



Cabinet

Minute of Decision

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Additional Item: COVID-19: Update

Portfolio **Health**

On 2 March 2020, Cabinet:

Situation update

- 1 **noted** the briefing of the Minister of Health on the current COVID-19 situation;
- 2 **noted** that Cabinet has separately considered the temporary border measures [CAB-20-MIN-0067] and the economic impacts [CAB-20-MIN-0068];

Decisions by Group of Ministers with Power to Act

- 3 **noted** that on 27 February 2020 the group of Ministers with Power to Act on the COVID-19 response:

Recent developments

- 3.1 noted the update from the Minister of Health on a suspected case of COVID-19 in New Zealand, and that test results will be known on Friday afternoon, 28 February 2020;
- 3.2 noted that the Ministry of Health will be considering the next steps in respect of this case on Friday morning, 28 February 2020;
- 3.3 directed the Ministry of Health to provide advice to Ministers with Power to Act as soon as possible on the details of the case and the next steps, including contact tracing;
- 3.4 agreed to implement temporary border restrictions on persons travelling from Iran to New Zealand;
- 3.5 invited the Minister of Immigration to initiate work to implement the temporary border restrictions on persons travelling from Iran; and on whether there should also be restrictions on persons travelling from Italy and South Korea, particularly from the Daegu area, and to report back to the group of Ministers with Power to Act as soon as possible;

Possible exemption for international students

- 3.6 noted that the situation globally is changing rapidly and the risk of a confirmed case in New Zealand is high, and that it is possible that a pandemic may be declared;
- 3.7 noted that New Zealand could ease the existing border restrictions and allow up to 2,000 PhD and Postgraduate students from China to enter New Zealand and attend university;

- 3.8 noted that the only workable model for monitoring a cohort of this size would be an assurance, rather than audit, approach;
- 3.9 noted that an assurance approach would still require scarce expert public health resources, predominantly in the planning and development phase;
- 3.10 noted that an audit approach would require significant public health resources in the planning, development and delivery phases;
- 3.11 noted that any requirement of audit or assurance by public health professionals would divert scarce health resources away from:
- 3.11.1 response preparation (currently at the border and wider health sector);
 - 3.11.2 response to an identified case or outbreak; and
 - 3.11.3 delivering core public health services;
- 3.12 noted that officials therefore do not recommend an exemption, given this opportunity cost;
- 3.13 noted the economic impact and public confidence considerations support the above conclusion, and that international relationship considerations have been taken into account and are considered to be manageable;
- 3.14 agreed not to implement an exemption to the travel restrictions for international students from China;
- 3.15 invited the Minister of Health and the Acting Minister of Education to prepare a communications plan for the announcement of the above decision;

Other matters

- 3.16 noted that the Prime Minister has asked for further advice on removing the stand-down period for workers impacted by the outbreak and on the options for redeploying or retraining displaced workers.

Establishment of ad hoc Cabinet committee on COVID-19 response

- 4 **noted** that the Prime Minister intends to establish an ad hoc Cabinet committee on the COVID-19 response, which will include the Ministers currently in the group of Ministers with Power to Act and other Ministers as appropriate.

Michael Webster
Secretary of the Cabinet

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Prime Minister
Deputy Prime Minister
Minister of Health