Fully vaccinated international travellers get Sydney green light

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Sydney, October 15 (RHC)-- Sydney will open up to fully vaccinated international travellers from November 1 without the need for quarantine, the leader of the country's most populous state said on Friday, bringing forward a full return of overseas travel.

Australia closed its borders in March 2020 in response to the pandemic, allowing entry almost exclusively to citizens and permanent residents who have been required to undergo a mandatory two-week hotel quarantine at their own expense.

"We need to rejoin the world. We can't live here in hermit kingdom. We've got to open up," New South Wales (NSW) Premier Dominic Perrottet told reporters.

Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison said earlier this month overseas travel would return once 80 percent of people in a particular state were fully vaccinated, but would be available initially for Australians and would require home quarantine.

In NSW, the number of people fully vaccinated has already reached 77.8 percent, while 91.4 percent have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. However, Perrottet said it was time to open up to help revive the economy, which has been badly damaged by the state's near four-month COVID-19 lockdown.

"Hotel quarantine, home quarantine is a thing of the past, we are opening Sydney and New South Wales to the world," he said. Perrottet said those arriving into Sydney will first have to show proof of vaccination and a negative COVID-19 test prior to boarding a plane to Australia, he said.

The removal of quarantine requirements will aid international travel into Australia and is likely to be welcomed by the tens of thousands of Australians who have been stranded overseas as a result of the policy. There have also been strict quotas on the number of places available to returning travellers in hotel quarantine.

NSW reported 399 COVID-19 cases on Friday, well down from the state's pandemic high of 1,599 in early September. Nationally, cases stood at 2,578. Neighbouring Victoria state, where vaccination rates are lower, reported 2,179 new locally acquired cases, down from a record 2,297 a day earlier.

Meanwhile, Canberra, the national capital, on Friday ended its more than two-month lockdown, allowing cafes, pubs and gyms to reopen with strict social distancing rules. The country's overall coronavirus numbers are still relatively low, with some 139,000 cases and 1,506 deaths.

Meanwhile, the Australian Medical Association, which represents the country's doctors, on Friday warned its modelling showed the country's health system will not be able to cope with an influx of coronavirus patients after the country reopens.

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