

# Exercise Micro no small operation

**One small corner of Christchurch International Airport became the testing ground for how multiple agencies respond to a pandemic threat in a training exercise held in June 2018.**

Staff from Police, St John, Customs, the Ministry for Primary Industries, Air New Zealand, Canterbury DHB and of course Christchurch Airport Limited were in attendance. An exercise such as this is vitally important to ensure Canterbury can manage the incursion of infectious diseases – not just for the health of our Canterbury population, but to prevent system overload. The potential consequences could be catastrophic if this had been a real ‘new’ strain of flu that wasn’t contained or managed well.



*Exercise Micro briefing in the Christchurch Airport Emergency Operations Centre.*

Community and Public Health's (C&PH) Health Protection Officer Debbie Smith and Emergency Preparedness Coordinator Hamish Sandison took the lead in planning the exercise alongside airport managerial staff. Medical Officers of Health Drs Ramon Pink and Cheryl Brunton were the Incident Controller and Health Lead at the arrival gate respectively. Canterbury DHB staff from the Public Health Nursing Service, C&PH and Emergency Planning were also involved in the planning and Mick O'Donnell from Communications took part as a “badly-behaved” member of the media.

The sectioned off area of the airport became known as Tunnel 33 for the exercise and those who entered could not leave until the exercise was complete.

The exercise itself involved a bus masquerading as a ‘plane’ and 30 or so ‘passengers’ – each with a brief about how to behave, including three who had come down with flu-like symptoms in flight. Actors behaved suitably frightened, stressed or indignant, after having been kept on the ‘plane’ for over an hour after landing.



*Medical and public health staff responding to the 'plane' of passengers during Exercise Micro.*

Customs stopped passengers including someone claiming diplomatic immunity (an “inject” designed to test participants), although three business class passengers did manage to escape as part of a priority disembarkation, before Customs were in place.

Dr Brunton was Health Lead for the event and was faced with a barrage of “media” questions, such as whether this was bird flu, was it true that infected passengers had made it through to the main airport and possibly beyond and advice for the public.

Debbie and Hamish said, “The exercise was an outstanding success in that it achieved its objective of revealing the strengths and weaknesses of the border health response procedures.

“It was also very rewarding to see the fruition of our many hours of careful preparation come together in the form of a harmonious multi-agency collaborative response – a trial run that will stand all of the agencies in good stead for dealing with a real event.”



*Some of the affected 'passengers' interacting with Immigration staff during Exercise Micro.*