

17/02/2021

Craig MacDonell

By email: fyi-request-14374-27ef5d80@requests.fyi.org.nz
Ref: H202100068

Dear Craig MacDonell

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) on 11 January 2021 for information relating to COVID-19 returnees from higher risk countries.

Please find a response to each part of your request below.

"Please provide the data that New Zealand has that definitively proves that passengers are boarding flights bound for New Zealand with the virus already present."

The Ministry is unable to 'definitively' confirm the number of passengers boarding flights bound for New Zealand who had the virus or were positive before arriving in New Zealand. In order to 'definitively' identify if the individuals contracted the virus, this would require immediate testing of everyone as soon as they get off a flight. We are currently testing on arrivals from high risk countries (countries excluding Australia, Antarctica and most Pacific islands) in day 0/1 testing.

In order to review the day three positive tests, this would require the Ministry to manually capture each individual case to see if their incubation period and travel. This would not provide certainty with if the individual had COVID-19 before flying to New Zealand or during transit. Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(e) and section 18(f) of the Act.

However, the Ministry can provide you with the cases detected within a day of entering New Zealand up to 18 January 2021

Since 1 September 2020		Since 1 January 2021	
Country of Origin	Count	Country of Origin	Count
Denmark	1	England	5
England	7	Russia	3
Germany	1	South Africa	2
India	2	Ukraine	8
Jordan	1	United Kingdom nfd	5
Netherlands	1	United States of America	3
Pakistan	6	Total	26
Russia	3		
South Africa	2		

Spain	1		
Turkey	1		
Ukraine	8		
United Kingdom	12		
United States of America	7		
Uzbekistan	1		
Total	54		

The above information was provided by:

- The total count and breakdown by country of origin for cases tested positive on day 0/1 from the date day zero testing was started and;
- The total count broken down by country of origin from September for cases tested positive on day 0/1 (this will only be those that were symptomatic on arrival).

“Please provide an explanation of how the pre-departure testing system will create a safer and more efficient MIQ system in light of the outbreaks reported after pre-departure testing in the Russian fishermen and Pakistan cricket team groups, given the validity period of such a test and the time it takes to travel (particularly from the UK which you have used repeatedly as an example in press releases and when speaking to media)”.

We’ve been monitoring overseas developments very closely, and, like many other countries, have heightened concerns about the new variants of the virus and their potential to spread more rapidly. The pre-departure testing requirements are an extra precautionary step to provide another layer of protection for New Zealand from COVID-19. Some people are exempt from the pre-departure testing requirements. Detail here: <https://covid19.govt.nz/travel-and-the-border/travel-to-new-zealand/pre-departure-testing-for-arrivals-into-new-zealand/who-needs-to-get-a-pre-departure-test/>.

Pre-departure testing is an additional measure to further reduce the risk of new COVID-19 cases in New Zealand, in line with our elimination strategy. It is complementary to existing testing requirements, such as day 0/1 testing, and does not duplicate them.

Travellers to New Zealand are required to undergo day 0/1 testing within 24 hours of arriving at a managed isolation and quarantine facility. Travellers from Australia, Antarctica and most Pacific islands are exempt from day 0/1 testing.

“Please provide data to show there has been a statistically significant increase in cases being found in MIQ facilities from United Kingdom sources since the latest rise in cases began (approximately September). Please provide equivalent data for August as well for a pre-rise comparison.”

Please find attached the table titled ‘Total UK Arrivals by Arrival Date’. This information is a list of positives from the UK from 15 August 2020 to 11 January 2021, the date of your request. Please note there this information is only data held by the Ministry.

Under section 28(3) of the Act you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by calling 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Ministry website at: www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gill Hall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gill Hall
Group Manager
COVID-19 Science and Insights
COVID-19 Health System Response Directorate

