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Coronavirus: First case of virus in New Zealand

Henry Cooke and Andre Chumko 20:32, Feb 28

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Dr Ashley Bloomfield, of the Ministry of Health, confirms New Zealand's first case of Covid-19.

The first case of coronavirus has been confirmed in New Zealand, and authorities are now scrambling to track down people who may have come into contact with the patient.

The person - who is in their 60s - is in a stable and improving condition in Auckland City Hospital, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said.

They are a citizen of New Zealand who had been to Iran and flown back to New Zealand via Bali.

Auckland City Hospital where the patient is being treated in isolation.

ABIGAIL DOUGHERTY/STUFF

Auckland City Hospital where the patient is being treated in isolation.

Ardern said New Zealand's pandemic plan was now being fully put into place.

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"It has been through good care and good management that New Zealand has gone through such a long period of time without having a case arriving on our shores," Ardern added.

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Ministry of Health's Director-General of Health Dr Ashley Bloomfield says the person's family took all the right precautions.

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Ministry of Health's Director-General of Health Dr Ashley Bloomfield says the person's family took all the right precautions.

The Ministry of Health had earlier confirmed testing was underway for a suspected coronavirus case. The results of the tests were formally reported to the ministry about 4.15pm on Friday.

"I'm confident that the risk of this disease is being very well-managed," Health Minister David Clark said on Friday evening.

It was revealed the person diagnosed with the disease had tested negative for coronavirus on two previous occasions, but continued to show symptoms.

"Clinical judgment was to continue and look into greater detail," Clark said.

New Zealand was the 48th country to have a confirmed case and

more sporadic cases may continue to arrive in New Zealand, Clark said.

"We are well prepared, because we've had time to be prepared."

FIRST CASE IN NEW ZEALAND

The patient is currently being treated in Auckland City Hospital and is in isolation in a negative pressure room to prevent any spread of the disease. They have been in the room since arriving at the hospital.

The health ministry insists that the risk of a community outbreak of coronavirus from this patient is low.

Minister of Health David Clark gives an update on the first case of coronavirus in NZ on Friday.

ROSS GIBLIN/STUFF

Minister of Health David Clark gives an update on the first case of coronavirus in NZ on Friday.

Director-general of health Ashley Bloomfield said public health officials had been working to trace who the person had been in close contact with.

This included a people on the flight involved, particularly on the final leg, which came from Bali to New Zealand.

Officials would be contacting people within the same row as the individual, along with the two rows ahead and behind the person. Cabin crew members would also be contacted.

They would be required to self-isolate for 14 days.

HENRY COOKE/STUFF

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern addresses the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in New Zealand.

The person arrived in New Zealand on Wednesday, February 26, on Emirates flight EK450 to Auckland via Bali, from Tehran.

While travelling, the person was "unwell", Bloomfield said. He understood they were wearing a mask on-board the flight.

Once they arrived, they had travelled by private vehicle to their own home, with family members only.

Later that same day, when family members became concerned with the person's condition, Healthline was phoned, Bloomfield said.

After being advised to go to hospital, the person was taken there by family members.

"People need to feel empowered and enabled to do the right thing. In this case, we have a family who did exactly the right thing," Bloomfield said on Friday.

ROSS GIBLIN/STUFF

"People need to feel empowered and enabled to do the right thing. In this case, we have a family who did exactly the right thing," Bloomfield said on Friday.

All were wearing masks on arrival. As a result of the individual's symptoms and travel history they were admitted and tested.

"All the right protocols were followed."

The ministry had no evidence the person had transmitted the virus to anybody else.

TWO EARLIER TESTS ON PERSON NEGATIVE

Medical staff had a "high degree of suspicion" about the patient, so continued to take further test samples from them, Bloomfield said.

The person was the first in New Zealand to fulfil the definition of a suspected case.

The first two samples were taken from the person's throat, and returned a negative result.

The patient's symptoms - a cough and difficult breathing - were more consistent with a lung infection, and so a third sample, which returned a positive result, was taken from there.

The person had travelled to Iran some weeks ago to visit family and was returning to New Zealand.

At least three family members were also in isolation and would be offered testing.

The ministry would not be re-testing any of the people it had previously tested in New Zealand who had returned a negative result.

Bloomfield said the process followed by the person and their family was "exemplary".

"People need to feel empowered and enabled to do the right thing. In this case, we have a family who did exactly the right thing."

Chinese women wear protective masks in Beijing amid a coronavirus outbreak.

KEVIN FRAYER/GETTY

Chinese women wear protective masks in Beijing amid a coronavirus outbreak.

TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS FROM IRAN

The government earlier announced temporary travel restrictions on people travelling from Iran - but this was not directly related to the person's diagnosis, Bloomfield said.

The ministry was already concerned about the increasing number of deaths in Iran reported earlier in the week. "It was a separate process."

Clark said there were an increasing number of cases in Iran and concerns about the quality of information coming out of the country.

Iran's healthcare system was struggling to cope with a widespread coronavirus outbreak, Bloomfield said.

Medical staff check passengers arriving from Iran in the airport in Najaf, Iraq.

ANMAR KHALIL/AP

Medical staff check passengers arriving from Iran in the airport in Najaf, Iraq.

The situation in Iran was concerning, Clark said. "There is ongoing spread of the disease there, and a large degree of uncertainty about the scale of the outbreak and the ability to contain it."

The new restrictions mean people will not be able to travel from Iran to New Zealand and anyone who has been in Iran in the last 14 days would need to self-isolate.

New Zealand citizens and permanent residents will still be allowed to return home, but will be told to self-isolate for 14 days.

The restrictions came into force immediately, and would be reviewed every 48 hours.

A number of airlines had already suspended flights to Iran, he said.

Clark said the Government was also bolstering the health presence at international airports.

The focus remained on keeping coronavirus out of New Zealand, helped by more travel restrictions and an increased border presence.

NO EXEMPTIONS FOR CHINESE STUDENTS

The Government had also decided not to allow any exemptions to let overseas students from China into New Zealand, Clark said.

"Our priority is protecting New Zealanders.

"Allowing thousands of students into the country from China, and guaranteeing they were safely in self-isolation, would have been incredibly difficult to implement."

Globally the virus has infected more than 83,000 people, and more than 2800 people had died - most of them in mainland China.

However, in the past week there have been alarming outbreaks outside China, with outbreaks in Italy, South Korea, Iran, Japan and Singapore.

Since early February New Zealand has banned the entry of foreign nationals who have travelled from or through mainland China in the past 14 days.

Meanwhile, thousands of New Zealanders returning from China have been asked to self-isolate at home.

From early on in the outbreak, the Ministry of Health has said it was highly likely that cases of coronavirus would be reported in

New Zealand.

"Border restrictions are a key part of protecting New Zealanders. Immigration New Zealand is ready to implement the entry restriction on travellers from Iran to keep New Zealanders safe," Immigration Minister Iain Lees-Galloway said.

"People should check with their travel agents about flight options if their travel plans are disrupted."

HEALTH STAFF TO MEET FLIGHTS

Starting Saturday, health staff would meet all direct international flights landing at New Zealand airports from Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Thailand.

Bloomfield said while the World Health Organisation had not yet defined the global spread of the virus as a pandemic, New Zealand was effectively treating it as one.

The Government has also signed off on a \$1 million fund available to key regions most affected by the travel restrictions put in place for Chinese visitors as a result of the coronavirus, such as Auckland, Rotorua, Queenstown and Christchurch.

"These places are taking a serious hit as a result of the down turn in Chinese visitors, and it's heartening to see the Government moving quickly to step in to help these regions mitigate the impact of reduced Chinese visitor numbers on industry and communities," said Regional Tourism New Zealand executive officer Charlie Ives.

A previous suspected case in January - also in Auckland - [tested negative for the virus](#).

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