

Hon Chris Hipkins

MP for Remutaka

Minister for COVID-19 Response

Minister of Education

Minister for the Public Service

Leader of the House



25 November 2021

G Sharma

fyi-request-17293-087aceed@requests.fyi.org.nz

C19OIA2021014

Dear G Sharma

Official Information Act request relating to Review of Very High Risk Countries

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request, received on 21 October 2021. You requested:

1: Is there any new review, briefing and decision imminent in regards to recategorising currently VHR countries based on the current status of daily cases?

2: Are there any ongoing review or briefing presented to the cabinet to include UK and other developed countries with current daily high number of cases?

The criteria for considering 'very high risk' (VHR) designation takes into consideration a broad range of factors including, but not limited to:

- The number of positive cases as a percentage of arrivals into New Zealand;
- Whether cases in the country are rising rapidly, and the predominant strain (i.e. the variant of concern);
- The level of confidence in the country's health system capacity and its testing measures; and
- Vaccination coverage rates in the country.

Officials also consider data and information from a range of publicly available international sources relating to the global situation on a regular basis.

Ministers are provided with a public health risk assessment as part of a review of the VHR countries which considers the current situation and whether it has improved in relation to the above factors.

A review of the country risk classification was provided to my office for consideration on 16 August 2021, though a decision regarding a change in risk designation for these countries was delayed due to the Delta outbreak on 17 August 2021. An updated review of the country risk classification was provided to my office on 17 November 2021. The risk designation for these countries is still under active consideration.

You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision under section 28(3) of the Act.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'CH', is positioned below the text 'Yours sincerely'.

Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response