



# COVID-19 AND INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL FOR SPORT

1 SEPTEMBER 2020

## IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION

Athletes have a natural desire to compete internationally in the 12 months preceding an Olympic/Paralympic Games. Athletes, coaches and sport organisations need to recognise however that in these extraordinary times, the potential risks of international travel may outweigh the perceived benefits.

### Current regulations around international travel from Australia

All international travel from Australia is currently prohibited, with exemptions in few circumstances. ([covid19.homeaffairs.gov.au/leaving-australia](https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/covid19/leaving-australia))

**Sport organisations and athletes must stay up to date with evolving local and international guidelines.**

This document provides guidance and a checklist for sport organisations to consider in relation to International travel.

### Australians and permanent residents wishing to travel internationally

If you are an Australian citizen or a permanent resident you cannot leave Australia due to COVID-19 restrictions unless you have an exemption. You can apply online ([travel-exemptions.homeaffairs.gov.au/tep](https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/tep)) but you must meet at least one of the following:

- > your travel is as part of the response to the COVID-19 outbreak, including the provision of aid
- > your travel is essential for the conduct of critical industries and business (including export and import industries)
- > you are travelling to receive urgent medical treatment that is not available in Australia
- > you are travelling on urgent and unavoidable personal business
- > you are travelling on compassionate or humanitarian grounds
- > your travel is in the national interest.

You must provide evidence to support your claims. Requests may be finalised without further consideration if insufficient evidence is provided. Evidence may include:

- > passport/s
- > marriage certificate/s
- > birth certificate/s
- > death certificate/s
- > proof of relationship (for example, shared tenancy agreement, joint bank account etc.)

- > proof that you are moving to another country on a long term basis such as leases, job offers and evidence your goods are being transported
- > proof of your current valid visa, including in Australia and/or overseas
- > letter from a doctor or hospital about any medical treatment/condition with statements on why travel is necessary
- > letter from an employer showing why the travel is necessary or that the work undertaken by you is critical
- > statement or evidence to show when you wish to return to Australia
- > any other proof you may have to support your claims

**All evidence supporting a travel exemption claim needs to be officially translated into English.**

**You should apply for an exemption at least two weeks, but not more than three months before your planned travel. Please make only one request per person. Duplicate requests will delay assessment.**

**If you are not granted an exemption, you should not continue with your travel plans. If granted an exemption, you must take evidence of that exemption decision to the airport.**

You are exempt if you are:

- > ordinarily resident in a country other than Australia
- > an airline, maritime crew or associated safety worker
- > a New Zealand citizen holding a Special Category (subclass 444) visa
- > engaged in the day-to-day conduct of outbound freight
- > associated with essential work at Australian offshore facilities
- > travelling on official government business, including members of the Australian Defence Force

You are considered ordinarily resident in a country other than Australia if international movement records show that you have spent more time outside Australia than inside for the last 12 to 24 months. You do not need to carry a paper record of your movements with you. If required, Australian Border Force officers at airports can check your movement records in Departmental systems.

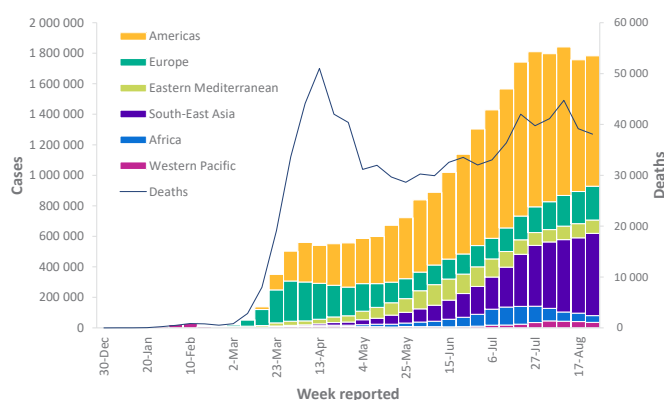
If you do not think you need a travel exemption, you can present this evidence when you check-in at the airport. However, if you have any doubt about whether your circumstances fall within the definition of ordinarily resident, we recommend you lodge a request for assessment at least two weeks prior to your intended departure.



## Current global statistics on COVID-19

Global cases of COVID-19 continue to increase. Over 1.8 million new COVID-19 cases and 38,000 new deaths were reported to WHO in the week ending 30 August. **Athletes and officials contemplating international travel should review the 'total confirmed new cases' in the daily WHO Situation Report ([who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports](https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports)) and take advice from a doctor, before leaving Australia.**

Diagram 1: WHO Global COVID-19 cases (bars) and deaths (line), as at 30 August 2020



Many countries are currently easing restrictions and opening borders. In some of these countries, restrictions are being eased despite continued high local transmission rates, primarily driven by economic considerations.

## International travel for training/competition in sport

When considering international travel, sport organisations need to undertake a risk-benefit analysis, considering the potential safety risks to athletes and officials and the potential benefits that may be gained from the travel. In order to decide if international travel is a reasonable activity and identify what practical risk mitigation strategies can be put in place, sport organisations need to consider the following:

### Government regulations governing international travel, as per above.

International travel will not be permitted unless the reason for travel satisfies Australian Government criteria for exemption to the international travel ban.

### Regulations governing arrivals, permitted gatherings and activities, in country of destination.

Each country will have varying restrictions and guidelines on what manner people can gather and the types of activities that can be undertaken. The international situation is fluid and can change quickly with little warning.

## Understanding the risks:

### Healthcare facilities at the destination.

While the risk is lower in the young and healthy, there are many documented cases of severe disease and death occurring in young, healthy individuals. COVID-19 is unpredictable and the standard of healthcare available and hospital infrastructure should be taken into account when planning international travel.

### Local transmission rates at the destination.

Many countries have far higher local transmission rates than Australia. Some countries are easing social restrictions and permitting inbound travel to their country, despite persisting high levels of transmission. Sport organisations should not assume that because a particular nation permits inbound travel of international visitors, that it is safe to do so. The official figures of daily COVID-19 cases for a given country should be interpreted with caution, due to the differences in testing protocols and allocation of resources. Often the official figures underestimate the true community transmission risk, and further expert input is advised. It is also important to understand how the local healthcare system is coping with the current caseloads.

### Local transmission rates at points of transit between Australia and the destination.

Travel to some countries, may prevent athletes and officials from onward travel to certain other nations. When contemplating international travel, sport organisations need to undertake thorough planning and be sure that travel between countries is permitted.

### Whether any members of the travelling party have health vulnerabilities.

Those most at risk of having a poor outcome from exposure to COVID-19 include Paralympic athletes, those aged over 65 years, people with weakened immune systems, people with chronic medical conditions (such as high blood pressure, heart and lung conditions, kidney disease and diabetes), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. For a person who is at increased risk, the decision to travel internationally should be made after careful discussion between the individual, the treating doctor and the sport.

### Requirements for quarantine.

Many countries currently require individuals travelling from Australia to undergo quarantine when entering the country. Some countries also require COVID-19 testing on entry to their country. Individuals returning to Australia from overseas locations currently require mandatory, supervised (that is, not at home) quarantine for 14 days. Sport organisations need to understand the quarantine regulations pertaining to the country of destination and for return to Australia (see "Returning to Australia" below for further information), when considering the benefit of international travel. Quarantine for 14 days will significantly impact on an athlete's ability to train and maintain physical condition.



### Risk of high intensity exercise after COVID-19 infection.

Individuals who are young and healthy are at lower risk of serious acute complications from COVID-19. This however cannot be assumed. There is growing evidence that COVID-19 is a multi-organ disease, not just a respiratory disease. COVID-19 can have deleterious effects on the heart, brain, kidneys, liver and clotting systems. High performance athletes who have been infected have reported significant reduction in exercise capacity and slow recovery. The knowledge around potential risks to athletes suffering COVID-19 and then returning to high intensity training is in its infancy. It is possible that athletes suffering relatively minor symptoms with COVID-19 may be at risk of persisting cardiac, respiratory or other complications which could potentially place the athletes at risk during high intensity exercise and compromise long term training plans. Any athlete suspected of having had COVID-19 should be thoroughly assessed by medical practitioner and cleared for high intensity activity by a medical practitioner before return to sport.

### Defining the benefits of international travel for competition to sport:

#### What is the primary purpose of the international travel?

There should be a clear and tangible reason as to why international travel is essential to achieve the desired outcome. It is acknowledged in some instances, there may be no reasonable alternative. Sport organisations should consider whether the purpose can be achieved without leaving Australia.

### Risk mitigation strategies:

#### A medical contingency plan for COVID-19 infection to one of the touring party.

Any sport organisation conducting international travel for the purposes of training/ competition must have a contingency plan in place on how undifferentiated respiratory infections and a confirmed case of COVID-19 will be managed. If one of the touring party becomes infected with COVID-19, it is highly likely that the whole touring party will be quarantined, tested and potentially prevented from travelling for a number of weeks. A clear protocol for managing the occurrence of COVID-19 infection within the touring party should be in place, prior to departure. This plan should be constructed in consultation with a medical practitioner.

#### Medical insurance and financial risk.

Medical insurance should specifically include cover for COVID-19 infection, including cover for intensive care admission and additional isolation hotel rooms. If an individual on the touring party becomes unwell and requires admission to an intensive care unit, the medical costs associated with an ICU admission could exceed \$50,000 per day. Sport organisations need to carefully consider the medical insurance requirements and the potential financial risk exposure of undertaking the travel.

### Sport organisations should consider the following risk mitigation measures when contemplating international travel;

Where possible, touring groups should **avoid sharing bathroom facilities or dining halls.**

**Minimising the size of the touring party.** Larger group size when travelling to areas of elevated risk will increase the potential exposure of the group to COVID-19.

**Reduce the duration of the international stay** to the shortest duration possible.

**Travelling with a doctor.** For larger travelling parties (10-15) it is recommended that a doctor is included in the travelling support staff. A doctor can work with local health authorities to provide assessment and treatment that may prevent a hospital presentation. This is likely to be more important when travelling to countries where the local health care system has capacity challenges.

**Travel with a sufficient supply of face masks and hand sanitiser** to ensure that the travelling party can comply with local infection prevention legislation. International air travel is a situation where it is often not possible to follow social distancing principals, a face mask should be worn for the duration of the flight. All in the touring party will require instruction regarding appropriate use of face masks ([publish.viostream.com/play/bfxgwognhq4t96](https://publish.viostream.com/play/bfxgwognhq4t96)), including use for airport transfers at destination, and depending on local transmission rates.

**Have a pre-determined exit strategy.** Decide how your team is going to monitor the local situation while at your destination and at what point would it no longer be considered safe to stay. Sport organisations should maintain flexible booking arrangements. Do not expect that there will be the same volume of flights and ease of air travel as prior to the pandemic. Last minute changes to flights are likely to be more difficult and expensive to arrange.

### Returning to Australia

**There are limited flights into Australia from overseas locations.** Some Australian states are currently not receiving any international flights or have imposed caps on the number of weekly returning arrivals. Many flights into Australia from overseas are selling out within 90 seconds of opening bookings.

**The cost of flights into Australia from overseas is currently much higher than usual.** Athletes/officials contemplating international travel need to understand that there may be challenges in obtaining return flights to Australia and that flights may be very expensive.

Individuals travelling back into Australia from overseas will be required to **undertake supervised hotel-based quarantine, at their own expense.** This is likely to be in the order of \$3,000/fortnight. More information is available at the Department of Home Affairs Travel Restrictions page ([covid19.homeaffairs.gov.au/travel-restrictions-0](https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/travel-restrictions-0)).



## Informed consent for international travel

Sport organisations that are contemplating international travel for athletes/officials should ensure that athletes and officials have been appropriately informed about the inherent risks. It is strongly recommended that sport organisations require athletes and officials who are undertaking international travel to complete a formal document indicating informed consent. A suggested format for such a document is provided below:

I confirm that I have requested exemption to travel overseas for reasons related to sport participation. I acknowledge that I have been informed of the following:

- > Overseas travel is likely to involve an elevated risk of contracting COVID-19
- > COVID-19 is a serious disease that can be fatal or can cause long-term health impacts
- > Individuals with pre-existing disease are at higher risk of serious complications from COVID-19
- > Contracting COVID-19 may cause long-term health effects that impact upon capacity to exercise
- > **Contracting COVID-19 may impact on ability to compete at Olympic/Paralympic Games**
- > Contracting COVID-19 will necessitate medical clearance from a specialist before resuming high intensity sport
- > Contracting COVID-19 may require one or more of enforced quarantine, restricted ability to travel, hospitalisation, ICU admission
- > Medical treatment overseas could result in financial costs in multiple tens of thousands of Australian dollars per day. It is the responsibility of the traveller to ensure that they have appropriate insurance or other arrangements in place to meet any medically-related financial costs that may arise. Insurance policies must specifically cover treatment for COVID-19
- > It may be very difficult and expensive to book return flights to Australia
- > On return to Australia, 14 days of supervised hotel quarantine is likely to be required, at the expense of the traveller

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_