down from elevated risk Delta Alert Level 2 settings to normal Alert Level 2 settings (with minor changes as set out in Appendix 2); and
 - 44.3 These Alert Level settings are next reviewed on Sunday 3 October for further consideration by Cabinet on 4 October 2021.
- 45 Enhanced symptomatic and asymptomatic testing, and daily expanded wastewater testing will continue in the Auckland region. As part of ongoing vigilance, the following are also planned for the rest of New Zealand:
- 45.1 a strong focus on symptomatic testing throughout New Zealand, and enhanced wastewater testing, in particular, in cities with managed isolation and quarantine facilities.
 - 45.2 continued efforts throughout New Zealand, to get the highest possible vaccination rates, including among secondary school students.
- 46 During previous outbreaks, Auckland has moved down Alert Levels within relatively short periods of time once an outbreak has been contained. The Director-General anticipates that, due to the increased transmissibility of the Delta variant and the risk that even one case in the community poses, Auckland will need an extended period at lower Alert Levels.

Proposal regarding Alert Levels

- 47 On the basis of the latest public health risk assessment and the Director-General's interim public health advice, I propose Cabinet agrees to:
- 47.1 move Auckland to Alert Level 3 at 11.59pm Tuesday 21 September; until at least 11.59pm Tuesday 5 October; and
 - 47.2 keep the rest of New Zealand at Alert Level 2 until at least 11.59pm Tuesday 5 October.
- 48 I propose these settings are reviewed by Cabinet in two weeks on Monday, 4 October. In light of the cases reported last night in the northern Waikato, further advice will be provided today about options to move the affected community in the Auckland to a higher Alert Level by including it in the Auckland Alert Level area or through a section 70 notice.
- 49 If the proposed Alert Level changes are agreed to, Auckland businesses and services that are permitted to operate at Alert Level 3 will be able to reopen from 11.59pm Tuesday 21 September. Necessary work to prepare the premises for reopening will be permitted to be undertaken ahead of the shift in

Alert Levels, while Auckland remains at Alert Level 4.² At Alert Level 3, schools and early learning services are open for children and young people up to year 10 whose parents and caregivers have to leave home to work and there is no one at home to look after them. At Alert Level 3 children and young people remain in bubbles of 10 at school and early learning service. There is only limited capacity for onsite learning at Level 3. Schools and early learning centres may need up to 48 hours following an announcement to move to Alert Level 3 to prepare to reopen.

- 50 To provide additional reassurance about Auckland moving to Alert Level 3, I suggest the following recommendations made by the Director-General are also carried out in the Auckland region:
- 50.1 Continued relationship building with affected high-risk community;
 - 50.2 Continued enhanced testing to identify cases in unknown contacts, including exploring surveillance testing of businesses operating at Alert level 3; and
 - 50.3 Ongoing drive to rapidly increase vaccination rates across Auckland.

Assessment of the proposed measures/options against the non-health factors

- 51 I have assessed the options against the non-health factors agreed by Cabinet, as set out below. While I remain aware of the economic impact of Alert Level 4 restrictions on Auckland, I am reassured by traffic and electronic card spending recovery in areas outside of Auckland since the shift to lower Alert Levels. Pressure on at-risk populations, mental health impacts, and demand for essential support (including food parcels) continue as Alert Level restrictions endure, especially in Auckland. Moving Auckland to Alert Level 3 is likely to alleviate many of these issues. Compliance with Alert Level restrictions and other public health measures should continue to be encouraged, particularly as willingness to comply is reportedly reducing for some measures and general fatigue from Alert Level restrictions intensifies.

Economic impacts from Alert Levels

- 52 There is considerable uncertainty about the size of the impact of the Alert Level restrictions. Treasury undertook a full re-calibration of the impacts of the Alert Level restrictions in the BEFU forecasts in April 2021. These estimates have subsequently been updated to reflect changes to tighten Alert Level 2 settings as well as the spill-over effects from Auckland being at Alert Level 4 while the rest of the country is at lower Alert Levels.

Table 2: Approximate economic impacts of the Alert Level restrictions relative to Alert Level 1 (rounded to nearest \$10m)³

² Clause 25(2)(a)(ii) of the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Alert Level Requirements) Order (No 11) 2021 refers.

³ These projections are based on "Delta Alert Level 2" settings, including a cap of 50 people for indoor hospitality venues.

Restrictions	Reduction in economic activity per week	
AL3 in Auckland, AL2 rest of country	\$260 million	4% of national GDP
AL4 in Auckland, AL2 rest of North Island, AL1 South Island	\$690 million	11% of national GDP
AL4 in Auckland, AL2 rest of country	\$700 million	12% of national GDP
AL4 across all of NZ	\$1,520 million	25% of national GDP

- 53 The impacts will differ across industries and within regions. Moving Auckland from Alert Level 4 to Alert Level 3 will enable a significant increase in work activity, with industries such as construction, wholesale trade, and food services expected to see the largest increases.
- 54 These estimates are derived from the observed impact previous Alert Level escalations have had on activity and they do not account for potential changes over time (such as firms adapting their behaviour).
- 55 High-frequency economic indicators (traffic and electronic card spending) continue to be lower than normal in Auckland, while in areas outside of Auckland they have made a full recovery.
- 56 Businesses continue to express concerns regarding supply chain disruption and labour shortages. These issues are reportedly acute in construction and related sectors due to strong demand, global shipping issues, and Auckland's continued Alert Level 4 restrictions. Supply-side pressures were prevalent before the current outbreak (due to factors such as border settings) and will likely remain even as Alert Level settings are lowered.
- 57 Previous lockdowns indicate that while activity does fall sharply at higher Alert Levels, a significant amount is deferred rather than lost, if the time spent under higher Alert Level restrictions is kept short. Private sector forecasters also expect resilience. The major banks have reported far less concern from customers than last year.

Economic impact of revised Alert Level 2 settings

- 58 The Treasury has considered proposals to loosen indoor gathering or capacity limits under Alert Level 2 (outlined in Part 3 of this paper). The economic impact of these proposed changes is difficult to quantify. However, the Treasury expects these changes will offset a significant proportion of the approximately \$10 million of economic activity per week that was estimated to be lost due to the lower gathering limits. The sectors most likely to benefit from this proposed change are accommodation and food services, and arts and recreation. Continued face covering-use requirements (relative to the original Alert Level 2) may dampen some activity, although this impact will

likely diminish over time as people become more accustomed to wearing face coverings as part of everyday life.

- 59 The Ministry of Social Development (MSD), other social agencies, and NEMA continue to monitor the social impacts of any change in Alert Levels, and any additional support that might be required for people and communities.
- 60 The Wage Subsidy Scheme August 2021 has had strong uptake with \$2,098 million paid across two payments as at Thursday 16 September, supporting 1,198,084 jobs. The vast majority of jobs supported have been for businesses with under 500 employees. The August 2021 Resurgence Support Payment Scheme has had strong uptake as well with \$572 million paid to 185,000 businesses as of Friday 17 September. The vast majority of support (93 percent of recipients) has been for businesses with fewer than 10 employees.
- 61 The number of people on a main benefit increased by 10,272 in the four weeks to Friday 10 September and while further increases are likely, the rate of growth has slowed considerably. Food grants increased significantly in the first two weeks after lockdown, peaking 81 percent higher than before lockdown for the week of 27 August. They have since fallen, but remain 20 percent higher than pre-lockdown for the week of 10 September. The Auckland region is now receiving 38 percent of all food grants, compared to 32 percent in the week before lockdown.
- 62 Any move down Alert Levels in parts of the country that enable more economic activity should reduce demand for financial and in-kind support. However, the proposals in this paper will result in continued and possibly increased demand from some sectors in Auckland.

Impacts on at-risk populations

- 63 The outbreak of COVID-19 and the associated Alert Level response is having a range of impacts on at-risk populations. These are set out in more detail in Appendix 1, and include:
- 63.1 higher vulnerability to, and disproportionate impacts of, COVID-19 amongst Māori and Pacific populations, exacerbated by lower rates of vaccination and existing health co-morbidities amongst these groups;
 - 63.2 restrictions on earning capacity (e.g. loss of jobs, reduced hours, small businesses affected and the impact of finances of families) and issues accessing support for those still working at Alert Level 4;
 - 63.3 inequitable access to material essentials such as food, hygiene products, shelter and warmth and online financial services;
 - 63.4 ongoing demand for mental health support services, with employment issues now in the top five issues presenting to Youthline Helpline; and
 - 63.5 continued discrimination targeted towards Pacific peoples and disabled people (the latter relating to face covering exemptions).

Public attitudes and compliance

- 64 Research carried out between Thursday 9 September to Monday 13 September 2021 (n = 477), showed most New Zealanders (73 percent) agree with lockdown as an approach and with different Alert Level settings being applied across the country (71 percent). However, some think there could be more freedom outside of Auckland (44 percent) and a third of respondents think lockdown should be stricter.
- 65 The research show's respondents' emotions have become more neutral over the past month (23 percent in August compared to 41 percent in September) and there is a decline in those who are feeling "sad" (46 percent down to 26 percent). Some remain angry (17 percent) or fearful (13 percent). Lockdown and COVID-19 "fatigue" are likely driving these feelings.
- 66 Since Monday 30 August, there has been a significant decline in the number of New Zealanders who are "happy" to do their part when it comes to getting a COVID-19 test if unwell (63 percent now compared to 77 percent in August). There is strong willingness to comply with key COVID-19 health behaviours, including new face covering and record keeping requirements.
- 67 Overall Police is continuing to see good compliance with the Alert Level restrictions. Between 11.59pm Tuesday 17 August and 5pm Friday 17 September, Police advise:
- 67.1 77 people have been prosecuted for COVID-19 related offences in Auckland. Counties Manukau District has had the highest number of people prosecuted (37 people or 48 percent).
- 67.2 Between 11.59pm Tuesday 17 August and 5pm Saturday 18 September, Auckland Police has undertaken 27,838 pandemic related activities. 9432 online 105 breach notifications have been received and 2320 infringement notices have been issued.
- 67.3 There have been continued reports of people attempting, and occasionally successfully, travelling across the Alert Level 4/2 boundary when not permitted to do so. It is likely the innovation and motivation of individuals to bypass Alert Level boundaries will increase the longer the boundaries are in place.

Ability to operationalise the proposals in this paper

- 68 Effective operationalisation of the proposals in this paper will require consideration of the following issues:
- 68.1 Clear communications, explaining the changes to Alert Level 2 settings and reiterating the high threshold for permitted movement across the Alert Level 3/2 boundary. Communications will be important so people understand and comply with the requirements, including whether evidence of having had a test or a negative test result is required (depending on the reason for travel), and to minimise people re-

applying for exemptions from boundary requirements when the same permissions continue (discussed in the following section).

- 68.2 Delays at boundary checkpoints and impacts on supply chain movements, as the complexity of testing requirements at the Alert Level boundary, and additional compliance monitoring and enforcement, increase.
- 68.3 Testing of prisoners before they are released (discussed in the following section). I am advised that Corrections staff are working to identify operational options to respond to prisoners who are unwilling to undergo a test prior to release. Failure to undergo a test without an exemption would limit ability to cross the Alert Level boundary, which may result in breach of bail conditions in some instances.

PART 2: BOUNDARY SETTINGS

Update on current boundaries

- 69 On Monday 6 September Cabinet agreed that the same categories of permitted movement for businesses and services across the previous Alert Level 4/3 boundary would also apply to the Alert Level 4/2 boundary [CAB-21-MIN-0360 refers]. In addition, there is a limited number of permissions for individuals to cross the boundary for non-work purposes, e.g. to provide urgent care for a child or attend a medical appointment.
- 70 Between 12am Monday 6 September and 11.59pm Thursday 16 September a total of 149,309 vehicles had been stopped at the northern and southern checkpoints, with 1,652 turned around (1271 at the southern boundary and 381 at the northern boundary). Generally, compliance has been very high and motorists are carrying the required evidence to demonstrate their permitted reason to travel. Only around one percent of vehicles have been turned around.
- 71 On average, Air New Zealand carries 233 passengers out of, and 241 passengers into, Auckland each day under Alert Level 4/2.
- 72 As at 12pm Friday 17 September, 7296 companies had been issued Business Travel Documents that can be used as evidence of a worker's permission to cross an Alert Level boundary. These support 44,854 people to cross the Alert Level 4/2 boundary. Transport (15,937 workers) and the primary sector (9501 workers) currently account for most documents.
- 73 As of 12.30pm Friday 17 September, the Ministry of Health had received 5284 requests for personal travel exemptions. To date, 5034 requests have been processed, of which 232 have been approved and 3968 declined - including all but 7 applications for exemptions to travel to attend a funeral or tangihanga.

Updates will be made to permitted movement across the Alert Level 3/2 boundary

- 74 On Monday 13 September Cabinet agreed to the permitted movement across an Alert Level 3/2 boundary being the existing Alert Level 4/2 permissions in the current Order (including permitted movement for businesses and services and non-work purposes) and additional personal categories including to visit the dying, accompany a tūpāpaku or deceased person to a tangihanga or funeral; and attending a tangihanga or funeral [CAB-21-MIN-0370 refers].
- 75 Notwithstanding the cultural significance of funerals and tangihanga, they have the potential to become super-spreader events. This is in part because people travel to them from various places. The Director-General of Health has recommended that the Alert Level boundaries remain tightly controlled, with any additional travel dealt with through the exemptions regime.
- 76 I consider that travel across an Alert Level 3/2 boundary in these circumstances should be considered on a case-by-case basis and that people travelling for this purpose should seek an exemption from the Director-General of Health. This would enable public health mitigations to be applied as a condition of an exemption such as requiring evidence be carried of a negative test result (as is currently the case for all exemptions granted). Travel across an Alert Level 3/2 boundary for this reason would therefore not be a permitted movement in the Order.
- 77 I therefore propose to rescind the decision referred to in paragraph 74 and instead propose that permitted movement across an Alert Level 3/2 boundary will be the existing Alert Level 4/2 permissions in the current Order (including permitted movement for businesses and services and non-work purposes).
- 78 Cabinet also previously noted that I will ask Cabinet to consider whether further categories of permitted movement should be allowed, after Auckland moves to Alert Level 3. This phased approach could allow additional permitted movement to address personal circumstances causing undue hardship and to enable workers in key industries (including construction and forestry) which could mitigate impacts on major infrastructure projects and supply chains. Consideration would need to be given to the likely increased volume of traffic and associated impacts on the efficient operation of checkpoints. Officials will provide further advice to Ministers with Power to Action the week of 27 September.
- 79 This further advice will also provide detail on industries which are reopening in some capacity under Alert Level 3. For example, in education, principals and teachers living in an Alert Level 2 area will be unable to travel into and out of an Alert Level 3 area to get to work (and home again). This impact will extend to children unable to attend school in an Alert Level 3 area, and their parents and caregivers who may not be able to return to work as a result.

Testing requirements at the Alert Level boundary will be expanded as an additional layer of protection

- 80 On Monday 6 September, Cabinet agreed both that workers at Alert Level 4 businesses and services be required to carry evidence of a COVID-19 test within the last seven days when crossing an Alert Level boundary. People permitted to travel for personal reasons were to be encouraged to have a test [CAB-21-MIN-0360 refers].
- 81 In addition, on Monday 13 September, Cabinet agreed, in principle, that people permitted to cross Alert Level boundary for personal reasons are also required to carry evidence of a test. Specifically, that people who move across an Alert Level 4/2 or Alert Level 3/2 boundary:
- 81.1 for personal reasons on a regular basis would be required to carry evidence of having had a COVID-19 test within seven days of crossing the boundary; and
- 81.2 for personal reasons as a single trip will be required to carry evidence of a negative COVID-19 test received within 72 hours of crossing the boundary.
- 82 Requiring people to carry evidence of having been tested for COVID-19 will mitigate the risk associated with these movements across the boundary. The paragraphs below confirm this decision and clarify what will be required under particular permissions.

People travelling for personal reasons that are likely to be one-off will be required to have a pre-departure test 72 hours prior to moving across the boundary

- 83 For people permitted to travel across the boundaries for personal reasons, the Director-General has recommended that in the majority of cases, they be required to carry evidence of a negative nasopharyngeal or oropharyngeal test result, returned within 72 hours of their planned travel. This requirement provides the greatest level of assurance that individuals are not transmitting COVID-19 from Auckland to parts of the country at lower Alert Levels. In limited instances where people are likely to be travelling regularly evidence of a test being taken in the previous seven days will be accepted.
- 84 Officials have also considered whether some permitted personal movement across the boundary, which could involve regular travel in some instances, should be included in the seven-day surveillance testing regime for workers. The Director-General of Health considers that there are limited circumstances in which this could apply. This would ensure consistency with the testing for regular movements allowed for work reasons and could include either a nasal swab or saliva test. Such permitted movements would be limited to those caring for pets and animals and those accessing health services with an appointment.
- 85 The full list of permitted movements, and the testing and evidence requirements which apply, are detailed in Appendix 3.

Pre-departure testing requirements will be applied to some categories of people moving across the Alert Level boundary for personal reasons

86 I therefore propose people moving across an Alert Level 4/2 or 3/2 boundary (in either direction) for personal reasons be required to carry evidence of a negative COVID-19 test received within 72 hours before crossing the boundary. This requirement would apply for travel for the following reasons:

- 86.1 leave or relocate hospital/residential care;
- 86.2 attend a judicial institution;
- 86.3 leave or relocate home on court order;
- 86.4 leave or change home after period of detention;
- 86.5 collect a person leaving or relocating home on court order or after detention;
- 86.6 leave New Zealand, including travel to pre-departure MIQ;
- 86.7 collect a person going home after MIQ or QFT travel; and
- 86.8 accompany or collect others (when the other person is subject to testing requirements).

87 I propose that for people moving across an Alert Level 4/2 or 3/2 boundary for personal reasons on what may be a regular basis, that they are required to carry evidence of having had a COVID-19 test in the seven days before travel. This requirement would apply for travel for the following reasons:

- 87.1 care for pets or other animals, where there is no one else able to provide care for them; and
- 87.2 access health services with an appointment.

88 There are some situations where testing requirements may not be appropriate for personal movement across the boundary, e.g. when travel is urgent or when there would be no additional public health-risk caused by this movement. I propose that people moving across an Alert Level 4/2 or 3/2 boundary for the following reasons will not be required to carry evidence of a COVID-19 test:

- 88.1 urgent care of child/support or care to person in critical/terminal condition;
- 88.2 emergency;
- 88.3 go home after MIQ;
- 88.4 go home after QFT travel;

- 88.5 travel home from Alert Level 2 to Alert Level 3 area;
 - 88.6 transit Auckland by road or air;
 - 88.7 people exempt from the COVID-19 Public Health Response Order; and
 - 88.8 accompanying others (when the person being accompanied is not subject to testing requirements).
- 89 A table of all the permitted reasons for travel, and the testing and evidentiary requirements is set out at Appendix 3.

The Director-General of Health can consider exemptions to testing requirements

- 90 There may be some situations where it is very difficult (or not possible) for people travelling for personal reasons to obtain a negative test result before they cross the Alert Level boundary. For example, the Department of Corrections and Ministry of Justice have advised that requiring some individuals to carry evidence of a negative test carried out within the 72 hours prior to travel is likely to be complex. This is particularly in instances where people are being released from Corrections facilities to a bail address on the other side of a boundary, and where witnesses and counsel are required to travel for a criminal case.
- 91 In these instances, people would need to seek an exemption from the Director-General of Health in order to travel across the Alert Level boundary. As the public health risk of movement across an Alert Level 3/2 boundary is less than the risk across the Alert Level 4/2 boundary, the Ministry of Health will take this into consideration when granting exemption requests, including for personal travel, such as to visit the dying, accompany a tūpāpaku or deceased person, or to attend a funeral or tangihanga.
- 92 Traditionally, the Ministry of Health has seen requests for exemptions spike following a change in Alert Level. The Ministry will design an operational policy framework to ensure they make robust and consistent decisions on all exemption requests, taking into account time required for pre-departure testing to be undertaken, if the travel is approved and testing is required.

Testing requirements can take effect from 11.59pm Thursday 23 September

- 93 Adequate lead in time is needed to implement the additional testing and exemption requirements for personal travel and to ensure that they are understood. This includes ensuring that:
- 93.1 Clear communications can be developed so that people can understand and comply with the new requirements. Communications will focus on the requirement to have a pre-departure negative test result, as this will apply in the majority of cases. Communications will emphasise that obtaining a negative test prior to crossing a boundary is the safest thing to do, even when this is not required.

- 93.2 People planning to move across the boundary have time get a pre-departure test and result, (the Ministry of Health advise that typically 80 percent of test results are processed within 24 hours of being received at the processing Laboratory).
- 93.3 Police and other enforcement officers (e.g. Avsec) can prepare and train staff to monitor and enforce the changes. Given the increasing complexity of testing requirements, including the differential testing requirements for personal travel, there is a risk that additional compliance monitoring and enforcement could have flow on implications such as delays at boundary checkpoints and for supply chain movements. This is likely to be particularly acute as manufacturing increases, leading to more freight on the roads, when Auckland moves to Alert Level 3.
- 94 I propose that the additional testing requirements for personal movement come into force at 11.59pm Thursday 23 September.

PART 3: REVISED ALERT LEVEL SETTINGS

Alert Level 1 settings

- 95 On Tuesday 14 September, the COVID-19 Ministerial Group (CMG) considered and noted advice on proposed changes to Alert Level 1 settings [CMG-21-MIN-0026]. Further advice was provided to Cabinet Business Committee (CBC) on Wednesday 15 September, where it was agreed that the existing Alert Level 1 settings should be retained [CBC-21-MIN-0106 refers].
- 96 Retaining the existing Alert Level 1 settings reflects public health advice that these settings remain fit for purpose in the Delta context, when there is no COVID-19 circulating in the community. The objective of Alert Level 1 is to prepare, while the disease is contained in New Zealand.
- 97 I propose to retain the current Alert Level 1 settings that were most recently in place immediately prior to the current outbreak. The mandatory record keeping obligations Cabinet agreed to in August 2021 [CAB-21-MIN-0315 and CAB-21-MIN-0330], which apply at all Alert Levels, will also be included in any Order moving any part of New Zealand to Alert Level 1 in the future.

Alert Level 2 settings

- 98 Where COVID-19 is circulating in the community, and some parts of the country are at a higher Alert Level (e.g. Alert Level 3 or 4), the risk profile is different. The risk of community transmission is present but low, and our objective is to reduce this risk. In this context, it is not appropriate for any part of the country to shift to Alert Level 1 at this time as outlined in the Director-General's interim public health advice above.
- 99 When most of the country stepped down to Alert Level 2, we strengthened some Alert Level 2 controls. Anticipating more enduring periods of time spent

at Alert Level 2, CBC agreed graduated settings within Alert Level 2 should be employed as an alternative to strengthening Alert Level 1 settings [CBC-21-MIN-0106 refers].

100 The Director-General has proposed several adjustments to the Alert Level 2 settings (as outlined in Appendix 2) to 'step down' the restrictions at this Alert Level. I propose to update the following Alert Level 2 settings in line with the Director-General's recommendations:

100.1 Increase the maximum indoor gathering or capacity limit from 50 people to 100 people. This limit would apply at event facilities (including cinemas, stadiums, casinos), hospitality venues (including restaurants, cafes and bars) and social gatherings (including weddings, funerals, parties).

100.2 Remove the no standing during a public transport journey rule we agreed to last week. Removing this rule will limit mitigation of transmission risk on public transport to mandatory face coverings, which is a requirement that applies at all Alert Levels.

101 There are two other changes to the Alert Level 2 settings that the Director-General proposes, which I am seeking Cabinet's views on today. Officials advise these changes could be made to come into effect at 11.59pm Tuesday 21 September.

101.1 The first is linked to the proposed increase to indoor gathering or capacity limits, requiring face coverings be mandated for all people (including performers) at indoor event facilities. This change is proposed to off-set the risk of increased gathering limits. The standard exceptions (e.g. to eat or drink) would continue to apply.

101.2 The second is the Director-General's proposal to reduce the physical distancing requirement for visitors to gyms, public facilities, local authorities and central government agencies and office and factory workplaces from 2 metres to 1 metre to be consistent with previous Alert Level 2 settings.

102 I consider that the other changes proposed by the Director-General (set out in Appendix 2) are more complex and are a departure from previous Alert Level 2 settings. These require further policy and legal analysis, and in some cases, consultation with affected sectors. I am therefore proposing that officials undertake further work on these proposed Alert Level 2 settings and report back to Ministers with Power to Act on options to progress them in the week of 27 September.

Alert Level 3 setting for funeral and tangihanga

103 I also propose to adjust the funeral and tangihanga gathering limits at Alert Level 3. Under current Alert Level 3 settings, controlled gatherings (funeral, tangihanga, wedding or civil union) are limited to a total of 10 people, including support staff. The Ministry of Health has advised it is reasonable to

exclude support staff (e.g. celebrants, funeral directors) from the 10-person limit at funerals and tangihanga and viewings at Alert Level 3. This change will enable more mourners to attend funerals and tangihanga and viewings. Transmission risk would be managed by limiting the number of support staff to 5 (up to 15 people present in total) and requiring the two groups (attendees and support staff) to stay at least two metres apart.

Future Alert Level framework

- 104 Work has begun to develop a new Alert Level framework that could be applied once the vaccination rollout is advanced, as agreed at CBC last week [CBC-21-MIN-106]. The very preliminary draft design features three levels, conceptually similar to Levels 1, 2 and 3 on the current framework, with Level 1 similar to pre-pandemic normal life but with widespread surveillance testing, and Level 3 pitched at about Level 2.5 on our present framework. At this stage, we expect to retain elimination as a goal under the new approach, but vaccination and more widespread testing will help to reduce the speed and danger of outbreaks, so an individual case will not be an immediate public health emergency.
- 105 The new framework will depend for its viability on the highest possible level of vaccination. Vaccination, plus maintaining highly-effective contact tracing, isolation and quarantine processes, can enable us to keep sickness and mortality from COVID-19 at low levels without returning to Level 4 lockdowns. The framework is being built from the best-available public health advice, science and modelling. The Prime Minister expects to have an initial proposal brought together in the next few weeks and then to begin to talk about it and seek public input.
- 106 The first message will be to make clear that a less-restricted life in the future depends on New Zealanders together achieving a world-leading vaccination rate. If vaccination rates turn out lower, we would need to strengthen the public health controls in the new framework and live with those restrictions in the longer-term. These unwelcome restrictions would be necessary to avoid overwhelming our hospitals with COVID-19 cases and accepting mortality rates that surpass those of influenza and pneumonia.
- 107 The other benefit of high vaccination and maintaining disease vigilance and effective public health controls is the opportunity to open the international border without the constraints of MIQ to inbound travellers that present lower risks of disease transmission. We would require adults to be vaccinated and to endure repeated testing, but we anticipate there could be a short self-isolation period either at home (for residents) or in commercial accommodation (for visitors). Our self-isolation trial is a first step towards testing the operational feasibility of self-isolation.
- 108 Our central scenario is that we eliminate this current outbreak in Auckland and then move to the new framework once vaccinations are sufficiently high. But officials are also working on a transition scenario where the current outbreak is not eliminated, and we instead gradually move into the new framework while vaccination rates continue to build.

- 109 We expect to learn a lot from observing the experience of European countries with high vaccination rates in the coming months, especially those that have recently removed their equivalent of domestic Alert Level controls.

PART 4: OTHER MATTERS

Financial implications

- 110 On 18 August 2021, delegated Ministers agreed to activate both the Resurgence Support Payment (RSPAUG21) and Wage Subsidy Scheme (WSSAUG21). The tables below provide a high-level estimate for the costs of the schemes under Alert Level scenarios.

Table 3: Approximate WSS and RSP costs in different Alert Level scenarios

Scenario	WSS	RSP ⁴	Total
AL4 in Auckland, AL3 across rest of NZ – 2 weeks	\$700 to \$1,050 million	\$550 million	\$1,250 to \$1,600 million
AL4 in Auckland, AL2 across rest of NZ – 2 weeks	\$550 to \$900 million ⁵	\$430 million	\$980 to \$1,330 million
AL3 in Auckland, AL2 across rest of NZ – 2 weeks	\$350 to \$650 million	\$200 million	\$550 to \$850 million

Table 4: WSSAUG21 and RSPAUG21 actual payments made and appropriation balances

	WSSAUG21	RSPAUG21
Payments made at 17 September ⁶	\$2,276 million ⁷	\$572 million
Amount remaining in appropriations at 17 September ⁸	\$296 million	\$558 million ⁹

Wage Subsidy Scheme August 2021

- 111 Applications for the second payment under the WSSAUG21 have closed.
- 112 The third payment for the WSSAUG21 opened at 9am Friday 17 September and will close at 11:59pm Thursday 30 September [CAB-21-MIN-0373 refers]. The cost of the third payment is expected to be less than the first and second payments as a result of the change in Alert Levels.
- 113 Cabinet has delegated authority to Joint Ministers to draw down up to \$2,200 million from the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund (CRRF) for future payments under the WSSAUG21 [CAB-21-MIN-0328 refers]. As at Friday 17

⁴ These costings are for a single round of payments opened during the indicated Alert Level scenario. Officials expect most of the RSP's uptake to be realised in the first 10 days of a lockdown. Any lockdown of 10 or more days is therefore likely to have costs at the higher end of our estimates.

⁵ Costing for this scenario has been revised upwards as a result of recent uptake data.

⁶ Note the \$2,276 million represents actual payments made. It does not represent the value of actual applications made due to the lag in processing time.

⁷ This total includes amounts for the first, second and third payments from the WSSAUG21.

⁸ Delegated Ministers have agreed to draw down an additional \$500 million from the CRRF to the WSSAUG21 to cover the costs of the additional wage subsidy payments.

⁹ This figure includes \$230 million that was appropriated to meet the expected cost of the second payment of the RSP.

September, the balance of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund is \$11.8 billion.

Resurgence Support Payment August 2021

- 114 Under initial Alert Level scenarios and associated estimated uptake, the RSPAUG21 was estimated to cost \$600 million, though officials recognised that a more severe public health situation requiring prolonged periods at higher Alert Levels would push costs beyond that figure.
- 115 On Friday 27 August Cabinet agreed to increase the funding available under the RSPAUG21 by \$300 million [CAB-21-MIN-0344 refers], raising the total value appropriated to \$899.9 million. Cabinet also authorised Joint Ministers to draw down on the CRRF if costs escalate beyond estimates again, up to a cap of \$100 million.
- 116 Following the Government’s announcement of a second payment of the RSP, a further \$230 million was appropriated to meet the expected cost (included in the table above). The Government also announced that if Alert Level 2 settings are still in place in the coming weeks, there will be two further rounds of the RSP, opening on Friday 8 October and Friday 29 October. Subject to the Alert Levels in place at the time, the third and fourth rounds of the RSP are estimated to cost between \$100 million - \$200 million, and \$40 million - \$120 million respectively.

Legislative Implications

- 117 I will make an Order under section 11 of the COVID-19 Public Health Response Act 2020 informed by Cabinet’s decision.

Impact Analysis

- 118 The Treasury has determined that the regulatory proposals in this paper are exempt from the requirement to provide a Regulatory Impact Statement because they are intended to alleviate the short-term impacts of a declared emergency event of COVID-19 outbreak. These proposals are required urgently to be effective, making a complete, robust and timely impact analysis unfeasible.

Human Rights

- 119 s9(2)(h) [Redacted text block]

s9(2)(h) [Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Proactively Released

s9(2)(h) [Redacted]
[Redacted]

[Redacted]

- [Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
- [Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

Population impacts

130 The impacts of community outbreaks of COVID-19 (and the associated Alert Level measures put in place) on vulnerable populations has been canvassed earlier in this paper and are outlined in more detail in Appendix 1.

Consultation

- 131 This paper was prepared by the COVID-19 Group within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The Ministry of Health reviewed the paper and provided specific input and text, including advice on the course of the outbreak, the public health response, and the views and recommendations of the Director-General of Health. The Crown Law Office advised on Bill of Rights Act implications.
- 132 The Treasury, Te Puni Kōkiri, the Ministry of Social Development, Ministry for Ethnic Communities, and Ministry for Pacific Peoples have provided input into relevant parts of the paper. The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, Department of Internal Affairs, Waka Kotahi, Ministry of Transport, Ministry for Primary Industries, Ministry of Culture and Heritage, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Education, and Police were consulted on relevant parts of this paper.

Communications and proactive release

133 The Prime Minister will communicate the decisions set out in this paper after Cabinet agreement. I intend to proactively release this paper after Cabinet consideration subject to redaction as appropriate under the Official Information Act 1982.

Recommendations

The Minister for COVID-19 Response recommends that Cabinet:

- 1 note that since Tuesday 17 August 2021, 1,071 community cases of COVID-19 have been identified in New Zealand (as of 9am Monday 20 September);
- 2 note that on Monday 13 September Cabinet:
 - 2.1 agreed to keep Auckland at Alert Level 4 until 11.59pm Tuesday 21 September;
 - 2.2 agreed in principle to move Auckland to Alert Level 3 from 11.59pm Tuesday 21 September, subject to further public health advice and Cabinet review;
 - 2.3 agreed to keep the rest of New Zealand at Alert Level 2 until at least 11.59pm Tuesday 21 September;
 - 2.4 agreed to review these settings on Monday 20 September [CAB-21-MIN-0370 refers].
- 3 note the Director-General of Health's interim advice (to be updated on 20 September) is that:
 - 3.1 the ongoing decline in cases, lack of unexpected wastewater results and reduced proportion of cases infectious in the community suggest that the current outbreak in Auckland is gradually coming under control;
 - 3.2 in light of the above, the COVID-19 risk for Auckland is now medium; and
 - 3.3 because there is no widespread COVID-19 transmission outside of Auckland and close to 100 percent of known contacts have been reached and had at least one test, the COVID-19 risk for the rest of New Zealand is low;

Alert Levels

- 4 note the Director-General of Health's interim public health advice is:
 - 4.1 Auckland moves to Alert Level 3 at 11.59pm Tuesday 21 September for a period of two weeks; and
 - 4.2 the rest of New Zealand moves down from current Alert Level 2 settings to normal Alert Level 2 settings "with minor changes" (as set out in Appendix 2);
- 5 agree an appropriate measure in response to the level of public health risk would be to:

5.1 move Auckland to Alert Level 3 from 11.59pm Tuesday 21 September until at least 11.59pm Tuesday 5 October;

AND

5.2 keep the rest of New Zealand at Alert Level 2 until at least 11.59pm Tuesday 5 October;

6 agree Cabinet next reviews Alert Level settings for Auckland and the rest of New Zealand on Monday 4 October;

Alert Level boundaries

7 note that Cabinet previously agreed to the permitted movement across an Alert Level 3/2 boundary being the existing Alert Level 4/2 permissions in the current Order (including permitted movement for businesses and services and non-work purposes) and the following additional personal categories:

7.1 to visit the dying;

7.2 accompany a tūpāpaku or deceased person to a tangihanga or funeral; and

7.3 attending a tangihanga or funeral;

8 agree to rescind the decision referred to in recommendation 7 in accordance with the Director-General's advice that the boundaries remain tightly controlled, with any additional travel dealt with through the exemptions regime;

9 agree that permitted movement across an Alert Level 3/2 boundary will be the existing Alert Level 4/2 permissions in the current Order (including permitted movement for businesses and services and non-work purposes);

10 note that movement across the Alert Level 3/2 boundary to visit the dying, accompany a tūpāpaku or deceased person to a tangihanga or funeral, or attend a tangihanga or funeral will only be possible with an exemption from the Director-General of Health, and will not be included as a permitted movement in the Order;

11 note the Director-General of Health's advice that requiring a negative pre-departure test for people travelling out of the Alert Level 4 area for personal reasons would provide the greatest level of assurance that individuals are not transmitting COVID-19 to parts of the country with lower Alert Levels;

12 agree that people moving across an Alert Level 4/2 or 3/2 boundary be required to carry evidence of a negative COVID-19 test received within 72 hours of crossing the boundary for the following reasons:

12.1 leave or relocate hospital/residential care;

12.2 attend judicial institution;

- 12.3 leave or relocate home on court order;
 - 12.4 leave or change home after period of detention;
 - 12.5 collect a person leaving or relocating home on court order or after detention;
 - 12.6 leave NZ (including travel to pre-departure MIQ);
 - 12.7 collect a person going home after MIQ or QFT travel; and
- 13 agree that people moving across an Alert Level 4/2 or 3/2 boundary for the following personal reasons will be required to carry evidence of having taken a COVID-19 nasal swab or saliva test within seven days of their travel:
- 13.1 access health service with an appointment; and
 - 13.2 to provide care, or enable care to be provided, for pets or other animals, (but only if a breach of the Animal Welfare Act 1999 could result if the care were not provided)
- 14 agree that people moving across an Alert Level 4/2 or 3/2 boundary for the following personal reasons will not be required to carry evidence of a COVID-19 test:
- 14.1 urgent care of child/support or care to person in critical/terminal condition;
 - 14.2 emergency;
 - 14.3 go home after MIQ;
 - 14.4 go home after QFT travel;
 - 14.5 travel home from Alert Level 2 to Alert Level 4 area;
 - 14.6 transit Auckland (who as far as reasonably practicable must not stop en route); and
 - 14.7 accompanying others (when the person is not subject to testing requirements);
- 15 agree that additional testing requirements for people moving across the boundary for personal reasons will take effect from 11.59pm Thursday 23 September;

Alert Level settings

- 16 agree that the existing Alert Level 1 definition and settings remain unchanged;

- 17 note the Director-General has recommended that some Alert Level 2 settings should be revised as set out in Appendix 2 (which would enable a graduated step down from the current Alert Level 2 settings);
- 18 agree to make some of the adjustments to Alert Level 2 settings proposed by the Director-General, specifically:
- 18.1 increase the maximum indoor social gathering limit and indoor event and hospitality facilities capacity limit at Alert Level 2 from 50 people to 100 people;
- AND
- 18.2 make use of face coverings mandatory for all people at indoor event facilities (subject to existing exceptions, such as when eating and drinking);
- AND
- 18.3 reduce physical distancing requirements at gyms, public facilities, local authorities and central government agencies and office and factory workplaces from 2 metres to 1 metre for customers (to be the same as workers);
- AND
- 18.4 remove the prohibition on standing on a public transport journey;
- 19 direct officials to report back to Ministers with Power to Act in the week of 27 September on options to progress consideration of the remainder of the Director-General's proposed Alert Level 2 settings;
- 20 note that the Unite Against COVID-19 channels will continue to be used to strongly encourage record keeping everywhere a person goes, not only in places where record keeping for contact tracing purposes is now mandatory;
- 21 agree to adjust the existing Alert Level 3 settings to exclude support staff from the 10-person limit that applies to funeral, tangihanga or viewings at Alert Level 3; and

Other matters

- 22 agree that Cabinet's decision today will be communicated by the Prime Minister.

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

Proactively Released

Appendix 1 – Impacts on at-risk populations

Māori

- 1 Whānau Māori experience the impacts of ongoing lockdowns disproportionately at an overall population level, and are more vulnerable to COVID-19 due to higher rates of health co-morbidities and other health disparities. Managing the balance between the potential risk of exposure to COVID-19 with the disproportionate impacts of ongoing Alert Level restrictions is therefore critical.
- 2 The key way to balance these competing concerns for Māori is to focus on increasing the vaccination rates for the Māori population, particularly the under 50 year age group. This focus should sit alongside continued support for Whānau Ora commissioning agencies, iwi, hapū and Māori organisations to distribute food and meet the material and other essential needs of whānau Māori, particularly in Tamaki Makaurau.
- 3 Data from the month of August shows that access to financial support is also increasing. During August:
 - 3.1 48,200 Māori received Jobseeker Work Ready (JS-WR) support – an increase of 3.2 percent (up 1,500 Māori) from the previous month. This increase accounts for half (2,900) of the increase for all JS-WR recipients between July and August 2021.
 - 3.2 Māori received 71,300 Special Needs Grants (SNG) for food from MSD (up 19,800 or 38.3 percent compared to July). Food items and support packages received by Māori from other agencies/organisations are not recorded in these figures, suggesting demand is higher than what is captured by SNG figures.
- 4 Te Puni Kōkiri (TPK) regional offices report that some iwi and Māori organisations are addressing issues of connectivity and digital devices for children still unable to attend school. Fear of infection to tamariki and their whanau may result in hesitancy about returning to school, which is likely to become an issue as more schools reopen under lower Alert Levels in Auckland.
- 5 Continued Alert Level 4 restrictions in Tāmaki Makaurau are adversely affecting Māori businesses' immediate resiliency and future capabilities. Longer-term stressors and severe effects are showing, from business restructuring and hibernations, through to possible closures. TPK regional kaimahi are working with other agencies to provide wrap-around business and wellbeing advice and services to stressed and vulnerable Māori SMEs.
- 6 A creative push from across the country is addressing the lower Māori vaccination rates for those under 50. Vaccination rates for Māori over 50 years old are comparable to non-Māori rates, however rates for Māori aged 20 to 34 remain markedly lower. Data as at Thursday 16 September shows that:

- 6.1 48 percent of Māori aged 12+ have had at least their first shot, and 23 percent have had two doses – still a long way behind non-Māori rates of 73 percent and 38 percent respectively.
 - 6.2 Of most concern are rates for younger Māori – just 10 percent of Māori aged 20-29 are fully vaccinated.
 - 6.3 Daily vaccination rates for Māori are falling (from a peak of 9453 on Friday 27 August to 5158 on Wednesday 13 September), though non-Māori vaccinations are falling as well.
- 7 Te Puni Kōkiri regional offices advise that while national strategies and communications about vaccinations are gaining traction, local solutions are increasingly coming to the fore and it will be important to back these.

Pacific peoples

- 8 A significant proportion of the New Zealand Pacific population live in the Auckland region, with large numbers in pockets of South Auckland. Pacific peoples account for over 70 percent of the current COVID-19 cases, with the Māngere Assembly of God Church (AOG) of Samoa presenting as the largest sub-cluster of this outbreak. As at Friday 17 September, 311 active (confirmed and probable) COVID-19 cases were Pacific.
- 9 Pacific peoples are more susceptible to COVID-19 health risk-factors including immunocompromised conditions, cancer, respiratory diseases and diabetes mellitus. This means that Pacific peoples who contract COVID-19 are more likely to be hospitalized and more likely to die from the virus.
- 10 Pacific people currently have relatively low vaccination rates (as at 11.59pm 12 September 2021, 88,493 (31%) Pacific Peoples had received two doses of the vaccine, compared to 1.2 million (37%) non-Māori or Pacific). There continue to be reports of vaccine hesitancy, particularly among young people. This is driven by misinformation, religious beliefs, concerns about the recent myocarditis case, and prevalent low health literacy.
- 11 A move to Alert Level 3 for the Auckland region will need to be supported by Alert Level 3 information for Pacific peoples that is targeted, clear, concise and accessible. The prevalence of low health literacy amongst Pacific peoples, and the relatively high number of Pacific peoples who speak Pacific languages as their first language necessitates this focus.
- 12 Higher Alert Level settings are creating restrictions on earning capacity which can amplify income and poverty inequities. Food security and financial struggles continue to be key issues. There is ongoing significant demand for food parcels and social services, and other essentials e.g. PPE.
- 13 School principals have raised concerns about 'COVID fatigue' and the potential impact on NCEA exams. Overall, there is concern that long lockdowns could disadvantage students in assessments and exacerbate

wellbeing issues. Some needs are still not being met, e.g. students and churches without devices.

- 14 Nationally, the impact of the lockdown on RSE workers and overstayers is a growing concern. Cook Islanders unable to get home due to closed borders are being supported by their New Zealand-based community because they are ineligible for support.
- 15 There has been an increase in racial discrimination targeted towards Pacific peoples which is linked to the large outbreak among the Pacific community in South Auckland.
- 16 There are self-isolation challenges for larger intergenerational families, and cultural capability gaps identified in MIQ settings. Other challenges reported include meeting the criteria to access support (e.g. food parcels, financial support).
- 17 A need for support for elderly and people living alone has also been identified, alongside health and wellbeing impacts and family violence concerns, all of which relate to confinement to the home bubble under higher Alert Levels and the stress of reduced or no income.
- 18 Church leaders, Pacific providers, community navigators, and the Ministry for Pacific Peoples continue to be critical sources of trusted information from government into the community about keeping safe from COVID-19, and the importance of getting vaccinated. These trusted sources have also mobilised to deliver support for Pacific families and communities alongside pop-up drives to increase both vaccination and COVID-19 testing rates.

Disabled people

- 19 The current priority issue, while higher Alert Level restrictions are in place, is the issue of face-covering exemptions. There remains a number of documented incidents of confrontation between disabled people who are unable to use face coverings, and supermarket staff, security guards and sometimes Police. This issue is being responded to through better communications and information with a commitment to monitoring and follow up actions. The Ministry of Health is taking the lead alongside the Office for Disability Issues, DPMC, MSD, Police, supermarket chains and disabled peoples organisations. The key messages being promoted are:
 - 19.1 For disabled people and the disability community - “the use of face covering/face masks is an important public health measure to combat COVID. Some, not all disabled people, and people with mental health and other health conditions may have difficulty using a face covering. That’s okay! The right to not use a face covering also brings the responsibility to be especially vigilant on social distancing when in public and/or accessing services.”
 - 19.2 For the wider community - “some disabled people and some people with mental health and/or other health conditions are unable to use

face coverings. That's okay, respect, don't judge. Those who are unable to use face coverings should, with care, be able to access supermarkets, and other services."

Ethnic communities

- 20 As with previous lockdowns, there continue to be concerns around the loss of jobs, reduced hours, and the financial impact on families for ethnic communities. Challenges associated with digital connectedness and a limited understanding of English can leave ethnic communities, especially the elderly, highly socially vulnerable in the context of COVID-19. Within ethnic communities, there are many self-employed or small business owners, which cannot operate under Alert Level 4 – a large number of which are in Auckland.
- 21 The move to Alert Level 3 for Auckland will benefit SMEs and isolated segments of communities, in particular, the ability to have contactless pick-up and delivery and to expand bubbles. Moving down to Alert Level 2 in the rest of New Zealand has enabled businesses to operate and allowed small gatherings, which has provided many communities the opportunity to reconnect with their wider communities and support networks.

Older people

- 22 Issues that will impact older people during a longer period of time spent at higher Alert Levels include:
- 22.1 Accessing online services – some people still pay bills in person and will be impacted by the lockdown and not being able to pay their essential service bills (power, telephone etc).
- 22.2 Food delivery services – during lockdown, older people are encouraged to get others to do their shopping. This becomes problematic if they cannot go online or cannot get someone to assist them. Sometimes payment becomes an issue (access to cash).
- 22.3 Anxiety – how older people keep themselves and others safe will continue to generate anxiety due to the virulent nature of the Delta strain. Increased levels of anxiety are reportedly putting demands on providers that specialise in providing support to older people. Officials predict that demand for these services will remain high.
- 22.4 Resuming normal activities – the longer we remain at Alert Level 3 or 4 the more difficult it becomes for some older people to resume normal activities with confidence. Moving to Alert Level 2 will be widely welcomed by older people, however many will continue to have heightened levels of anxiety.

Young people

- 23 As reported previously, officials have seen a significant surge in support being sought by young people in relation to their mental and general wellbeing.

Temporary funding has been allocated to Youthline to support the significant increase in demand they are experiencing. The top five presenting issues to the Youthline Helpline in order of 1-5 were: Depression and Sadness; Suicide; Relationships – Partner; Employment Issues; and Self Harm. This is the first time this year that Employment Issues has appeared in the top five. There were 111 incidents reported this week; no change from the previous reporting period. A total of 64 incidents (58 percent of all reported incidents) this week were related to suicide.

- 24 Providers are reporting that there are pockets of young people across the country struggling. There are a range of issues being reported, including needing support to leave unsafe living environments, being isolated and having no way to engage support networks, misinformation around vaccine risk leading to a lack of interest in being vaccinated, increased anxiety, and young people with disabilities facing challenges with accessing supports, and COVID-19 testing and vaccinations.
- 25 Online learning/education has been a consistent concern for young people over the lockdown period. This included issues with access to devices or Wi-Fi connection, inadequate space at home, and young people struggling to engage with online learning. There are some concerns young people may not return to school post-lockdown. The extension of the lockdown restrictions is also creating stress for young people who are looking to transition to tertiary education or secondary school, as they are missing out on open days and face-to-face meetings with universities/colleges.

People experiencing family violence or sexual violence

- 26 Sector bodies have not reported any significant shifts in demand for sexual violence and family violence services since Alert Level 4 began. Preliminary data from Police shows that there has been a small increase in family harm reports, noting that they fluctuate due to external factors, and it is currently within the normal range. It may be that people are finding it difficult to reach out for support, and this may result in an increased demand for relevant services as areas reach lower Alert Levels. MSD is continuing to keep closely connected to the family and sexual violence sector to monitor any increased demand so it can understand additional support that may be required.
- 27 MSD is re-airing SafeBubble campaign key messages of “It’s OK to ask for help” and “Help is still available”, geo-targeted to Auckland. The campaign will let people know that help continues to be available while “in their bubbles”.

Low income individuals and households

- 28 Income disruption from reduced hours of work due to Alert Level 3 and 4 restrictions may make it harder for some people to meet their current and future financial obligations. The impact on current financial obligations has been reported by community food providers where the majority of people seeking food parcels are on low incomes (for example due to reduced wages or the wage subsidy scheme not being sufficient) as opposed to MSD clients on a main benefit.

Appendix 2 – Director-General of Health’s proposed changes to settings under lower Alert Level 2

Proposed restrictions which differ from the current Alert Level 2 requirements are **bolded and underlined**. The proposed changes shaded green are the proposals that this paper recommends are agreed and come into effect on 11.59pm Tuesday 21 September. The proposed changes shaded red require more consideration.

Settings	Type of restriction	Restrictions at Alert Level 2 (current settings)	Recommended restrictions at modified Alert Level 2 (proposed in this paper)
Retail (supermarkets, retail stores, shopping malls and takeaway food outlets)	Physical distancing	2m for customers (except from friends/family)	2m for customers (except from friends/family)
	Gathering limits	No cap on total numbers; limits achieved through physical distancing	No cap on total numbers; limits achieved through physical distancing
	Face coverings	Yes	Yes
	Record keeping (business or organiser obligation)	No	<u>Yes</u>
Social gatherings (weddings, funerals, religious services, parties and informal get-togethers)	Physical distancing	No legal requirement but encouraged through guidance.	No legal requirement but encouraged through guidance.
	Gathering limits	50 per defined indoor space, 100 per defined outdoor space	In an indoor venue that is not seated and ticketed, maximum of <u>100 persons OR one person per 2 square metres.</u> <u>No capacity constraints on outdoor spaces or on indoor events that are seated and ticketed.</u>
	Face coverings	No	No
	Record keeping (business or organiser obligation)	Yes (Obligation on the people responsible for the gathering)	Yes (Obligation on the people responsible for the gathering)
Hospitality venues (restaurant, cafés, bars)	Physical distancing	1 metre between adjacent table	<u>No legal requirement but encouraged where practicable</u>
	Gathering limits	50 per defined indoor space (seated), 100 per defined outdoor space (seated)	In an indoor venue that is not seated and ticketed, maximum of <u>100 persons OR one person per 2 square metres.</u> <u>No capacity constraints on outdoor spaces</u>
	Face coverings	Yes, for staff	Yes, for staff
	Record keeping (business or organiser obligation)	Yes, for customers	Yes, for customers
	Additional requirements	N/A	If licenced venue, must be seated to operate (to restrict night-clubs)
	Event facilities (cinemas, stadiums, and casinos)	Physical distancing	1 metre for everyone (except from friends/family)
	Gathering limits	50 per defined indoor space, 100 per defined outdoor space	In an indoor venue that is not seated and ticketed, maximum

			of 100 persons OR one person per 2 square metres. No capacity constraints on outdoor spaces or on seated and ticketed indoor events. However, entry and exit managed to stop crowding: e.g. when customers in a stadium or outdoor event leave, passing through constrained indoor spaces (e.g. passageways).
	Face coverings	No	Required except when eating and drinking or when outdoors
	Record keeping (business or organiser obligation)	Yes for visitors	Yes for visitors
	Additional requirements	Must be seated when eating/drinking	Must be seated when eating/drinking, where face coverings can be removed
Public Transport (buses, planes and trains)	Physical distancing	No legal requirement but encouraged where practicable	No
	Gathering limits	No specific cap, but no standing permitted during journey	Remove no standing rule
	Face coverings	Yes	Yes
	Record keeping (business or organiser obligation)	No	No
'Controlled Access' businesses and services (office workplaces and factories with no public facing shopfront)	Physical distancing	1 metre for workers, 2 metres for others	1 metre for everyone
	Gathering limits	No cap on total numbers; limits achieved through physical distancing	No cap on total numbers; limits achieved through physical distancing
	Face coverings	No	No
	Record keeping (business or organiser obligation)	No	No
Gyms, public facilities and social services offices, such as libraries, museums, recreation centres, swimming pools MSD offices and gym classes.	Physical distancing	2m for customers (except from friends/family)	1m for customers (except from friends/family)
	Gathering limits	No cap on total numbers; limits achieved through physical distancing	No cap on total numbers; limits achieved through physical distancing
	Face coverings	Yes, indoors (not for gyms or swimming pools)	Yes, indoors (not for gyms or swimming pools)
	Record keeping (business or organiser obligation)	Yes, for visitors	Yes
Events and gatherings held outdoors	Physical distancing	1 metre	No
	Gathering limits	100 people in an outdoor defined space	No
	Face coverings	N/A	Required for any indoor parts
	Record keeping	Mandatory	Mandatory

	(business or organiser obligation)		
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Appendix 3 – Testing evidence requirements for personal travel across Alert Level boundaries – 4/2 and 3/2 settings

Permission	Requirement to carry evidence of a permitted movement	What testing is required	Requirement to carry evidence of a test
Permitted work <i>Previously agreed by Cabinet</i>	Yes	Test within 7 days	Yes
Necessary work <i>Previously agreed by Cabinet</i>	Yes	Test within 7 days	Yes
Exempt workers <i>Previously agreed by Cabinet</i>	Yes	-	No
Urgent care of child/support or care to person in critical/terminal condition	No	-	No
Access health service with appointment	Yes	Test within 7 days	Yes
Leave or relocate hospital/residential care	Yes	Negative test in past 72 hours	Yes
Attend judicial institution	Yes	Negative test in past 72 hours	Yes
Leave or relocate home on court order	Yes	Negative test in past 72 hours	Yes
Leave or change home after period of detention	Yes	Negative test in past 72 hours	Yes
Collect a person leaving or relocating home on court order or after detention	Yes	Negative test in past 72 hours	Yes
Leave NZ (including travel to pre-departure MIQ)	Yes	Negative test in past 72 hours	Yes
Emergency	No	-	No
Go home after MIQ	Yes	-	No
Go home after QFT travel	Yes	-	No
Collect a person going home after MIQ or QFT travel	Yes	Negative test in past 72 hours	Yes
Care for pets or other animals	Yes	Test within 7 days	Yes
Travel home from Alert Level 2 to Alert Level 3 or Alert Level 4	No	-	No
Transit across Alert Level 3 or Alert Level 4	Yes	-	No



Cabinet

Minute of Decision

This document contains information for the New Zealand Cabinet. It must be treated in confidence and handled in accordance with any security classification, or other endorsement. The information can only be released, including under the Official Information Act 1982, by persons with the appropriate authority.

COVID-19 Response: 20 September 2021 Review of Alert Level Settings

Portfolio **COVID-19 Response**

On 20 September 2021, Cabinet:

Background

- 1 **noted** that since Tuesday, 17 August 2021, 1,071 community cases of COVID-19 have been identified in New Zealand (as of 9.00 am Monday, 20 September 2021);

- 2 **noted** that on 13 September 2021, Cabinet:
 - 2.1 agreed to keep Auckland at Alert Level 4 until 11.59 pm Tuesday, 21 September 2021;
 - 2.2 agreed in principle to move Auckland to Alert Level 3 from 11.59 pm, Tuesday, 21 September 2021, subject to further public health advice and Cabinet review;
 - 2.3 agreed to keep the rest of New Zealand at Alert Level 2 until at least 11.59 pm, Tuesday, 21 September 2021;
 - 2.4 agreed to review these settings on Monday, 20 September 2021;

[CAB-21-MIN-0370]

- 3 **noted** that the Director-General of Health of Health's interim advice is that:
 - 3.1 the ongoing decline in cases, lack of unexpected wastewater results and reduced proportion of cases infectious in the community suggest that the current outbreak in Auckland is gradually coming under control;
 - 3.2 in light of the above, the COVID-19 risk for Auckland is now medium; and
 - 3.3 because there is no widespread COVID-19 transmission outside of Auckland and close to 100 percent of known contacts have been reached and had at least one test, the COVID-19 risk for the rest of New Zealand is low;

Alert Levels

- 4 **noted** that the Director-General of Health's interim public health advice is:
- 4.1 Auckland moves to Alert Level 3 at 11.59 pm, Tuesday, 21 September 2021 for a period of two weeks; and
 - 4.2 the rest of New Zealand moves down from current Alert Level 2 settings to normal Alert Level 2 settings, with a number of changes as set out in Appendix 2;
- 5 **agreed** that an appropriate measure in response to the level of public health risk would be to:
- 5.1 move Auckland to Alert Level 3 from 11.59 pm, Tuesday, 21 September 2021 until at least 11.59 pm, Tuesday, 5 October 2021;
 - 5.2 keep the rest of New Zealand at Alert Level 2 until at least 11.59 pm, Tuesday, 5 October 2021;
- 6 **noted** that the Director-General of Health intends to issue a section 70 Notice to put temporary restrictions in place in respect of the area in the northern Waikato/Hauraki with three recent cases;
- 7 **agreed** that Cabinet next review the Alert Level settings for Auckland and the rest of New Zealand on Monday, 4 October 2021;

Alert Level boundaries

- 8 **noted** that Cabinet previously agreed to the permitted movement across an Alert Level 3/2 boundary being the existing Alert Level 4/2 permissions in the current COVID-19 Public Health Response Order (the Order) (including permitted movement for businesses and services and non-work purposes) and the following additional personal categories:
- 8.1 to visit the dying;
 - 8.2 accompany a tūpāpaku or deceased person to a tangihanga or funeral; and
 - 8.3 attending a tangihanga or funeral;
- [CAB-21-MIN-0370]
- 9 **rescinded** the decision referred to in paragraph 8 above in accordance with the Director-General's advice that the boundaries remain tightly controlled, with any additional travel dealt with through the exemptions regime;
- 10 **agreed** that permitted movement across an Alert Level 3/2 boundary will be the existing Alert Level 4/2 permissions in the current Order (including permitted movement for businesses and services and non-work purposes);
- 11 **noted** that movement across the Alert Level 3/2 boundary to visit the dying, accompany a tūpāpaku or deceased person to a tangihanga or funeral, or attend a tangihanga or funeral will only be possible with an exemption from the Director-General of Health, and will not be included as a permitted movement in the Order;

- 12 **noted** the Director-General of Health's advice that requiring a negative pre-departure test for people travelling out of the Alert Level 4 area for personal reasons would provide the greatest level of assurance that individuals are not transmitting COVID-19 to parts of the country with lower Alert Levels;
- 13 **agreed** that people moving across an Alert Level 4/2 or 3/2 boundary be required to carry evidence of a negative COVID-19 test received within 72 hours of crossing the boundary for the following reasons:
- 13.1 leave or relocate hospital/residential care;
 - 13.2 attend a judicial institution;
 - 13.3 leave or relocate home on court order;
 - 13.4 leave or change home after period of detention;
 - 13.5 collect a person leaving or relocating home on court order or after detention;
 - 13.6 leave New Zealand (including travel to pre-departure Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ));
 - 13.7 collect a person going home after MIQ or quarantine-free travel (QFT) travel;
- 14 **agreed** that people moving across an Alert Level 4/2 or 3/2 boundary for the following personal reasons will be required to carry evidence of having taken a COVID-19 nasal swab or saliva test within seven days of their travel:
- 14.1 to access a health service (with an appointment);
 - 14.2 to provide care, or enable care to be provided, for pets or other animals (but only if a breach of the Animal Welfare Act 1999 could result if the care were not provided);
- 15 **agreed** that people moving across an Alert Level 4/2 or 3/2 boundary for the following personal reasons will not be required to carry evidence of a COVID-19 test:
- 15.1 urgent care of child/support or care to person in critical/terminal condition;
 - 15.2 emergency;
 - 15.3 to go home after MIQ;
 - 15.4 to go home after QFT travel;
 - 15.5 to travel home from an Alert Level 2 to an Alert Level 4 area;
 - 15.6 to transit Auckland (who as far as reasonably practicable must not stop en route); and
 - 15.7 when accompanying others (when the person is not subject to testing requirements);
- 16 **agreed** that additional testing requirements for people moving across the boundary for personal reasons will take effect from 11.59 pm, Thursday, 23 September 2021;

Alert Level settings

- 17 **agreed** that the existing Alert Level 1 definition and settings remain unchanged;
- 18 **noted** that the Director-General has recommended that some Alert Level 2 settings should be revised as set out in Appendix 2, attached to the submission under CAB-21-SUB-0379 (which would enable a graduated step down from the current Alert Level 2 settings);
- 19 **agreed** to increase the maximum indoor social gathering limit and indoor event and hospitality facility capacity limit at Alert Level 2 from 50 people to 100 people;
- 20 **deferred** consideration of the proposals to:
 - 20.1 make use of face coverings mandatory for all people at indoor event facilities (subject to existing exceptions, such as when eating and drinking);
 - 20.2 reduce physical distancing requirements at gyms, public facilities, local authorities and central government agencies and office and factory workplaces from 2 metres to 1 metre for customers (to be the same as workers);
 - 20.3 remove the prohibition on standing on a public transport journey;
- 21 **directed** officials to report back to Ministers with Power to Act on COVID-19 matters in the week of 27 September 2021 on options to progress consideration of the remainder of the Director-General's proposed Alert Level 2 settings, including the matters referred to in paragraph 20 above;
- 22 **noted** that the Unite Against COVID-19 channels will continue to be used to strongly encourage record keeping everywhere a person goes, not only in places where record keeping for contact tracing purposes is now mandatory;
- 23 **agreed** to adjust the existing Alert Level 3 settings to exclude support staff from the 10-person limit that applies to funeral, tangihanga or viewings at Alert Level 3;
- 24 **agreed** that it be mandatory for face coverings to be worn in indoor settings at secondary schools under Alert Level 3;

Other matters

- 25 **agreed** that Cabinet's decision today will be communicated by the Prime Minister.

Michael Webster
Secretary of the Cabinet