



Australian Government
Department of Health and Aged Care

Chief Medical Officer

The Hon. Mark Butler, MP
Minister for Health and Aged Care
PO Box 6022
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister Butler

I am writing to recommend you consider repealing the *Biosecurity (Entry Requirements – Human Coronavirus with Pandemic Potential) Determination 2023* (the Determination) under section 44 of the *Biosecurity Act 2015* (the Act).

Background

The Determination requires travellers entering Australia on flights originating from the People's Republic of China, including the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macau, to provide evidence of a negative COVID-19 test result if requested by a relevant official. The Determination took effect on 5 January 2023 in response to the significant wave of COVID-19 infections in China, and the risk of new variants with increased pathogenicity and immune escape entering Australia.

There has been high compliance with the requirements, with approximately 99% of passengers being spot-checked on arrival in Australia able to provide evidence of their negative test result.

Supporting arguments for repeal

Since the Determination came into effect, there have been no new variants of concern reported from China, and a significant decrease in cases, hospitalisations and deaths noted in the data from China.

China has been regularly providing data to the Global Initiative on Sharing Avian Influenza Data (GISAID). The GISAID is a data source relied on by many countries including the WHO. Reports show a decreasing trend in new cases, hospitalisations and deaths since peaking in late December 2022/early January 2023. There was no spike in that data following the Lunar New Year holiday period and, to date, there have been no reports of new variants of concern.

Since the Determination came into effect, the Department of Health and Aged Care has also been exploring ways to enhance Australia's existing surveillance capabilities, to further strengthen our capacity to detect and respond to emerging variants of concern of international origin.

This includes:

- a pilot program to test aircraft wastewater
- expansion of the existing community sentinel wastewater testing program, and
- enhancing national consistency in follow-up of people who test positive for COVID-19 and have travelled overseas in the preceding 14 days.

Like-minded countries that had also implemented pre-departure testing requirements in response to the epidemiological situation in China have now also repealed, or announced their intention to repeal, their requirements, including:

- United States of America – intention to remove their pre-departure testing requirements for travellers from China (including Hong Kong and Macau), effective 10 March 2023.
- Republic of Korea - has ceased testing Chinese travellers on arrival (1 March 2023) and mandatory post-arrival PCR tests are place until 10 March 2023.
- Japan - has reduced its mandatory testing upon arrival from 100% down to 20%.
- France – has removed requirements from 16 February 2023.
- Italy – has removed requirements from 28 February 2023.
- New Zealand - did not implement pre-departure testing, with voluntary random testing upon arrival.
- European Union - is considering changes to its requirements.
- Canada - has previously indicated that it would reconsider screening arrangements by 8 April.

Conclusion

On the basis of the information included above, and in my capacity as the Chief Medical Officer and Director of Human Biosecurity, I recommend that you consider repealing the Determination. Should the need arise again and there is a sufficient public health rationale, it is open to you to make a new Determination.

Yours sincerely



Professor Paul Kelly
Chief Medical Officer

8 March 2023