

Health protection officers ready to welcome our Aussie neighbours as trans-Tasman travel bubble opens

Our hardworking health protection officers at Christchurch Airport are anticipating emotional moments as the trans-Tasman bubble bursts open to allow travellers from Australia to arrive here without having to quarantine.

“It will be surreal. With passengers being able to visit family after such a long time and border staff seeing the airport almost back to business as usual after 12 long months, I’m sure there will be a lot of emotion,” says Health Protection Officer Debbie Smith.

In long-awaited news the government recently announced that from today travellers from Australia will be able to arrive in New Zealand without having to quarantine. The first flight into Christchurch from across the ditch touched down today at 2.20pm with the second due to arrive five minutes later.

“We are feeling rather lucky at this point that there are no early morning flights on the first day, but we do have some days with flights arriving at midnight and just after,” she says.

The flights from Australia require a significant increase in staff and shifts during the day. As a result, a new team is being stood up with some new people coming on board to manage the team.

Debbie and fellow Health Protection Officer Jimmy Wong will be handing over a lot of the logistics/airside operations to this team and moving back into their usual roles – around liaison and maintaining stakeholder relationships at the border, developing standard operating procedures (SOPs), training, public health risk assessment of travellers and ill traveller response.

“Of course, we’ll also be helping the new team get up and running and supporting them.”

Debbie says everyone is hoping for a successful first day of many with no unwell passengers, the team working well, SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) working as intended with no gaps being identified, and for the passengers to have an excellent journey through to their holiday.

Being fully vaccinated adds another layer of confidence. “But it doesn’t mean we don’t keep up a high standard of adherence to Infection Prevention and Control guidelines etc, and we are also still subject to the mandatory testing requirements.”

Passengers are provided information at the time they book tickets about the symptoms of COVID-19. They must complete a health declaration pre-departure and on check-in, and there are passenger announcements onboard:

- encouraging hand hygiene;
- information on downloading the COVID-19 Tracer app (or keeping another record);
- wearing a mask on all public transport; and
- contacting Healthline and staying put if they develop symptoms.

Information cards for their wallets are available if they want them.

There are many layers of health messages throughout their journey within the airport including sanitiser and fresh masks if needed, Debbie says.



Health staff awaiting the arrival of the first flight from Australia in Christchurch International Airport earlier this afternoon.