



10th September 2021

Mr Stephen Donnelly TD
Minister for Health
Department of Health
Block 1, Miesian Plaza
50-58 Lower Baggot Street
Dublin 2

Dear Minister

As you will be aware, the Health (Amendment) Act 2021, which was signed into law on 7th March 2021, provides for a system of mandatory quarantine in designated facilities, having regard to a number of factors including the advice of the Chief Medical Officer and following consultation with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, to designate in writing any state where there is known to be sustained human transmission of COVID-19 or any variant of concern or from which there is a high risk of importation of infection or contamination with COVID-19 or any variant of concern by travel from that state.

As of 29th August 2021, the 7 Designated States under the provisions of the Act were:

Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru.

An Expert Advisory Group on Travel (EAGT) was established on 1st March 2021. Following a Government Decision on 9th April, membership of this group was augmented to include expertise on border security, hotel quarantine logistics, international travel law and foreign relations. This entails official representation from the Department of Justice, Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of Defence. In keeping with the provisions of the Act, a methodological approach for risk assessments was established in collaboration with the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) of the Health Service Executive and agreed by the EAGT. These assessments inform the advice of the Chief Medical Officer in relation to the designation of territories as designated states, within the meaning of the Health Act 1947, where *there is known to be a sustained human transmission of COVID-19 or any variant of concern or from which there is a high risk of importation of infection or contamination with COVID-19 or any variant of concern by travel from that state*, and where appropriate, revocation.

I am advised that at its meeting on 27th August, the EAGT adopted a revised approach. This was considered appropriate in the context of Ireland's current epidemiological situation, including the predominance of the Delta variant, and the high uptake levels achieved through the vaccination programme. The approach ensures that recommended measures, as they apply to travel, remain appropriate and proportionate, while facilitating a better coordination of travel with other EU Member States. Additionally, for the purpose of the risk assessment process, I am advising that variants with the E484K mutation, including the Beta (B.1.351) and Gamma (P.1) variants are considered as significant, with additional consideration of variants which have not yet been fully displaced by Delta including the Lambda (C.37) and Mu (B.1.621) variants of interest.

As part of their ongoing considerations, the EAGT noted, and I am in agreement, that in further reducing the number of countries, and consequently, the number of travellers entering mandatory quarantine facilities, that the additional importance of the operation and effectiveness of other travel measures, including post-arrival RT-PCR testing and home quarantine, are recognised, and in consideration of this, such measures must be reappraised.



In this regard, I am recommending the following:

- the effective operation of a formal system of home quarantine oversight, monitoring and reporting
- the effective monitoring and reporting of compliance with post-arrival testing
- that non-essential travel should be discouraged to and from third countries not currently listed on Annex 1 by those who are not immune through full vaccination or recovery
- that non-essential travel should be discouraged to and from 'dark red' EU/EEA countries, by those who are not immune through full vaccination or recovery, and that individuals travelling on the basis of a 'not detected' RT-PCR test result taken not greater than 72 hours prior to travel should be advised to quarantine at home which may be exited following a 'not detected' RT-PCR test result taken no earlier than day 5 post-arrival
- the introduction of a pre-travel declaration form to ensure that those travelling are asymptomatic and have not received a positive PCR or antigen test result in the 10 days prior to travel.

In advising on non-essential travel to and from those third countries not currently listed on Annex 1 and 'dark red' EU/EEA countries, and as noted previously, I am advised that the current approach to travel does not align with the EU approach on the lifting of restrictions. Firstly, the EU recommendation is that the lifting of restrictions on non-essential travel should apply to those countries listed on Annex 1, with restrictions on non-essential travel for those not immune through full vaccination or recovery continuing to apply to all other third countries; Ireland does not currently differentiate between Annex 1 and other third countries.¹ Secondly, the EU recommendation is that all non-essential travel to and from countries or regions classified as 'dark red' should be strongly discouraged and that those travelling with an essential purpose from 'dark red' countries, that are not immune through full vaccination or recovery, should fulfil testing requirements and undergo quarantine/self-isolation as appropriate; this is not currently the approach taken in Ireland.²

Having considered the epidemiological data and application of the revised approach, I am recommending that, being time-bound and considered interim in nature, travellers from both EU/EEA and non-EU countries should enter mandatory hotel quarantine based on the following consideration:

Countries with known VOC, based on individual country risk assessment using an agreed risk matrix and consideration of the epidemiological evidence. The latest assessments considered data relating to the Beta (B.1.351), Gamma (P.1), Lambda (C.37) and Mu (B.1.621) variants of concern/interest, noting the ongoing challenges with data quality and availability, particularly with regards to limitations in or absence of genomic sequencing capacity and reporting in the majority of countries.

Based on the individualised country-levels risk assessments of countries not previously designated, no new designations are recommended.

Based on the individualised country-levels risk assessments of countries previously designated, the continued designation of the following is recommended:

- **Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru**

Revocation

Of countries previously designated the revocation of the following is proposed:

- **Ecuador**

¹ Council Recommendation (EU) 2020/912 on the temporary restriction on non-essential travel into the EU and the possible lifting of such restriction

² Council Recommendation (EU) 2020/1475 of 13 October 2020 on a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A02020H1475-20210616>



The epidemiological situation in Ireland continues to be monitored and the scientific basis for these advices is noted, while also acknowledging that international travel policy is informed by a range of factors and that such policy is determined by Government. This approach, and the continued timely revocation of designated status where such a decision can be supported on public health grounds has been agreed by the EAGT.

I am advised that, at their next meeting on 24th September, the EAGT will consider a review of the variants currently assessed for the purposes of designation, particularly in the context of emerging evidence relating to their ability, or lack thereof, to compete with the Delta variant. I support this review and will provide recommendations based on the findings to ensure that advice in relation to travel remains appropriate and proportionate.

Yours sincerely

Dr Tony Holohan
Chief Medical Officer



Annex A. Restriction of travel from non-EU/EEA and EU/EEA countries with Mandatory Hotel Quarantine advised as follows:

VoCs
Argentina
Bolivia
Brazil
Chile
Colombia
Peru