

Media Release

The Hon James Merlino MP
Acting Premier
Minister for Education
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DELIVERING A SAFE AND SECURE QUARANTINE SYSTEM

International passenger flights to Victoria will resume following comprehensive expert reviews into the management of new highly-infectious, rapidly changing variants of coronavirus.

From Thursday 8 April, international passenger arrivals will be able to resume, starting at an arrivals cap of 800 people per week and scaling up to 1,120 per week subject to capacity and the completion of ventilation works.

This follows independent expert reviews into the management of new, highly-infectious and rapidly changing variants of concern, and an evaluation into how each hotel ventilation system can respond to this ever-changing virus.

With no national standard for ventilation in quarantine hotels, these expert assessments and their learnings will be shared with other jurisdictions, providing insight into how the quarantine system can respond to this ever-changing virus.

Changes to the program will ensure our system is adapting to respond to infectious new variants – in addition to future challenges like the Federal Government resuming international flights – including developing a new Victorian standard for ventilation systems and upgrading hotels where necessary to comply with the standard.

PPE requirements have been standardised across all hotels to bring them in line with Health and Complex Care hotel practices, along with strengthened end-of-shift procedures and a new online system for easier contact mapping of staff and their households.

Testing of hotel residents will be boosted from two to four times during their quarantine period, with follow up tests recommended after quarantine, based on medical advice.

The independent assessment of ventilation at all quarantine hotels is well advanced, with room-by-room assessments being conducted by an occupational hygienist physician, supported by a team of engineers and other specialists.

To date, minor remediation works have been identified and individual assessments will be considered complete once remediation work has been validated by the assessor. All works will be completed before hotels come online to support arrivals.

Additionally, the Government has today released its response to the final report from the Hotel Quarantine Board of Inquiry and is taking action to implement in full or part each of the 81 recommendations, including referring recommendations to National Cabinet where appropriate.

Of these recommendations, which include the 69 recommendations from the Interim Report, the Government has accepted and already acquitted 49 recommendations, accepted and already acquitted four in part, accepted and will implement eight in full and referred 20 to National Cabinet to ensure a nationally consistent approach.

Following the Board's Interim Report, major changes were made to Victoria's quarantine program, including strengthened leadership, oversight and training, embedded public health and enforcement expertise across the program and additional Infection Prevention and Control measures.

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In response to new variants of concern and the highly-infectious, rapidly changing virus, the Government paused international arrivals and commissioned independent reviews to ensure these new risks were managed – keeping residents, staff and the community safe.

Reviews found CQV staff are well-trained in PPE donning, doffing and hand hygiene and are comfortable challenging each other regarding non-compliance and safety issues.

They also found that vaccination of hotel quarantine staff will be the most effective measure in preventing the spread of the virus – with the first dose of the vaccination now delivered to more than 4,150 frontline quarantine workers and the rollout of the second dose now underway.

Noting the long-term and ongoing challenges of responding to the virus, work is also continuing to identify alternative models of mandatory quarantine with ten sites shortlisted as potential locations for a stand-alone accommodation hub. This shortlist will ultimately be narrowed to one site, that will be recommended in the final business case presented to government.

Quotes attributable to Acting Premier James Merlino

“We’ve taken the action and time necessary to ensure we have the most rigorous quarantine system possible in place to protect against these highly-infectious, rapidly changing variants of concern.”

“The challenges of this virus will be with us for some time to come, that’s why we’ve listened to the advice of experts and made the necessary changes to ensure we’re keeping Victorians safe.”

Quotes attributable to Acting Minister for Police and Emergency Services Danny Pearson

“These emerging variants of concern mean we need to leave no stone unturned when it comes to infection prevention controls in our quarantine program.”

“We’ve already moved decisively to implement changes from these independent, expert reviews and will share these learnings with our interstate colleagues.”