

Covid 19 Delta outbreak: Sir John Key - 5 ideas to transform our approach

26 Sep, 2021 05:00 AM

OPINION:

On April 11, 1970, when Apollo 13 lifted off from the Kennedy Space Centre in Florida, its mission was to land on the moon but on just the second day, an explosion on board changed everything.

Suddenly, with diminished oxygen supplies, a frantic process began to try to return the three astronauts to Earth in their damaged spacecraft.

In a crisis, humans can be creative and inventive. Faced with the growing acceptance that Covid-19 and its variants may be with us indefinitely, the New Zealand Government and public health officials, like Nasa in 1970, rapidly need to change their thinking to adapt to the new challenge.

The aim should no longer be to exist in a smug hermit kingdom, but to get back to a life where New Zealanders can travel overseas – for any reason - knowing they can return home when they want to, and where we again welcome visitors to this country.

These are not radical aims, yet there has been no coherent plan shared with the public for when or how these might be achieved. The only urgency we've seen for months is an enthusiasm to lock down our country, lock up our people and lock out our citizens who are overseas.



Sir John Key at the National Party Annual Conference in 2014. Photo / Getty Images

Some people might like to continue the North Korean option. I am not one of them. Public health experts and politicians have done a good job of making the public fearful, and therefore willing to accept multiple restrictions on their civil liberties which are disproportionate to the risk of them contracting Covid.

Start your day in the know

Get the latest headlines straight to your inbox.

Another problem with the hermit kingdom model is that you have to believe the Government can go on borrowing a billion dollars every week to disguise that we are no longer making our way in the world.

You also have to ignore the deafening voices of tens of thousands of New Zealanders who are having their citizenship compromised by being stranded overseas. A very few of them manage to get back when public servants in Wellington decide whose plight is desperate enough to be rewarded with a golden ticket to MIQ. How is it that bureaucrats are deciding who gets to come home, while pretending the rest have been on an extended overseas shopping trip so deserve nothing more than being left to the mercy of a lottery?

A lottery is not a public policy. It's a national embarrassment. Whether you get to see your grandchild, or your dying mother, or your sister's wedding, depends on whether or not your number comes up. This is a lottery that is gambling with people's families and futures.

Related articles

25 Sep, 2021 05:00 AM Quick Read

[Travel](#)

24 Sep, 2021 02:34 PM Quick Read

[Kahu](#)

Meanwhile, those brave New Zealanders who have started or bought a small business are sleepless with worry – as are their workers – because lockdowns are an indiscriminate tool that stops commerce as effectively as it stops Covid. The true harm is being concealed by an economy propped up by borrowing.

Too often, I hear commentators supporting the North Korean option because they claim that opening up to the rest of the world will introduce the virus, and therefore cost people their lives.

International evidence does not support that claim. If you are vaccinated, your chances of being hospitalised or dying from Covid are slim.

There is an argument that the Government should mandate vaccination, but no country has done this, and neither will ours. Every day in New Zealand people die of smoking-related cancer or other conditions in which lifestyles have played a part. We each make our choices and live with the consequences.

But here's a plan that might work:

1. Give Māori and Pacific health providers a financial incentive for every person they get vaccinated in the next six weeks.

2. Give every person aged between 12-29 a \$25 voucher of their choice if they get vaccinated before December 1.

3. Allow only vaccinated people into licensed premises (and maybe park the Shot Bro bus outside a few nightclubs as an incentive).

4. Tell New Zealanders when borders will reopen. It might incentivise more people to get jabbed.

5. Stop ruling by fear. Instead, reassure people that living with the virus is possible, as long as you're vaccinated. Take positive actions like funding Pharmac to invest in therapies proven to help fight the virus, build up our hospital capacity and workforce, use saliva testing for Covid, subsidise home-testing kits for Covid and order booster shots now.

The final part of the plan is to open the borders, soon.

MIQ, as our sole quarantine response, is inadequate. Home quarantine should begin immediately.

The South Australian trial already requires those in home MIQ to leave their phone on 24 hours a day and to agree to using face recognition and GPS technology so they can be monitored.

We could throw in the kicker that if you break quarantine you get a \$20,000 fine, and time in the clanger.

Additionally, as Act leader David Seymour has been

advocating, we need privately-run and purpose-built short-term MIQ facilities for workers and, in time, for tourists.

This is by no means a complete list of what's possible. It's simply a few ways to encourage vaccination and to allow New Zealand to rejoin the world that is opening up without us.

For those who say it's too hard, or too risky I ask this: one day, when the largest part of the Minister of Finance's Budget pays only the interest on the debt we are racking up now, and you can't have the latest cancer drugs, or more police, because New Zealand can't afford them, what will you think?

Will you wish that in 2021 the Government had acted with the urgency and creativity that Nasa showed when suddenly having to rethink its approach to the Apollo 13 mission? Nasa succeeded. It proved that to get a different outcome, you need a different strategy.

COVID-19 TO READ THE HERALD'S FULL COVERAGE [CLICK HERE](#)