

With recovery of last case, New Zealand has eradicated virus

June 8 2020, by Nick Perry



In this April 17, 2020, file photo, Medical staff test shoppers who volunteered at a pop-up community COVID-19 testing station at a supermarket carpark in Christchurch, New Zealand. New Zealand has eradicated the coronavirus from its shores after health officials reported on Monday June 8, 2020 that the final person known to have contracted an infection had recovered. (AP Photo/Mark Baker, File)

New Zealand appears to have completely eradicated the coronavirus—at least for now—after health officials said Monday the last known infected person had recovered.

The announcement was greeted with joy around the country and means the nation of 5 million people will be among the first to welcome throngs of fans back into sports stadiums, embrace crowded concerts and remove seating restrictions from flights.

It has been 17 days since the last new case was reported, during which time an additional 40,000 people have been tested, bringing the total number tested to about 300,000. Monday marked the first time since late February there have been no active cases.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said she was confident New Zealand had halted the spread of the [virus](#) but it still must be prepared for more.

"We are confident we have eliminated transmission of the virus in New Zealand for now, but elimination is not a point in time, it is a sustained effort," she said at a news conference. "We almost certainly will see cases here again, and I do want to say that again, we will almost certainly see cases here again, and that is not a sign that we have failed, it is a reality of this virus. But if and when that occurs we have to make sure—and we are—that we are prepared."



In this April 17, 2020, file photo, a man reacts as a medical staffer tests shoppers who volunteered at a pop-up community COVID-19 testing station at a supermarket carpark in Christchurch, New Zealand. New Zealand has eradicated the coronavirus from its shores after health officials reported on Monday June 8, 2020 that the final person known to have contracted an infection had recovered. (AP Photo/Mark Baker,File)

More cases are likely to be imported as people enter the country. For now, the border remains shut to all but citizens and residents, with some limited exceptions. Everybody who does enter has to go into quarantine.

Ardern announced that the Cabinet had agreed to remove almost all remaining virus restrictions from midnight, with the exception of the border strictures.

"We can hold public events without limitations. Private events such as weddings, functions and funerals without limitations," Ardern said.

"Retail is back without limitations. Hospitality is back without limitations. Public transport and travel across the country is fully opened."

Experts say a number of factors have helped New Zealand wipe out the disease. Its isolated location in the South Pacific gave it vital time to see the devastating spread of the virus in other countries. Ardern also acted decisively by imposing a strict lockdown early in the outbreak.



In this April 17, 2020, file photo, shoppers line up at a pop-up community COVID-19 testing station at a supermarket carpark in Christchurch, New Zealand. New Zealand has eradicated the coronavirus from its shores after health officials reported on Monday June 8, 2020 that the final person known to have

contracted an infection had recovered. (AP Photo/Mark Baker,File)



In this May 14, 2020, file photo, passengers wait to board their flight at Christchurch Airport in Christchurch, New Zealand. New Zealand has eradicated the coronavirus from its shores after health officials reported on Monday June 8, 2020 that the final person known to have contracted an infection had recovered. (AP Photo/Mark Baker, File)



A man walks across the frost covered fairways of a golf course in central Christchurch, New Zealand, Saturday, June 6, 2020. (AP Photo/Mark Baker)

She said her government's focus will be on the country's borders, where isolation and quarantine will continue.

Just over 1,500 people contracted the virus in New Zealand, including 22 who died.

Eliminating the virus won't end the economic pain for the country. Thousands of people have lost their jobs. The [tourism industry](#), which accounts for about 10% of the economy, has been particularly hard hit.

But Monday was a time of celebration for many. Ardern said that when

she heard there were no more active cases, she did a little dance in her living room in front of her daughter Neve, who turns 2 this month. Ardern said the toddler had no idea what was going on but was happy to join her.

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