



14 September 2021

Ministerial and Secretariat Services

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Lional Jones

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Dear Lional Jones

Official Information Act request 2021 - 0148

I refer to your Official Information Act (OIA) request partially transferred to the Department of Internal Affairs (the Department or DIA) on 17 August 2021 from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), requesting the following information:

Can you please advise details of any Covid-19 vaccination and mask use requirements, policies or "Standard Operating Procedures" (SOPs) for members of the DPS and the crown limo driver while on duty with the Prime Minister.

Can you also please provide any memos, emails or other official communications that developed any of the requirements, policies or SOPs specific to the DPS and crown limo drivers."

The part of your request that was transferred to the Department concerns chauffeurs who work for VIP Transport. The Department is not responsible for DPS staff, and I understand that DPMC will respond to this part of your request.

Response to your request

All VIP Transport chauffeurs comply with the COVID-19 legislative requirements as set out in the Orders, which are here <https://covid19.govt.nz/alert-levels-and-updates/legislation-and-key-documents/>

The Department's VIP Transport service is deemed to be a small passenger service, as described here <https://nzta.govt.nz/commercial-driving/transport-service-licences/small-passenger-service/>.

The Ministry of Transport provides detailed guidance for use of small passenger services in the different Alert Levels <https://www.transport.govt.nz/about-us/covid-19/>

The Ministry of Health provides directives on the use of masks and face coverings in the community which VIP Transport staff follow <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/covid-19-use-masks-and-face-coverings-community>

As per Ministry of Health guidance, VIP Transport chauffeurs have been able to seek vaccination as their vaccine rollout groups became eligible. The Department has encouraged all staff to become vaccinated, highlighting Ministry of Health key messages, and advising that information is available on the COVID-19 website or by contacting their registered General Practitioner.

Information about the national COVID-19 vaccination programme is here <https://covid19.govt.nz/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccine-rollout-groups/>

Regarding the portion of your request for *'memos, emails or other official communications that developed any of the requirements, policies or SOPs specific to the DPS and crown limo drivers'*, I can confirm that the VIP Transport chauffeur service does not operate in regions or across New Zealand where they are deemed to be at Alert Level 4.

When the national Alert Level lowered in 2020, directives were available from the leading Ministries as outlined above, and VIP Transport followed these guidelines. These were sent to VIP Transport Regional Managers to update their staff. Please find attached as Appendix A copies of this type of email and guidelines. The documents entitled 'VIPT Resurgence plan' and the 'COVID-10 Workplace Reintegration Plan' have lists of links on the final page. These are links to general public sector, DIA, Ministerial Services, and VIP Transport policies and guidelines, which are not specific to VIP Transport mask use, so we consider these to be out of scope of your request.

In providing this information to you, I have withheld the contact details of former and/or current staff members section 9(2)(a) to protect the privacy of individuals. In this response, where section 9 has been relied on, I do not consider that the reason for withholding this information is outweighed by other considerations which render it desirable, in the public interest, to make it available.

Under Alert Levels 1-3, VIP Transport operational decisions are made taking into account a variety of factors, including the directives from the Ministries outlined above. All operational decisions relating to VIP Transport driver deployment are made by the Department's Ministerial Services team and not Ministers' offices, and are based on the level of demand, logistical efficiency, and taking into account health and safety considerations for both chauffeurs and their passengers.

Please note – as Ministry of Health or Ministry of Transport guidance is updated, this is communicated to VIP Transport staff, to ensure that they follow updated national directives.

Background

The Department of Internal Affairs (the Department), via the VIP Transport Service (VIP Transport), provides a safe, secure and professional fleet management and chauffeur service around New Zealand for Ministers, senior officials and other VIPs. VIP Transport operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and covers most of New Zealand. VIP Transport manages the Crown fleet, which is comprised of chauffeur-driven vehicles, vans, and Ministerial self-drive vehicles. The service also organises taxis or other private providers where VIP Transport chauffeured cars are either not available or not practical.

Those entitled to use chauffeur-driven vehicles include Ministers, visiting dignitaries, heads of state and heads of government, Governors-General, former Governors-General and former Prime Ministers, the Leader of the Opposition, the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the House, Public Sector Chief Executives, and senior judges.

Entitled users are listed in the Speaker's Directions 2017 and the Ministers' Travel Services within New Zealand Determination 2017; the Members of Parliament (Former Prime Minister's Travel Services) Determination 2017; and, the Members of Parliament Accommodation Services for Members and Travel Services for Family Members Determination 2017.

Ministers are the largest group of entitled users. Clause 2.1 of the Ministers' Travel Services within New Zealand Determination 2017 provides that '*A Minister may use a chauffeur-driven car arranged by VIP Transport at any time for any purpose, at the Minister's discretion.*'

These determinations are publicly available and can be found on the New Zealand Parliament's website at <https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/parliamentary-rules/directions-determinations/>.

If you have any concerns with the decision referred to in this letter, you have the right to request an investigation and review by the Ombudsman under section 28(3) of the Act.

Yours sincerely



Briget Ridden
General Manager
Ministerial and Secretariat Services