

Case Studies of COVID-19 Travel Restrictions

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Travel restrictions are an important tool for the reduction of inter-community disease transmission. By restricting travel between geographic regions, communities reduce the chances of undermining disease containment by importing infected cases. Here we look at some of the travel restriction measures taken by New Zealand, Luxembourg, Ireland, France and Spain to mitigate the risk of disease transmission.

I. NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand has performed comparably well during the COVID-19 outbreak. As an island nation, travel could be limited in a simpler way than for countries with land borders. On May 13, 2020 the New Zealand COVID-19 Alert Levels were published. Four alert levels were created based on disease outbreak conditions:

- 1) Level 1 - Prepare: COVID-19 is controlled overseas; Isolated household transmission could be occurring in New Zealand
- 2) Level 2 - Reduce: Household transmission could be occurring; Single or isolated cluster outbreaks
- 3) Level 3 - Restrict: Community transmission might be happening; New clusters may emerge but can be controlled through testing and contact tracing
- 4) Level 4 - Lockdown: Community transmission is occurring; Widespread outbreaks and new clusters

A mandatory quarantine or managed isolation of 14 days is required of all travelers entering New Zealand before onward domestic travel. Domestic travel restrictions depend on alert level. At an alert level of 1 people are encouraged to avoid mass transit if they are feeling sick, waiting for test results or required to self-isolate. At an alert level of 2 people who are sick are not allowed to use mass transit. Other travelers on mass transit are encouraged to practice social distancing and other risk mitigating measures. At an alert level of 3 travel between within country regions is only allowed for limited essential travel. Workers may only work as far as a neighboring region. At an alert level of four travel between regions and within regions is banned except for certain essential travel.

Restrictions at the different alert levels are cumulative. There are no restrictions on freight regardless of alert level. A comprehensive table of New Zealand's COVID-19 measures can be found at: <https://covid19.govt.nz/assets/resources/tables/COVID-19-alert-levels-detailed.pdf>

Plans have been developed for starting travel in a Trans-Tasman bubble to allow non-quarantine travel between Australia and New Zealand. However infected travelers arriving in New Zealand at the end of June, and outbreaks in Australia at the beginning of July have postponed this project.

On June 16, 2020, after 24 consecutive days of no new cases in the country, two new cases were confirmed - the result of recent travel from abroad. Two travelers were allowed to arrive from the UK after the death of a relative. They were granted compassionate exemption to break the mandatory 14 managed isolation on arrival in order to travel from Auckland

to Wellington via private vehicle. They are thought to have had no contact with anyone during the trip according to New Zealand's Director-General of Health. Authorities tested, traced and isolated anyone who came in contact with the infected individuals. Plans for the opening of the trans-Tasman travel bubble have been delayed as a result.

II. LUXEMBOURG

Luxembourg experienced a peak in cases towards the end of March, in May there were only a few cases per day. As a land-locked country in Europe, it provides important lessons in how travel restrictions combined with other measures can be effective in stopping an outbreak. Starting on March 18, 2020 a travel ban and entry restrictions were put in place. Third-country nationals were no longer permitted to enter the territory with the exception of Belgian, French and German cross-border workers. Frontier workers were issued a certificate that they were required to carry with them as proof of the need to cross the border. Additional exemptions included:

- 1) Citizens of the European Union, the European Economic Area, and Switzerland, as well as their family members, in order to return to their place of residence
- 2) Third-country nationals who hold long-term resident status in accordance with European Directive 2003/109/EC on long-term residents, as well as any other person with a right of residence in accordance with European directives and national law in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg or one of the neighboring countries;
- 3) Health professionals, health researchers and professionals involved in the care of the elderly;
- 4) Persons employed in the transport of goods and other persons employed in the goods and persons transportation sector, including airline personnel;
- 5) Members of the diplomatic corps, personnel of international organizations, military personnel, personnel in the field of development cooperation and humanitarian assistance, in the exercise of their respective functions;
- 6) Transit passengers;
- 7) Passengers travelling for urgent and duly justified family reasons;
- 8) Persons wishing to seek international protection or subsidiary protection in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg or for other humanitarian reasons.

As of May 11, 2020 new measures for gradual exit from the state of confinement were rolled out aimed primarily at reopening of activities within the territory <https://msan.gouvernement.lu/dam-assets/covid-19/exit/deconfinement-phase2/en-deconfinement.pdf>. After drastically reducing daily new cases to only a few per day, cases have recently seen an uptick averaging 50 new cases per day. The Health ministry has linked the rise in cases to private parties. Travel restrictions for non-EU citizens were extended on June 30, 2020 and are expected to remain in place for at least two additional weeks.

III. IRELAND

Ireland included travel restrictions as an integral part of the outbreak response effort. Restrictions remained in place even as other aspects of restrictions were relaxed. This includes both domestic and international travel. In particular, in phase 2 of opening up the economy the following restrictions and advisories were present:

- 1) All non-essential overseas travel to and from Ireland should be avoided.
- 2) Passengers arriving from outside the island of Ireland are expected to self-isolate for 14 days.
- 3) Stay Local: You may travel within your own county, or up to 20 kilometres from your home if crossing county boundaries.

Domestic travel restrictions were relaxed at phase 3 of the opening of the economy. More details are available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7ae99f-easing-the-covid-19-restrictions-on-june-8-phase-2/> and <https://preview.tinyurl.com/y94dcw3n>

IV. FRANCE

The French have adopted zoning, dividing into 101 "départements" and labelling them "red" or "green" according to the respective epidemiological situation, the hospital capacity, and the efficacy of testing and tracing. When starting to ease the lockdown on May 11, about half the départements were labeled red, the other half green. On June 2, all départements on the mainland became "green" and many restrictions were lifted. Nevertheless, stringent public health measures are still obligatory and several restrictions such as the size of public gatherings are still in place.

Two proposals that have informed these actions at the country level: https://www.esade.edu/itemsweb/wi/research/ecpol/EsadeEcPol_Insigth6_Exit_Strategy.pdf, and at the international level: <https://voxeu.org/article/green-bridges-reconnecting-europe-avoid-economic-disaster>.

Travel into France became unrestricted for EU-Schengen citizens, though a 14-day quarantine is mandatory for travelers coming from the UK. Specific other countries that have few

cases have been added to the travel list by shared policy across the EU, including at time of writing, Algeria, Australia, Canada, Georgia, Japan, Montenegro, Morocco, New Zealand, Rwanda, Serbia, South Korea, Thailand, Tunisia, Uruguay, China, subject to confirmation of reciprocity <https://reopen.europa.eu/en>. Travel is restricted for foreigners from other countries with exemptions made for diplomats, residents, healthcare professionals working on COVID-19, and certain transporters of goods and passengers.

V. SPAIN

The Spanish economy depends heavily on tourism, being the world's second most visited country, and has been under lockdown for several months. After a peak of new daily cases in April, Spain has since brought their new daily cases to the low hundreds. Spain has adopted a zoning strategy, dividing itself into its 59 provinces and islands (and in some cases even smaller divisions). Case distribution has been highly heterogeneous. Initially, travel between zones was restricted to only essential personal or professional reasons.

The European Commission and Spain have supported the creation of a European green zone network. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_854

The Canaries, and Balearic Islands have announced they are opening travel restrictions to allow for tourists from other controlled regions in Europe. In Mallorca, travel restrictions were moved from July 1st to June 21 and an experiment is underway to allow for 5,000 German tourists to travel to the region.

We note that given that Germany during this period continues to have active community transmission this represents significant risk. As an example, travel would be better restricted to countries with fewer cases including Switzerland, Norway, Finland and Ireland, which are much closer to Green Zone status than Germany. Travel corridors should only be considered between regions that are Green Zones. Moreover, the arrangements for travel itself must be carefully considered to prevent infection in transit. The possibility of importing infected cases is real and can disrupt a region's Green Zone status as manifest in recent cases imported to New Zealand.

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