

Tough restrictions on 'quarantine free' travel wound back after outcry

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8:24PM NOVEMBER 2, 2021 •  214 COMMENTS

Victoria and NSW have wound back some of the restrictions on fully vaccinated overseas arrivals after an outcry over a week-long ban on visiting restaurants and bars.

Amid the euphoria of Monday's "quarantine free" border reopening in the states, strict guidelines imposed by Victoria and NSW Health provided a sobering reality check.

Under the guidelines, arrivals were instructed they would need a Covid test within 24 hours of arrival and another after seven days.

In that time, they could not visit hospitality venues such as restaurants, hotels or bars, or attend large gatherings such as sporting events or concerts.

The rules applied to passengers as well as aircrew such as pilots and flight attendants, with their employer required to ensure compliance with the measures.

It is understood airlines including Qantas were among those to raise concerns about the guidelines, and late on Tuesday some of the measures were eased in NSW and Victoria.

A NSW Health spokeswoman said they were "constantly monitoring the evolving Covid-19 situation with the health and safety of the people of NSW our foremost priority".

"NSW Health has updated its advice for recent fully vaccinated international arrivals to Sydney to no longer restrict entry into large gatherings (for example, concerts, football matches) or hospitality venues (pubs, restaurants) for seven days following arrival," a spokeswoman said.

"However, people must continue to practise physical distancing, wear masks in indoor public spaces and practise good hand hygiene.

“Returned travellers should also be vigilant for symptoms and if they occur, get tested and self-isolate until they receive a negative result.”

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The NSW Health spokeswoman said restrictions during the first week after arrival would continue on entry to certain high-risk premises including facilities linked to aged care, disability care, healthcare and correctional services.

And children who were not fully vaccinated must not attend school or childcare for at least seven days and must not enter any other high-risk settings.

“In this phase of the pandemic, the onus is on every one of us to keep each other safe, especially our most vulnerable,” the spokeswoman said.

The changes were welcomed by Qantas and the Australian and International Pilots Association, whose members faced a constant cycle of restrictions due to their work.

AIPA president Murray Butt had warned that airlines could struggle to get crews to operate under such restrictions after almost two years of isolating and quarantine.

He pointed out that no Qantas pilot had contracted Covid-19 while operating more than 8000 freight and repatriation flights throughout the past 20 months.

Captain Butt also warned that such measures would need to be relaxed before international tourism restarted.

“There’s no way a tourist is going to arrive and be here for seven days before they can go to a restaurant,” he said.

After the guidelines were updated by both NSW and VicHealth, Captain Butt said it was a relief to see commonsense had prevailed.

“Quarantine free has to mean just that,” Captain Butt said. “These changes will certainly help our crews return to a much more normal way of life as they get back to more regular flying.”

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