

Australia unlikely to open border in 2021: health official

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Australia's international borders are unlikely to open to travellers this year despite the rollout of coronavirus vaccines, a top health official said Monday.

Health department secretary Brendan Murphy, a key adviser in Australia's virus response, said free-flowing travel to and from the country was not expected to resume in 2021.

"I think that we'll go most of this year with still substantial [border](#) restrictions," he told public broadcaster ABC.

"Even if we have a lot of the population vaccinated, we don't know whether that will prevent transmission of the virus.

"And it's likely that [quarantine](#) will continue for some time."

Australia's border has been largely closed to overseas visitors since March 2020 to stem the spread of COVID-19, with a limited number of citizens and their families allowed to return each week.

Tens of thousands of Australians remain stranded overseas as a result, while returning travellers must pay about Aus\$3,000 (\$2,300) to quarantine inside a hotel room for 14 days.

The country has secured access to both the Pfizer and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines, with the rollout scheduled to begin in late February but still awaiting approval from medical regulators.

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