

**MANAGED ISOLATION
AND QUARANTINE**

**Unite
against
COVID-19**

MIQ Absconder Events Report

Report into seven absconder events
4 October – 6 November 2021



**MINISTRY OF BUSINESS,
INNOVATION & EMPLOYMENT**
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New Zealand Government

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Absconder events

This report comprises seven absconder events involving nine absconders from Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ) facilities over a period of five weeks starting October 4th, 2021.

All the absconding events involved community referrals to MIQ and were, for the most part, very short in duration. Excluding two events that took over 24 hours to conclude, Security Guards were able to keep observation of the absconders for most of the event and the average time length for each event was under 20 minutes. The public health risk was minimised because of the quick actions of both Security Guards and New Zealand Police (NZ Police) responding to events.

No two events were the same, some were planned and some spontaneous. However, each one exploited a vulnerability of the MIQ system. This included fencing, processes, and standard operating procedures.

Fencing

- MIQ has a fencing standard which is adequate for a boundary fence but is not to a confinement standard. In addition, not all the facilities fences are up to the MIQ standard. Weaknesses in the fencing was a factor in several of the absconding events. Consideration should be taken to review the fence standard to make the fencing more robust and to ensure all fencing meets MIQ standards.

Processes

- Departure processes can be improved to ensure that the final departure point is the last check of the departure documentation. This would have prevented the confusion of an absconder on foot being confused with legitimate departees.
- Training in de-escalation processes for staff would be an advantage in some (but not all) circumstances.
- Consistency in handover processes and communications is also an area for improvement.

Standard Operating Procedures

- There cannot be a process for every scenario, the home visit event highlighted that clarity should be established for the span of control for MIQ staff and their responsibilities of people in MIQ care and the accountabilities between Health and MIQ.
- In many cases security staff had observed or attempted to delay the absconders. However, security staff are unable to detain or restrain potential absconders without NZ Police instruction. Neither are they trained to do so.

Security Guards have performed their roles

In each of the recent absconder cases, Security Guards have largely fulfilled their role. They attempted to persuade an absconder to comply with requirements, return to their room or stop the attempt to abscond. However, if an absconder is determined to leave, then there is little that a Security Guard can do.

In one case, there was a miscommunication between Security Guards but they were able to keep the absconder in sight, they quickly raised the alarm and acted appropriately.

New Security Guards receive a level of de-escalation training in their induction and officers from other agencies may receive de-escalation training from their home agency. MIQ is implementing its own de-escalation training, and these could be viewed as refreshers or for specific MIQ situations.

The additional de-escalation training is about an intervention that does not require physical engagement but would equip the Security Guard with the confidence to be more assertive in their verbal engagement and physical presence. This type of intervention could delay the abscond attempt or prevent it all together.

Police have responded quickly to detain absconders

Most of the absconder events have been short in duration, particularly when the absconder acted spontaneously. When notified, NZ Police were quick to pursue and quickly locate absconders. They were then taken into custody or returned to the facility.

In some cases, NZ Police called in additional support to detain absconders away from the facility surrounds. Having more Police on site would not necessarily prevent the absconder events.

Background to Managed Isolation and Quarantine System

The MIQ system was established as part of New Zealand's border defence against an outbreak or spread of COVID-19. It is a complex system of accommodation facilities, personnel, information systems, and testing regimes to ensure that positive COVID-19 cases are detected early at the border, and where necessary are isolated from the community.

The system significantly relies on the willing compliance of those in MIQ facilities. Community referred cases and returnees come to MIQ under different legal regimes however, once admitted, the requirements are the same for both.

Community referrals

Community referred cases have a different profile to border returnees. Border returnees are prepared for their stay in MIQ and understand if they become symptomatic or test positive, they will be transferred to a quarantine facility or area.

Community cases are often unprepared for their stay in MIQ and may have difficulty adapting. The expectations, needs, wellbeing, behavioural and risk profile of community cases can often be different from the returnees that MIQ was established for. These

differences, and sometimes a reluctance to comply with the public health order, can create issues for a system that relies on willing compliance.

As a result there have been several actual and attempted absconder events from MIQ facilities. The Head of Managed Isolation and Quarantine – Operations commissioned this review of absconder events to identify any system vulnerabilities and learnings that can be taken from the events.

Likelihood of more absconders

Since its inception, MIQ has cared for approximately 195,000 people and in that time, there have been 19 absconder events from both border returnees and community cases. This is an appreciably small percentage of people that have been in MIQ care.

When MIQ was first established there were a series of absconder events from border returnees. For a very long period, after processes were embedded, and expectations set, there was a long period with no absconders.

Recently, MIQ has played a greater role in caring for community cases and we have seen an increase in absconders or attempted absconding. Community cases can be reluctant to stay in MIQ and there are a greater percentage of persons presenting with higher needs and a large number of high-risk individuals.

Over the last few month, we have improved processes, information and communication protocols to offer a greater level of understanding and care for community cases. Security settings have been reviewed and improved after each absconding event.

However, if anyone staying at an MIQ facility is determined to leave it is still possible for them to do so. With the current number of high-risk individuals in MIQ it is reasonable to expect there will be further attempts to abscond.

Changing security settings options

MIQ has a layered approach to security which includes both physical measures and monitoring. The primary purpose of the security measures is to support the infection prevention and control (IPC) requirements.

MIQ relies on the willing compliance of those in our facilities and robust security settings. Security Guards are unable to detain anyone attempting to flee the facility unless instructed to do so by police. For this to happen, NZ Police will call on the Security Guard to assist them in the execution of their duty.

There are examples outside of the MIQ environment of Security Guards being empowered to use physical force in the execution of their duty. The Immigration Act is one such example.

If the Section 70 order were to change, a parallel to the Immigration Act could be considered. Under section 334 of the Immigration Act, a person who is in charge of a premises approved for Immigration detention purposes, and any person acting under the authority of that person, may use reasonable physical force to prevent damage to people or property and prevent someone escaping.

However, implementing an option of this type may require MIQ to be designated as a facility of detention which they aren't designed to be, and significant work would be required to fully understand the implications of this option.

Importantly, the majority of the current MIQ workforce does not have the level of training and situational awareness, competency, and fitness to perform this duty.

Alternative fencing options could be considered to strengthen the perimeter; however this may not be cost effective or necessarily provide a greater level of compliance for a relatively small number of absconders.

Recommendations

Recommendations are made for each individual absconder event however the following recommendations should be considered as system improvements.

- General reconsideration of fencing standard applied to facilities that house community quarantine cases.
- Provide de-escalation training to security staff to equip them with the necessary skills to intervene when appropriate.
- Procedures for departures to ensure consistent and robust process in place. The departure letter to be checked at the final point of exit, either to transport or the gate.
- Review process and authorisation level for any transfers medical or otherwise or short-term facility departures.
 - Establish process and formalise authorisation level for temporary facility departures.
 - Review and communicate parameters for accountabilities.
- Revisit handover procedures to ensure the hand over, take over (HOTO) process is being correctly followed.
- Higher risk individual (HRI) notification to be reviewed with option of extending to members of a family bubble as opposed to individuals.

ABSCONDER EVENT SUMMARIES

Summary – Absconder from Jet Park room 194 (AJP194) 4 October 2021

On 4 October 2021, a 32 year old male (community case) absconded from the MIQ Jet Park facility. Since arriving AJP194 was spoken to by Police on several occasions about his behaviour however, there was no indication that AJP194 was intending to abscond. In response to his behavioural issues a static Security Guard was proactively placed near his room for the duration of his stay. At approximately 3pm on October 4th the static Security Guard observed AJP194 exiting his room. The Security Guard directed AJP194 to return to his room. He did not comply and proceeded to walk toward the lifts. Following procedures, the guard immediately radioed Police and the operations control room to advise that AJP194 had exited his room. AJP194 proceeded to exit the building and was pursued immediately by two Police Officers. It took approximately three minutes from the time he left his room to the time he scaled a perimeter fence and ran away. Police followed him and he was eventually located by the Police Dog Handler at his vehicle less than 40 minutes after absconding, where he was arrested and transported to the Auckland Custody Unit.

Public Health Risk

In the time that AJP194 spent away from the facility he was not in contact with other people and the public health risk was low, given that he was arrested shortly afterwards.

Details

- AJP 194 was identified as a high-risk individual who required the development of a specific management plan which was implemented and contributed to the quick resolution of the absconding incident.



- Security staff acted appropriately, they were quick to raise the alarm and the NZ Police response was immediate.
- During his efforts to leave the facility AJP194 assaulted one of the Police Officers pursuing him while he scaled the fence, which aided his absconding.

Actions Taken

- Fencing reviewed and double layer fence installed where physical limitations permit. Approx. 40 metres installed.
- Dedicated unit within Jet park established for higher risk individual cases in facility.
- Enhanced screening processes in place for community cases entering facility.
- Extra support implemented for persons presenting with mental illness, alcohol, and drug addiction issues.
- Increased security presence at facility which allows for more fresh air and smoking breaks.
- Increased Police presence at Jet Park on each shift.

Issues

- AJP194 Ignored all instructions from Security Guard and there was not enough time for Police to attend to the room before the absconder proceeded to leave the buildings.
- AJP194 was able to easily scale the single fence (as was the pursuing Policer Officer).
- Security Guards are unable to force people back into their rooms.
- Security Guards are unable to physically detain or restrain potential absconders without Police instruction.
- Not all Security Guards have a higher level of de-escalation training.
- Fencing was not up to standard at point of exit.

Recommendations

- Review fencing and implement to MIQ standard where physical site limitations allow
- Site security plan to be updated to correctly reflect the fencing standard adopted.

Provide de-escalation training to security staff to equip them with the necessary skills to intervene when appropriate.

Summary – Absconders from Holiday Inn rooms 1004 & 1008 (AHI1004 & AHI1008) 19 October 2021

On October 19, 2021, two male community cases, aged 26 and 33, departed from separate rooms by exiting through their individual ground floor balconies into a common courtyard area. One of the two then tested the resilience of the fence by shaking it in an aggressive fashion. They exited the facility by scaling the internal double wire fencing and then the wooden facility fence to gain access to the main driveway entrance and ran off. The initial alarm was immediately raised by a Security Guard who had a clear view of the area from the entrance gate and he radioed the CCTV control centre to raise the alarm. NZ Police responded and pursued the pair on foot. The absconders were apprehended shortly afterwards a short distance away from the facility. It took approximately two minutes for the absconders to leave the facility and another three minutes until they were detained by NZ Police.

Public Health Risk

This was a short duration absconding event involving two people who were not Covid-19 positive and was resolved quickly by Police. The absconders did not encounter any other people and the public health risk was low

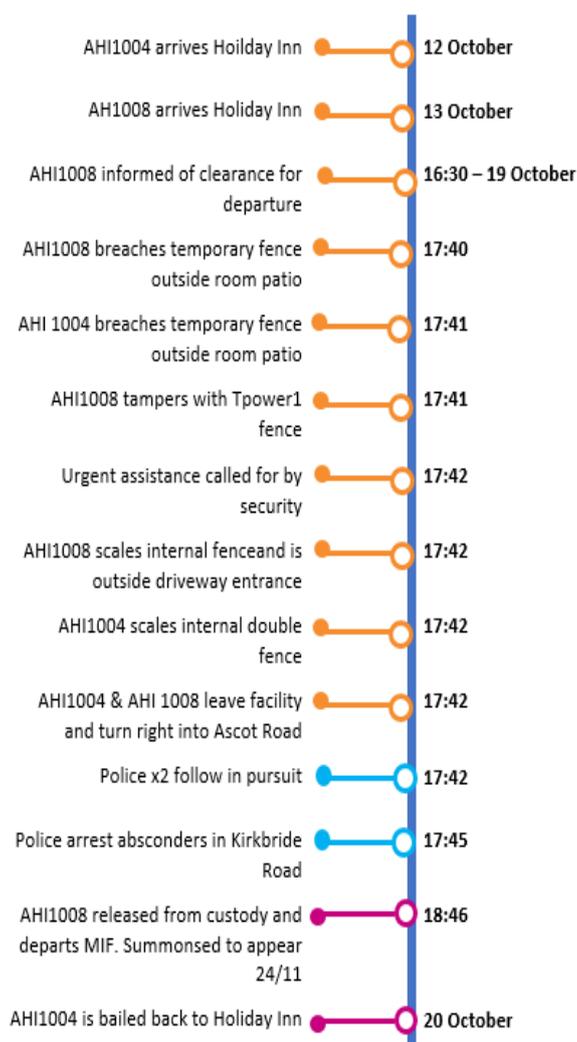
Details

- The absconders were in two rooms from a family bubble of six.
- The two males had come to the attention of MIF staff through previous behavioural issues and their room areas were under constant CCTV surveillance.
- HIA 1008 had previously jumped a balcony fence into a walking area and abused facility staff.
- HIA 1004 had been advised by the MIF Manager at 1630 that he was cleared for departure (from the facility) on the day he absconded. He absconded an hour later intending, he said later, to buy cigarettes.
- The absconding appears to be spontaneous, neither were fully dressed.

Actions Taken

- A full fence line inspection has been completed.
- The driveway double fence has been inspected with no visible or structural damage sustained during the incident.

Timeline



- A second Security Guard was deployed in the area for the duration of the remaining bubble members stay.
- Security debriefs were completed with night shift security workforce.

Issues

- Absconders were able to scale the two perimeter fences with ease. Fences had been installed and met site security plan standard.
- Security Guards had observed the absconders but are unable to detain or retrain potential absconders without NZ Police instruction.
- Not all Security Guards have a higher level of de-escalation training.

Recommendations

- General reconsideration of fencing standard applied to facilities that house community quarantine cases.

Provide enhanced de-escalation training to security staff to equip them with the necessary skills to intervene in these situations when appropriate.

Summary – Absconder from Holiday Inn room 2054 (AHI2054) 19 October 2021

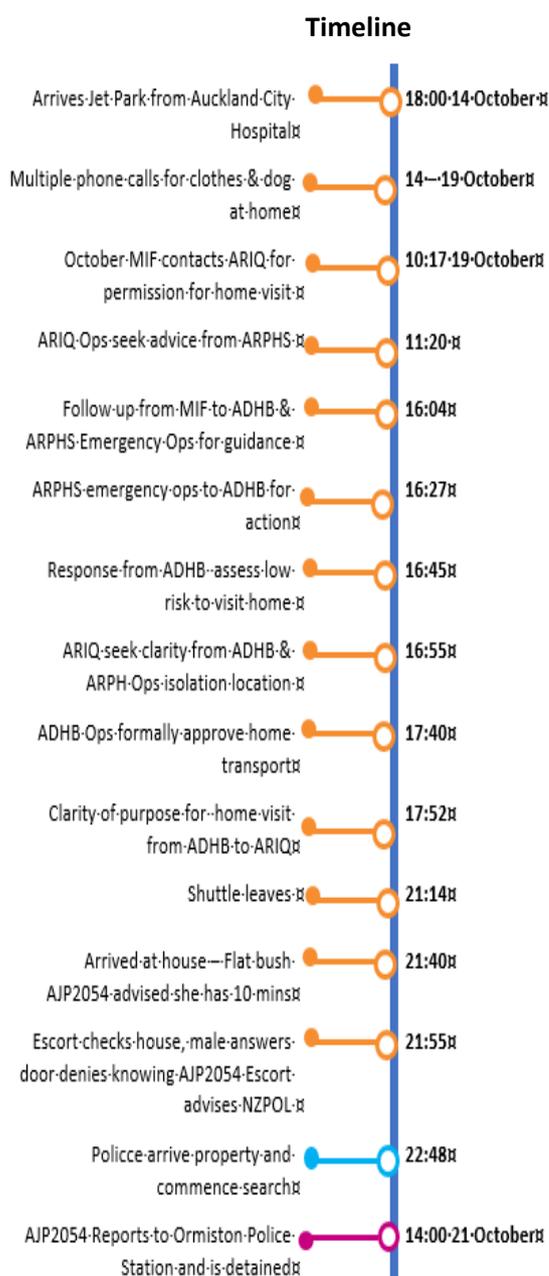
On 19 October 2021, a 46 year old female (community case) absconded during an escorted home visit. AHI2054 had arrived at MIQ direct from hospital without belongings. Between 14 – 19 October she made repeated requests to return home to secure her dog, pick up clothing and lock up her house. The MIF Manager engaged with Auckland Regional Public Health Services (ARPHS) to obtain authority for a home visit. Approval was granted and the home visit was arranged for the evening of 19 October. Transport was arranged, an escort provided, and few security challenges were anticipated however, there was no risk assessment prepared for the trip. The instructions to the escort were to accompany AHI2054 to the address only. The escort kept in touch with the MIF throughout the visit. On arrival, AHI2054 was allowed to enter the house alone and was told to return within 10 minutes while the escort and driver remained with the vehicle. After 15 minutes the escort went to the house and spoke to a male who denied knowing AHI2052. Police were immediately notified and on arrival, they searched the address and spoke with two male occupants. AHI2054 reported to the Ormiston Police station two days later.

Public Health Risk

AHI2054 was deemed a low health risk for the visit.

Details

- AHI2054 had arrived at the facility direct from hospital in a hospital gown with no personal items or clothing.
- Through the repeated requests from AHI2054 to return home, it was understood there was no one at the house.
- A shift hand-over occurred in the afternoon with a new MIF Manager starting. The outgoing MIF Manager was concerned with some behaviours exhibited by AHI2054 however, the specifics may have been lost in translation during the hand over.



- The email trail shows the focus to be on a health risk and not an operational risk for the home visit.

Actions Taken

- Process established to ensure any temporary departures from facility other than for transit to a hospital are authorised at the appropriate level. (Auckland ROD).

Issues

- Alternative actions had not been explored; there was little risk appreciation and no assessment of the address, which was assumed to be empty.
- There was no operational plan or contingency plan if anything were to go wrong.
- Multiple email conversations ARIQ/APRH/ADHB that seemed to cross over each other.
- It was unclear when the visit was approved, what role MIQ had. Initially it was thought that MIQ arranged transport and the role of the escort was limited.
- Wider agency involvement prior to the visit taking place was not recorded as taking place.

Recommendations

- Establish process and formalise authorisation level for temporary facility departures in line with medical transfer process.
- Revisit handover procedures to ensure the HOTO process being correctly followed.
- Review legal parameters for accountabilities under the general section order for persons who have returned a positive test for COVID-19, specifically for temporary departures.

Summary – Absconder from Novotel Ibis room 1037 (ANI1037) 30 October 2021

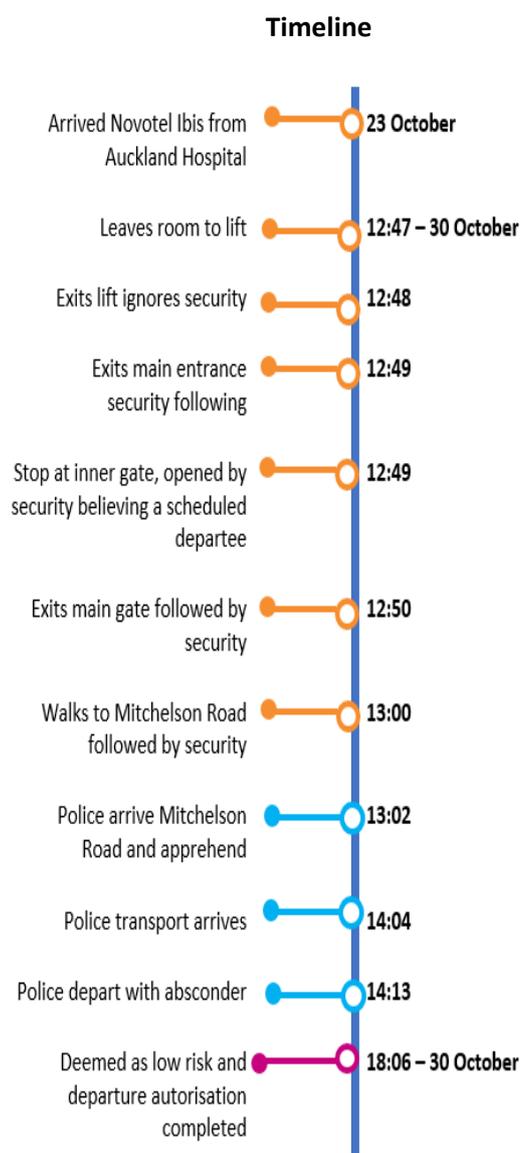
On 30 October 2021, a 33 year old male (community case) absconded from the facility by walking out the front gate when he was mistaken for an authorised person to leave. ANI1037 was challenged when leaving his room with luggage and as he made his way through the facility. ANI1037 was followed by a Security Guard who tried to call him back to the facility. The pursuing Security Guard was communicating with the Security Guard at the front gate via radio however, the message about ANI1037 leaving was misunderstood. The Security Guard on the gate thought that ANI1037 was cleared to leave and was part of a departing group leaving around the same time. ANI1037 stopped at the inner gate while on the way to main entrance. The gate was opened by the Security Guard who believed he was a legitimate departure. ANI1037 then left the grounds and ran under the motorway before coming back around to the nearby racecourse while being followed by Security Guards. It took approximately two minutes to leave the facility and the Security Guards had him under observation for the duration of this incident. NZ Police responded immediately and ANI1037 was detained and returned to facility 24 minutes after departing.

Public Health Risk

The absconding event was resolved quickly without the absconder encountering members of the public and the public health risk was low.

Details

- ANI1037 had made comments to health staff on previous occasions that he was going to walk out of the facility.
- He was eligible to depart November 1st however this may have been delayed if he was symptomatic.
- Identified as a high-risk individual his room entry was on active CCTV monitoring and security staff were briefed regarding his intention to walk out.
- He was seen on CCTV and Police were alerted.



- When ANI1037 was seen by security leaving his room with his bags packed. He was repeatedly challenged by a guard but proceeded to the exit two minutes later.
- Security Guards acted appropriately calling the command centre, and gate and kept him under observation.

Actions Taken

- Staff educated by Regional Operations Security Manager (ROSM) on the need for clear concise communications.

Issues

- Unclear communication between security team members during departures, resulted in the guard on the gate opening the gate for absconder.
- Radio traffic was high, poor terminology was used and there was confusion about ANI1037 and his status was not checked at the gate.
- Security staff had confronted the absconder but they are unable to detain or restrain potential absconders without Police instruction.
- Not all security staff have a higher level of de-escalation training.
- The standard operating procedure final exit check requires departing guest to show a departure letter. Absence of a process for documentation validation at the final departure point.

Recommendations

- Procedures for departures to ensure consistent and robust process in place. If the final exit check is at the gate, the departure letter is to be checked by security before exit.
- Security staff to be trained in de-escalation actions.
- Standardisation of radio communications and delivery of training to all staff.

Summary – Absconders from Jet Park room 192 (AJP192F & AJP192M) 30 October 2021

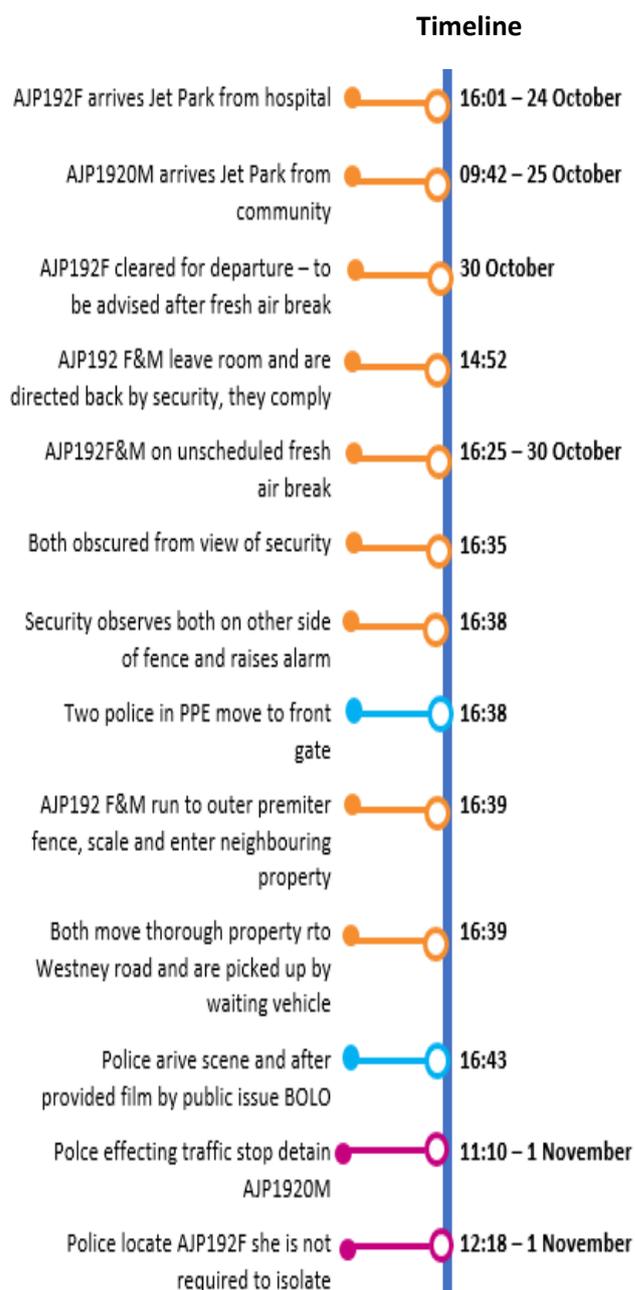
On 30 October 2021, two community cases, a 37 year old male and a 35 year old female, absconded from the MIQ Jet Park facility by altering a security fence and squeezing through the base of the fence. They scaled the facility perimeter fence and entered a neighbouring property where they made their way to the road and were picked up by a waiting vehicle. The female was cleared for release from the facility by NRHCC on 30 October but had not been advised of her impending departure. Although there were no prior indications or intentions to abscond, this appears to be a planned event. The couple had previously left their room attempting to have an unscheduled cigarette break. On that occasion they immediately complied with security when they were asked to return to their room. They left their room later, again asking for a cigarette break which was provided. While in the fresh air area, they went behind some trees where they were obscured from the security escort and then quickly exited the facility.

Public Health Risk

The female absconder was cleared for release and therefore did not pose a risk for public health. The male absconder was a medium to high risk having spent time in isolation but had not been cleared for departure.

Details

- At approx. 16:35 both disappeared from the Security Guards view within a grove of trees in the fresh air area while on an escorted fresh air break.
- Later CCTV review identifies that the male removed the temporary fencing bolt from the top of the fence allowing the fence to be pulled apart and they squeezed through the gap. The bolt was then repositioned before the pair made their way to the hotel fence on the boundary.
- Security Guards followed correct procedures and the alarm was immediately raised.



- Police located and detained the male the next day, while ARHPS advised the female no longer required quarantine.

Actions Taken

- Temporary fencing has been rectified and Operations Security Manager (OSM) is attending to the fence that borders the shipping yard.
- The area with trees that obscured the point where the fence was breached has been fenced off from the exercise area and is no longer accessible.
- Security staff monitoring the exercise area have redeployed to positions to provide an enhanced view of the exercise area.
- All the existing fence clamps were checked by the contractor and were turned outwards to make it harder for someone to loosen the bolts while in the exercise area.
- A second fence clamp was installed on every panel in the exercise area, to add redundancy to the clamps.

Issues

- Footage from the shipping yard shows the two individuals climbing over the outer perimeter hotel installed fence (6ft/Barbed wire).
- Trees obscured the view of the area where they breached the exercise area fence from the visual observation of the guards.
- No interaction possible from the guards to de-escalate situation.

Recommendations

- Further enhance fencing standards. Ensure the connecting clips are well secured that hold the fence together and possible further connectors.
- Make repairs to the permanent hotel fence on the boundary to further harden the security perimeter.

Summary - Absconder from Amohia room 220 (AA220) 5 November 2021

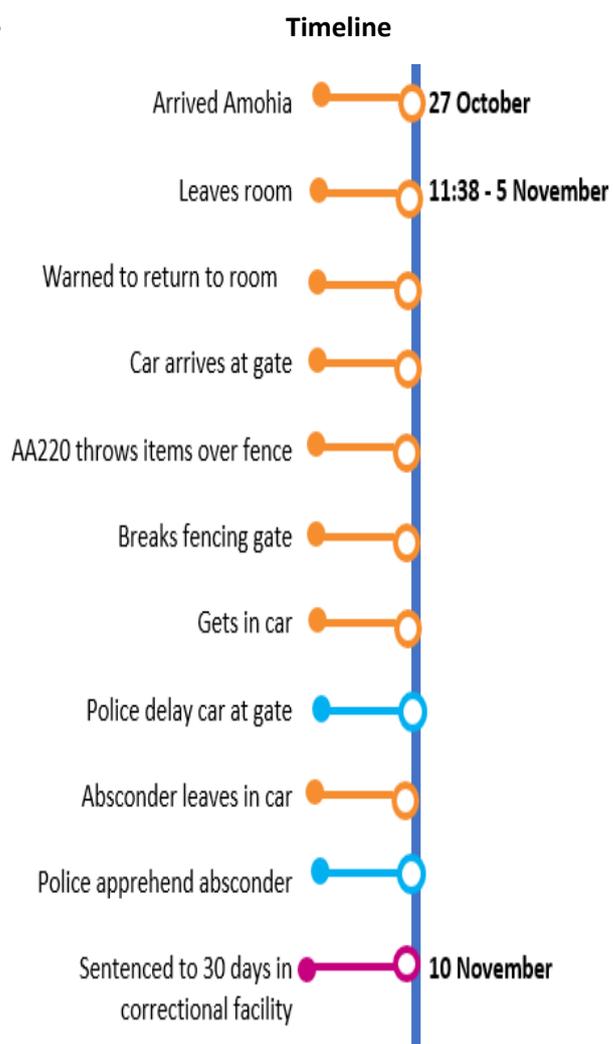
On 5 November 2021, a community case exited his room and told nearby staff he was going to leave. A medical team assisted by a staff member were in the hallway and repeatedly told AA220 to return to his room. They were ignored and the team then raised the alarm. AA220 proceeded out of the building being followed by security who continued to engage with AA220 instructing him to stop and return to his room. At the same time a vehicle approached the arrival gate. AA220 threw his personal items over the fence, uplifted a section from the base, pushed the gate wider and walked out of the facility to the waiting vehicle. Security maintained visual contact with the absconder until NZ Police from the MIF arrived at the location. NZ Police spoke to AA220 but were unable to prevent him leaving in the vehicle. Local Police who were nearby had been informed of the vehicle details and AA220 and his driver were detained by them 3 minutes later. AA220 was arrested and transferred to Te Awamutu Police Station.

Public Health Risk

This event was very short in duration. The positive case was immediately detained as was the person in the waiting vehicle. Both were isolated after the event and there was low public health risk

Details

- AA220 is a 33 year old male who was on day 9 of isolation and was in a bubble of one. There had been no issues identified previously.
- This was a planned event and AA220 had arranged for someone to pick him up at the entrance of the facility.
- Security and Health staff followed all processes and they kept AA220 under observation for the duration of the incident and escalated to NZ Police.
- The main gate is secured by chain lock so AA220 moved to the closed pedestrian gate and removed the gate from base block.
- AA220 was initially spoken to by NZ Police at the gate but proceeded to get back in the car and was driven away. AA220 and his driver were apprehended by NZ Police nearby who had been alerted by Police at the facility.



Actions Taken

- Extra radios have been sourced, programmed, and deployed.
- Fence and gate have been secured to the base using cable ties to prevent it from being lifted out.

Issues

- The staff member was without a radio due to supply issues and therefore was unable to provide an early warning for response although health staff immediately raised the alarm.
- AA220 was able to lift the pedestrian gate out of the base, the pedestrian gate was not secured to the main fence line. The fencing had been altered during the conversion to a quarantine facility.
- Security Guards had confronted AA220 but are unable to detain or restrain potential absconders without NZ Police instruction.
- AA220 had arranged for transport to pick him up.
- Security staff are not trained for interventions that require more than a non-passive response.
- CCTV review data was missing as the facility had received CCTV upgrade as part of the conversion to a quarantine facility.

Recommendations

- Complete a security fence and site security review.
- All security staff to undertake de-escalation training.
- Introduce standard practice to maintain CCTV data until it is not necessary.

Summary - Absconder from Holiday Inn room 1030. (AHI1030) 6 November 2021

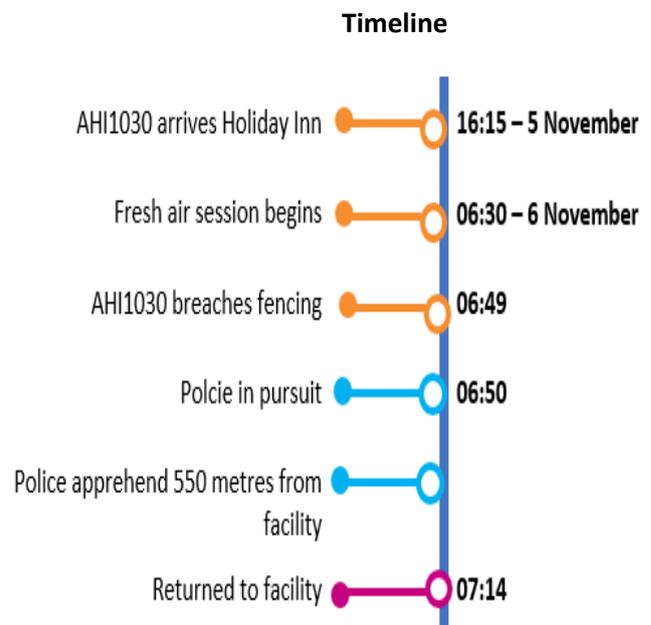
On 6 November 2021, a 17 year old male (close contact of a positive case), absconded from the MIQ Holiday Inn facility during a fresh air break. AHI1030 had not been previously identified as a high-risk individual as there had been no previous incidents involving him. AHI1030 was the only person taking fresh air at the time. As it was his first time, he was briefed on the rules and he indicated that he understood what was explained to him. During the briefing he indicated that he wanted cigarettes and intended to visit his girlfriend at 8am which led the lead Security Guard to be concerned that he was a flight risk. These concerns were communicated to the CCTV Operator and the NZ Police as a precaution. The guards observed him and became concerned when it appeared he was looking for a space where he could exit the area. He moved quickly to a section of the area that allowed him to squeeze between the fence and a container giving him access to a garden space, but still within the double layered security fencing. He then scaled two fences and left the facility. All this time he was verbally engaged with one of the Security Guards who was attempting to de-escalate the situation. Police were immediately available and pursued him via the breached exit point. The absconder was apprehended 550 meters from the facility and was returned to the facility.

Public Health Risk

AHI1030 was not COVID positive and was only away from the facility for approximately twenty minutes. The public health risk was low.

Details

- AHI1030 was escorted by three security personnel when he went for fresh air. He was not considered high risk although he was associated with high-risk individuals.



- AHI1030 raised questions that led the lead Security Guard to become concerned about the risk he posed. The concerns about how he was behaving were quickly communicated to the CCTV operator and the NZ Police and security followed all processes correctly.
- The time taken to squeeze through the gap and scale the fences was very short. Police who were immediately available, detained him and returned him to the facility successfully without iteration with the public.
- Guards acted quickly to contain, with one verbally engaging and another raising the alarm.

Actions Taken

- Fencing corrections implemented to secure fence and harden boundary fence area.
- Higher risk individual notification for individual.
- Rules were clearly explained to AHI1030 regarding expected behaviour whilst in the facility.

Issues

- Fencing was inadequate to contain non-compliant people
- Concern that absconder may not have fully understood the implications of being held in a MIF.
- Briefing may have been inadequate and not fully understood given the language issues and comprehension challenges.
- Family members in room were notified as higher risk individuals but not AHI1030 by association. If so, he would have had a NZ Police escort on the exercise.
- Security staff had confronted and warned AHI1030, but are unable to detain or restrain potential absconders without NZ Police instruction.
- ARIQ do not hold a specific S70 order that would require AHI1030 remain at the facility. He was not covered by the COVID positive general order as he was a close contact.

Recommendations

- Review fencing (include height), secure bolt couplings and investigate cable ties for all junctions.
- Higher risk individual notification extended to members of a family bubble as opposed to just individuals.

