

New Zealand, whose pandemic response was closely watched, removes last of COVID-19 restrictions

August 14 2023, by Nick Perry



New Zealand's Prime Minister Chris Hipkins announces an end to all COVID-19 restrictions during a press conference at the Parliament in Wellington, Monday, Aug. 14, 2023. New Zealand removed the last of its remaining COVID-19 restrictions, marking the end of a government response to the pandemic that was watched closely around the world. Credit: Mark Mitchell/NZ Herald via AP

New Zealand on Monday removed the last of its remaining COVID-19 restrictions, marking the end of a government response to the pandemic that was watched closely around the world.

Prime Minister Chris Hipkins said the requirement to wear masks in hospitals and other [health care facilities](#) would end at midnight, as would a requirement for people who caught the virus to isolate themselves for seven days.

New Zealand was initially praised internationally for eliminating the virus entirely after imposing nationwide lockdowns and strict border controls.

But as the [pandemic](#) wore on and more infectious variants took hold, the nation's zero-tolerance approach became untenable. It eventually abandoned its elimination strategy.

Reflecting on the government's response to the virus over more than three years, Hipkins said that during the height of the pandemic he had longed for the day he could end all restrictions, but now it felt anticlimactic.

He said about 3,250 New Zealanders from a population of 5 million had died with COVID-19 as a primary or secondary cause—about one-fifth of the mortality rate in the United States.

"While there were no doubt fractures in our collective sense of unity, I believe that New Zealanders can be enormously proud of what we achieved together," Hipkins said. "We stayed home, we made sacrifices, we got vaccinated, and there is absolutely no question, we saved lives."

Health Minister Ayesha Verrall said coronavirus case numbers and hospitalizations were low and had been trending down since June, and

the publicly funded health system had faced less disruption from the virus this southern winter.

"We have been able to complete 16,000 more operations than we did last year, and so that is a very good indication our health system is on a much more even keel than it was," she said.

The announcement comes two months before a [general election](#).

David Seymour, the leader of the opposition ACT Party, said the government had been treating people like children for too long.

"They have been happy to impose [high costs](#) with little benefit and have taken their sweet time getting around to fixing it," Seymour said in a statement.

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Citation: New Zealand, whose pandemic response was closely watched, removes last of COVID-19 restrictions (2023, August 14) retrieved 14 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-08-zealand-pandemic-response-covid-restrictions.html>

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