

# The Treasury

## Advice on COVID-19 Response - Tranche Three Information Release

September 2022

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Date: 24 February 2022

To: Minister of Finance (Hon Grant Robertson)

Deadline: None  
(if any)

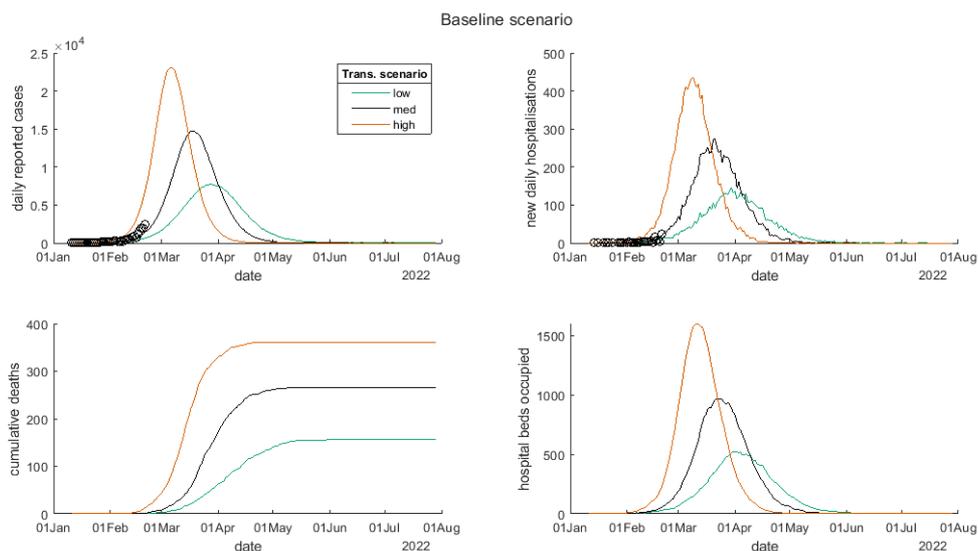
## Omicron outbreak modelling update

This aide memoire provides you with an update on modelling by COVID-19 Modelling Aotearoa (CMA – formerly Te Punaha Matatini) of the Omicron outbreak. It also includes specific modelling of the impact of two of the most economically disruptive public health restrictions currently in place: border restrictions, [33]

### Updated modelling of the Omicron outbreak

CMA has updated its model of the Omicron outbreak to reflect changes in booster eligibility, and to better fit the model to observed data including the age profile of infections to date.

The baseline (medium) scenario in the updated model suggests a peak of around 15,000 cases in the middle of March, with the number of hospital beds occupied forecast to peak at around 1,000 just over a week later.



The modelling suggests the outbreak will have dissipated by the start of May. The circles plotted on the charts above are the observed data, suggesting that in terms of case numbers we are currently tracking between the baseline and high scenarios.

## Modelling of the impact of policy choices around border restrictions

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### Border scenarios

CMA have modelled the impact of several border scenarios, reflecting different volumes of arrivals or positivity rates, and different mitigations to prevent onwards transmission from arrivals. Eighty percent transmission reduction is intended to be roughly equivalent to five-day self-isolation and daily RAT testing, and 25% transmission reduction roughly equivalent to no isolation but regular symptom checks.

The current positivity rate at the border is around 2%, meaning 650 infected arrivals per week equates to around 32,500 total arrivals per week. This is still significantly below pre-pandemic levels, but much higher than current arrivals which are generally around 1,500 to 2,000 per week.

Infected arrivals per week	Transmission reduction	Infections	Cases	Total hospitalisations
0 (baseline scenario)	N/A	1,868,000	453,200	8,400
65	80%	1,871,000 (+0.2%)	453,800 (+0.1%)	8,380 (-0.2%)
65	25%	1,883,000 (+0.8%)	455,800 (+0.6%)	8,470 (+0.8%)
650	80%	1,870,000 (+0.1%)	454,000 (+0.2%)	8,440 (+0.5%)
650	25%	1,894,000 (0.8%)	458,200 (+1.1%)	8,470 (+0.8%)

This suggests that the impact of relaxing border restrictions as planned will have only a limited effect in an environment where there is already widespread community transmission. We have asked CAM to run a scenario with a higher number of infected arrivals (2,800 per week – broadly equivalent to pre-pandemic levels of arrivals at a 2% positivity rate) to further test this hypothesis. As outlined in Annex 1, countries that previously used border restrictions comparable to New Zealand’s have become much more permissive following Omicron outbreaks.

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## Policy implications

Border restrictions [33] are among the most economically disruptive public health measures still in place. For example, we expect tourism recovery to be largely delayed as long as self-isolation requirements for arrivals continue.

While not definitive, both the modelling results and the direction of travel even in countries that originally pursued an elimination-like strategies suggest there is scope to test whether further tweaks can be made to these settings that will minimise economic disruption while still achieving public health objectives.

Harry Nicholls, Senior Analyst, Economic Policy, [39]  
John Beaglehole, Manager, Economic Policy, [39]

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<sup>2</sup> This was in relation to vaccinated, infected arrivals but the principle still applies to close contacts.

**Annex 1: Comparison of border restrictions and self-isolation policies for confirmed cases and close contacts internationally**

	<b>Border restrictions</b>	<b>Self-isolation for confirmed cases</b>	<b>Self-isolation for close contacts</b>
New Zealand	7 day isolation for approved countries and categories of individuals.	10 days (Phase 3)	10 days (Phase 3)
Australia (NSW)	Arrivals can leave self-isolation once they receive a negative result from a RAT taken on arrival. They must however test again on day 6 and avoid high risk settings (e.g. nursing homes) for 7 days.	7 days	7 days
Ireland	Vaccine passes or negative tests required for international travel. No self-isolation requirement.	7 days	No requirement if boosted.
Singapore	RAT required on arrival for approved countries.	7 days	Household contacts may leave the house each day following a negative RAT.
United Kingdom (England)	No requirement to take a test or isolate when entering England.	No requirement to isolate.	No requirement to isolate.