

New Zealand confirms airport virus case, says travel bubble unaffected

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New Zealand authorities revealed an Auckland airport worker had tested positive for Covid-19

New Zealand authorities revealed an Auckland airport worker had tested positive for COVID-19 Tuesday, although Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said it would not affect a newly opened travel bubble with Australia.

Confirmation the cleaner at New Zealand's largest airport had contracted the virus came barely 24 hours after the transport hub hosted joyful scenes as families reunited following the launch of the quarantine-free bubble.

Ardern said the cleaner worked on planes arriving from "red zone" countries deemed high risk, not Australia, which like New Zealand has largely contained the virus.

She said both Australia and New Zealand expected to handle border cases, and had systems in place to do that without closing the long-awaited travel bubble.

"We accept there will be cases and that is part of our journey together, for both sides," she told

reporters.

Ardern played down concerns the cleaner contracted the virus despite being fully vaccinated, pointing out the Pfizer jab used in New Zealand was 95 percent effective in reducing symptomatic onset of coronavirus.

She said that meant some people could still become infected but would experience milder symptoms than those who had not received the vaccine.

"We entirely expect that people who are vaccinated will get COVID-19, it just means they won't get sick and they won't die," she said.

New Zealand's health department released few details about the case, saying "the usual protocol of isolating the case, interviewing them, and tracing their contacts and movements is underway," it added.

In Australia, Health Minister Greg Hunt said the government had "full confidence" in New Zealand's ability to contain small outbreaks of COVID-19.

"The New Zealand system has picked up a case and we know that we have a highly infectious disease, but highly developed containment systems in both New Zealand and Australia," he said.

The bubble, which followed months of negotiations between the largely coronavirus-free neighbours, allowed their borders to reopen to each other after almost 400 days.

It means that for the first time since COVID-19 closed borders worldwide, passengers can fly between Australia and New Zealand without undergoing mandatory quarantine on arrival.

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