

REPATRIATION OF COOK ISLANDERS AND RESIDENTS

The first cohort of returning Cook Islands residents arrives this afternoon.

Prime Minister Henry Puna noted "It is a triumph of our people's strength, government policy, and coordinated efforts with our international partners that allows our people to come home. Yet we must remain vigilant as the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic continues to affect people around the world".

On Thursday 16 April 2020, the Prime Minister Puna declared the Cook Islands as a COVID-19 free

zone, "The government and our people want to maintain our COVID-19 free status, and cooperation amongst us all is critical".

The virus can be passed on to others through respiratory droplets. Travelling to the Cook Islands from New Zealand means anyone can be at risk of carrying the virus.

The Cook Islands Government has laid out strict protocols for the arrival of the repatriated passengers at Rarotonga Airport and their transfer to a supervised quarantine (SQ) facility, where they will

complete 14-days of supervised quarantine, followed by testing for the virus. Only once all criteria are met will these individuals be allowed to join their loved ones and friends.

The entire process has involved the coordination of almost a dozen ministries and government agencies, ensuring public health and safety remains the utmost priority.

Below you can find details on how we're handling the repatriation process to maintain our COVID-19 free status.



HOW WE'RE HANDLING THE REPATRIATION PROCESS

Upon arrival at Rarotonga International Airport

- All passengers will disembark the plane as per instructions of designated officials from Te Marae Ora Ministry of Health.
- The roughly 130 passengers will be processed at Rarotonga International Airport before being transported to the SQ facility (Edgewater Resort & Spa)
- Arriving passengers will not uplift their baggage at the airport. All carry-on and checked in baggage will be disinfected by health officials before delivery to the SQ facility.

Throughout the process, personal protective equipment (PPE) will be provided to those at risk of coming into close contact with arriving passengers and/or their baggage.

Once passengers have disembarked, the aircraft will be thoroughly disinfected before the boarding of passengers departing for Auckland. At no time will departing passengers or the general public, come into contact with the recent arrivals.

Upon arrival at the supervised quarantine facility, guests will be pre-checked and will be escorted to their respective rooms at the SQ facility.

There will be strict rules at the facility. Returning residents are required to sign an agreement on arrival, agreeing to abide by the quarantine requirement during their stay.

As part of the government-funded programme, meals will be provided and individuals will be given the opportunity to exercise outdoors. Laundry service will be provided along with laundry facilities being made available for those with further needs.

The returnees will receive daily health checks to ensure their wellbeing, and for the wellbeing and health of others. Full cooperation is needed to ensure health checks can be completed effectively.

Health officials will be on standby should any of those undergoing supervised quarantine begin feeling unwell, such as experiencing symptoms of fever, a cough, difficulty breathing, or sore throat. These individuals will be quarantined in their rooms to receive medical care.

While guests won't be able to have physical contact with their family and loved ones whilst in SQ, family and friends who wish to, may drop off food and personal items at the facility, between 8am and 12noon today and from 8am-4pm daily from tomorrow (Saturday). Items will be inspected prior to delivery to rooms.

Any breach of the quarantine requirements may result in prosecution and a term of imprisonment of up to 12 months or a fine not exceeding \$10,000.

Upon completion of 14 days of supervised quarantine at the facility, a health professional will confirm all returning residents meet a certain set of criteria prior to release.

This includes confirmation individuals have followed strict protocol and been in supervised quarantine for at least 14 days, have no symptoms consistent with COVID-19, and have produced a negative test result for COVID-19.

Once all criteria are met and approval is granted by Te Marae Ora, returning Cook Islanders will be permitted to leave the SQ facility and be reunited with their family and friends.

