

New Zealand chose to “go hard and go early” in an attempt to eliminate COVID-19, and Kate Dron shares her country’s experience. Kate is an Appointed Actuary with Suncorp New Zealand.

### Highlight of Disease Status:

Population as at Mid 2020 <sup>1</sup>	5,101,400
Population Density per Sq km	18
First Official Case	28-Feb-20
Lockdown	23 March 2020 to 13 May 2020 12 August 2020 to 30 August 2020 (Auckland only)
Number of Days	52 + 18
Did Lockdown reduce New Cases?	Yes
Sufficient Capacity in Healthcare System	Yes
Cumulative Cases as at 30 Nov 2020	2,056*
New Cases in Nov 20	99
New Cases Per 000 Population	0.02
Case Fatality Ratio	1.2%

\*New Zealand’s national count is higher than the WHO figure of 1,700 due to inclusion of probable cases with symptoms and close contact.

### New Zealand’s Initial Response

After news coming out of Wuhan, China in early January, the New Zealand Ministry of Health (MoH) set up the National Health Coordination Centre on 28 January 2020<sup>2</sup>, and on 30 January<sup>3</sup> an “Infectious and Notifiable Diseases” order came into effect requiring health practitioners to report any suspected cases of COVID-19.

New Zealand reported its first case of COVID-19 on 28 February<sup>4</sup>, a person in their 60s recently returned from Iran. A 2<sup>nd</sup> case was reported on 4 March<sup>5</sup>, a woman in her 30s who had recently returned from Northern Italy.

On 14 March<sup>6</sup> the Government announced that anyone entering New Zealand from anywhere other than the Pacific Islands must self-isolate for 14 days. And then on 19 March<sup>7</sup> all indoors gatherings of more than 100 people were cancelled, and New Zealand’s borders were closed to all but New Zealand citizens and permanent residents. Quickly thereafter, on 21 March<sup>8</sup> the Government introduced a 4-tiered Alert Level system (outlined below) and the Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, put the country on Alert Level 2.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.stats.govt.nz/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.health.govt.nz/news-media/news-items/novel-coronavirus-update-27th-january-2020>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=12304015](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=12304015)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/119899280/ministry-of-health-gives-latest-update-on-novel-coronavirus>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/wellington/119994409/coronavirus-second-confirmed-new-zealand-case>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/coronavirus/120279430/coronavirus-prime-minister-updates-nz-on-covid19-outbreak>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/action-indoor-gatherings-and-events-protect-public-health>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=12318673](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=12318673)

### *Alert Level 1 – Prepare*

COVID-19 is uncontrolled overseas, there may be sporadic imported cases and isolated local transmission. Schools and workplaces are open. There are no restrictions on personal movements or gatherings, but people and organisers are encouraged to maintain records for contact tracing.

### *Alert Level 2 – Reduce*

COVID-19 is contained but there is risk of community transmission and there may be active clusters. Gatherings of up to 100 people are allowed. Physical distancing of 2 metres when out in public and 1 metre in controlled environments like workplaces. Sport and recreation activities, public venues (e.g. museums, libraries, pools) and event facilities (e.g. cinemas, stadiums, casinos, concert venues) are allowed but subject to some restrictions. Face coverings required on most public transport and aircraft.

### *Alert Level 3 – Restrict*

High risk that COVID-19 is not contained within New Zealand. Multiple cases of community transmission and multiple active clusters. People must stay home in their immediate household bubble other than for essential personal movement such as going to work, school or for local recreation. Bubbles can be expanded to include close family, caregivers, or isolated people – the extended bubble must remain exclusive. Physical distancing of 2 metres outside the home or 1 metre in controlled environments like schools and workplaces. People must work from home if possible and children should learn at home but schools for years 1 to 10 and early childhood centres may open for children of essential workers only. Businesses can open but cannot physically interact with customers except for supermarkets, pharmacies, petrol stations and hardware stores (providing goods to trade customers). Low risk local recreation activities are allowed but public venues closed. Gatherings of up to 10 people allowed for weddings and funerals only.

### *Alert Level 4 – Lockdown*

Likely that COVID-19 is not contained. Sustained and intensive community transmission is occurring. There are widespread outbreaks. People must stay at home in their bubble other than for essential personal movement. Safe recreational activity is allowed in the local area. Travel is severely limited. All gatherings cancelled and all public venues are closed. Businesses are closed except for essential services. Educational facilities are closed. Rationing of supplies and requisitioning of facilities is possible. There is reprioritisation of healthcare services.

### **Lockdown Imposed**

On 23 March<sup>9</sup> the Prime Minister announced that New Zealand was moving to Alert Level 3 with immediate effect and on 25 March would move to Alert Level 4, effectively placing the entire country in self-isolation.

On 29 March<sup>10</sup> New Zealand had its first death from COVID-19, a woman in her 70s. The number of cases rose through March, reaching 647 by 31 March<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/new-zealand/2020/03/coronavirus-new-zealand-goes-to-covid-19-alert-level-3.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/new-zealand/2020/03/coronavirus-first-new-zealand-death-recorded.html>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.health.govt.nz/news-media/media-releases>

From 10 April<sup>12</sup> anyone entering New Zealand must be isolated in a government-controlled facility for at least 14 days.

New Zealand moved back down to Alert Level 3 on 27 April. By 30 April<sup>11</sup> the number of cases had reached 1,476, with 1,241 recovered and 19 deaths.

On 13 May<sup>13</sup> New Zealand moved to Alert Level 2 and the State of National Emergency,<sup>14</sup> which was declared on 25 March, was lifted.

By 31 May<sup>11</sup> there was only 1 active case in New Zealand and the total number of cases had peaked at 1,504 (1,481 recovered and 22 deaths).

The MoH reported on 8 June<sup>15</sup> that there were no more active cases of COVID-19 in New Zealand, and the country moved to Alert Level 1.

On 16 June<sup>16</sup>, after 24 days of no new cases, there were 2 new imported cases from the UK. By 30 June<sup>11</sup>, there were a total of 22 active cases, all imported from overseas.

And then on 11 August<sup>17</sup>, the news that New Zealand was dreading to hear, there were 4 new cases from an unknown source in the community – the first community transmission in 102 days. On 12 August, in line with the “go hard and go early” approach, the Auckland region moved to Alert Level 3 and the rest of New Zealand moved to Alert Level 2.

On 30 August<sup>18</sup> Auckland moved to Alert Level 2.5 (Alert Level 2 but with extra restrictions on travel and gatherings). By 31 August<sup>11</sup> there were 131 active cases and the total number had reached 1,738.

On 17 September<sup>19</sup> the New Zealand economy officially entered recession with GDP contracting by 12.2% in the June quarter. The resurgence of COVID-19 also resulted in the Prime Minister<sup>20</sup> delaying the general election from 19 September to 17 October.

All regions except Auckland moved to Alert Level 1 on 21 September<sup>21</sup>. And then on 23 September Auckland moved to Alert Level 2. Finally, on 7 October<sup>22</sup>, Auckland also moved to Alert Level 1.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/413866/covid-19-quarantine-or-managed-isolation-compulsory-for-all-arrivals-into-nz-pm-says>

<sup>13</sup>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20200511044940/https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/coronavirus/300009818/coronavirus-new-zealand-will-start-to-move-to-level-2-on-thursday>

<sup>14</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20200514012504/https://thespinoff.co.nz/politics/13-05-2020/covid-19-live-updates-may-13-alert-level-two-law-may-go-right-down-to-the-wire/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20200608035311/https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/418524/prime-minister-jacinda-ardern-reveals-move-to-level-1-from-midnight>

<sup>16</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20200616024648/https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/419124/covid-19-two-new-cases-in-new-zealand-both-arrivals-from-uk>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.newstalkzb.co.nz/news/national/four-covid-19-cases-confirmed-in-nz-from-unknown-source/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/new-zealand/2020/08/covid-19-auckland-to-move-to-level-2-5-on-sunday-what-you-need-to-know.html>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/business/426270/covid-19-gdp-results-show-nz-officially-in-first-recession-in-a-decade>

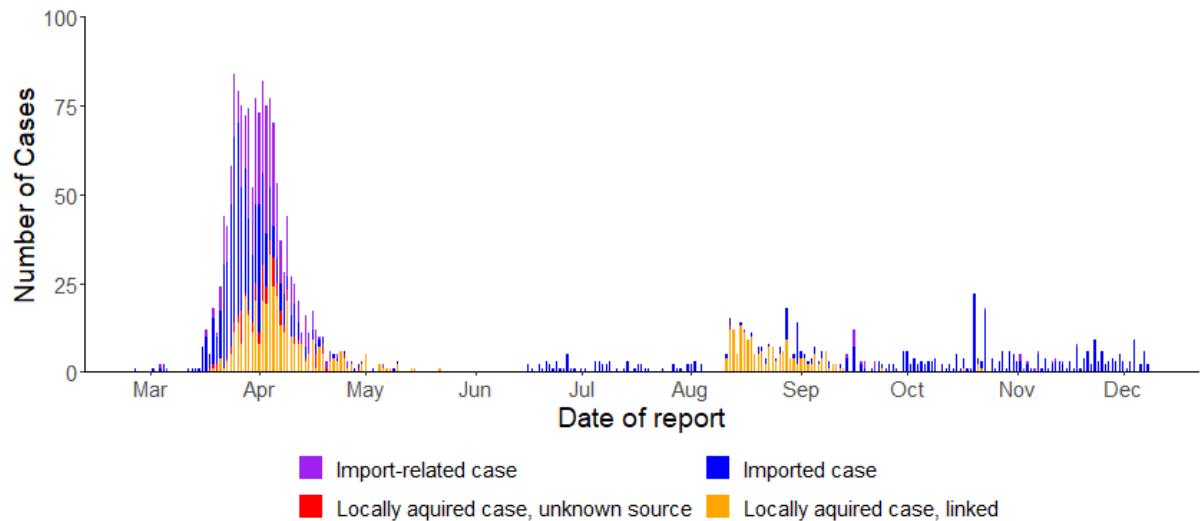
<sup>20</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/coronavirus/122466319/live-jacinda-ardern-delays-election-to-october-17-amid-coronavirus-outbreak>

<sup>21</sup> [https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=12366570](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=12366570)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/coronavirus/122983129/covid19-auckland-to-move-to-alert-level-1-from-midnight-wednesday>

On 21 October<sup>23</sup> there were 2 cases of community transmission in Port workers – the first community transmission since 25 September.

## Daily confirmed and probable cases by source<sup>24</sup>



### Current Situation

As at 30 November<sup>11</sup> there has been a total of 2,056 cases (1,700 confirmed, 356 probable) of which 72 are still active, 1,959 have recovered and 25 people have died. There have not been any cases of community transmission since 12 November. All people entering New Zealand are still required to be isolated in a government-controlled facility for at least 14 days on arrival.

New Zealand's overall COVID-19 strategy is elimination. This does not mean eradicating COVID-19 permanently from New Zealand but being confident that community transmission has been eliminated and that future imported cases are effectively contained.

In comparison to many countries New Zealand has, so far, fared relatively well in respect of COVID-19, and as an added bonus, early data suggests that overall mortality decreased over the lock down period compared to the previous 5 years. It is likely that the reduction is due to fewer deaths from traffic accidents, workplace injuries, respiratory related illnesses and elective surgery.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/21/new-zealand-records-25-covid-cases-amid-arrival-of-foreign-fishing-crews>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-data-and-statistics/covid-19-source-cases>