

Public information update: COVID-19 response for the Yolngu Region of East Arnhem - 24 May 2020

East Arnhem Covid 19 Team

Dear All

The designated biosecurity areas in the Northern Territory will be lifted on 5 June 2020. This was confirmed in an announcement by the Chief Minister yesterday. The areas were due to expire on 18 June 2020, but they will now be lifted in line with the third stage of the [Roadmap to the New Normal](#).

The designated biosecurity area of East Arnhem (including the towns of Nhulunbuy and Alyangula) has been in place since 11:59pm on 26 March 2020. The decision to lift the designated biosecurity area and the travel restrictions associated with it was made by the Commonwealth Minister for Health, with input from health experts, Land Councils and the Northern Territory Government.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR TRAVEL INTO EAST ARNHEM FROM WITHIN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY?

This change means that from 5 June 2020, it will no longer be necessary to quarantine for 14 days prior to entering the designated biosecurity area (if you are already inside the NT, e.g. Darwin, Katherine etc).

It also means that from 5 June there will no longer be a requirement for Approved Remote Essential Worker certificates/cards to enter the designated area.

However, there are still travel restrictions in place for people entering the Northern Territory from interstate and overseas. As always, relevant Land Council permits are still required for travel within the Territory, including within the East Arnhem region (see below for more detail).

A REMINDER TO REMAIN VIGILANT AS RESTRICTIONS WITH PERSONAL HYGIENE AND SOCIAL DISTANCING

The lifting of designated biosecurity areas means it is more important than ever that we all remain vigilant and observe [health advice regarding physical distancing and hygiene measures](#).

The Northern Territory Government is also encouraging the use of the [COVIDsafe app](#) to keep Territorians and their communities safe.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR TRAVEL FROM INTERSTATE?

The Chief Minister has been clear that the Northern Territory's border restrictions will remain in place for some time to come.

This means that whether travellers are flying from Cairns into Nhulunbuy (or Alyangula) or flying from anywhere outside of the Territory into Darwin and other interstate ports, they will be required to enter forced quarantine upon arrival at their own expense.

The forced quarantine requirement also applies to people travelling by road into the Northern Territory and mariners (such as fishing vessels, yachts, shipping etc coming from interstate) must also enter forced quarantine when arriving in the region (e.g. Gove Port, Alyangula port or any other location).

Travellers seeking exemptions from the requirement to complete forced quarantine (or permission to quarantine at a place other than a hotel that has been set up for interstate quarantine) [may apply to the Chief Health Officer for exemptions](#). Please note that processing these applications for exemptions takes some time and there is no guarantee that an exemption will be granted. We therefore encourage you to apply well in advance, if you do plan to seek an exemption.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR TRAVEL WITHIN THE EAST ARNHEM (YOLNGU) REGION?

The creation of the designated biosecurity area did not restrict the movement of Yolngu people within the region: It remains the case that Yolngu may travel between communities, homelands and the township of Nhulunbuy. The main change for Yolngu as a result of the lifting of the designated area is that after 5 June, they will also be able to travel within the Northern Territory and return again without needing to quarantine in Darwin or Katherine first.

For non-Yolngu (Balanda), travel beyond Nhulunbuy is still determined by the Northern Land Council. The current requirements focus on making sure essential services and supplies continue to remote

communities and homelands. We are seeking further information on whether the restriction of travel to essential workers will continue and we will provide advice about that as soon as possible.

All Balanda – regardless of whether they are doing essential works – must have a valid Land Council permit and carry your permit with you at all times. This requirement also applies if you are in transit (for example, if you travel out on the Central Arnhem Road you must have a Northern Land Council permit) or are visiting a recreation area (if you go to a Dhimurru recreation area you need a permit from Dhimurru).

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR TRAVEL WITHIN THE EAST ARNHEM (ANINDILYAKWA) REGION?

The Anindilyakwa Land Council has indicated that it will retain the Groote Archipelago & Community Access Permit, and that all non-Traditional Owner visitors and residents will require this permit to travel to the Groote Archipelago.

The ALC will be updating the requirements of these permits so that two-week quarantine before travelling will not be required from 5 June 2020, and that those in possession of a Groote Archipelago and Community Access Permit can travel freely around the Northern Territory without voiding their permit.

We are working with the ALC to fully understand the new arrangements and will issue further advice prior to 5 June 2020.

CAN THE DESIGNATED BIOSECURITY AREAS BE PUT BACK IN PLACE?

The short answer is, yes.

The Commonwealth Minister for Health has a wide range of powers, including to designate areas and restrict travel. Those powers are given to the Minister under the *Biosecurity Act 2015* (Cth) and activated when the Governor-General declares a human biosecurity emergency.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Governor-General first declared a human biosecurity emergency on 18 March 2020 for three months. On Friday 15 May, the declaration was extended by a further three months, meaning that the Minister's powers under the Biosecurity Act will continue until 17 September 2020.

The type of instrument that created designated areas in the Northern Territory and other parts of Australia is a Determination by the Minister for Health, using his emergency powers. That is an important protection, because it means that if the risks surrounding COVID-19 in Darwin and other regional centres increases, the Minister could consult with Land Councils and the Northern Territory Government to re-introduce designated biosecurity areas to keep people safe.

OTHER HEALTH DIRECTIONS

While intra-NT travel restrictions are easing, it is more important than ever that if you're participating in an activity or attending business premises, you to abide by signage and directions from staff that will ensure compliance with the principles underpinning the Northern Territory Government's Roadmap to the New Normal, including:

- Be respectful of the two hour limit.
- Adhere to physical distancing and hygiene with particular emphasis on hand hygiene.
- Stay at home if unwell.

PUBLIC INFORMATION UPDATES

These public information updates include details relevant to the East Arnhem region. The source of information for Northern Territory Government news and requirements related to the COVID-19 pandemic is <https://coronavirus.nt.gov.au/> and we encourage you to visit that site regularly. If you have questions about how Northern Territory Government requirements apply in the East Arnhem region, please email EastArnhem.Covid19@nt.gov.au and we will do our best to include relevant details in our next public information update.

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NT Police Compliance Number 131 444