COVID-19

**SPORT
NEW ZEALAND
IHI AOTEAROA**

This scan highlights some of the dimensions associated with the ongoing Covid-19 outbreak and considers the intermediate and longer-term implications for the play, active recreation, and sport sector. This follows the May 2020 pandemic scan.

1. **The uncertain pandemic landscape** Assesses how the virus may evolve over the coming few years, and the uneven impacts this could have across the globe.

2. **Balancing societal and individual trust** Highlights the centrality of individual and societal trust to the success of government policy to date, and how maintaining trust is a critical element in supporting future wellbeing programmes.

3. **Mobility and interconnectedness** Explores how vaccine passports may evolve in both the domestic and international context and considers whether the world is heading towards greater global connectedness or a shift to nationalism.

4. **Living to work** Examines the influence of the pandemic on the workplace, including whether the changes seen to date will revert back to pre-pandemic norms, or whether a deeper realignment of our relationship with the concept of work will play out over the coming years

5. **Living well** Looks at the human responses to the pandemic and their implication for medium term living patterns. Mental health is a core concern here, but there are also positive changes around the connection of individuals to their home environments and reassessment of wellbeing needs, including changing physical activity and participation habits.

This resource is part of a series which considers the changes and trends most likely to impact the future of the play, active recreation and sport sector and what we can do to best prepare for change.

Summary implications

Creation of new normal	• The opportunity to 'build back differently' and design a system that gives physical wellbeing a higher status, with benefits to physical and mental health and rebuilding trust and community connection.
Operating in an uncertain world	• With no return to a pre-Covid-19 society we need to become more adept with operating in an unstable environment that experiences ongoing disruption. This will require a change of mindset, more agile operating models, and new capabilities. • A new variant that causes further global lockdowns would be damaging to the motivation of current and aspiring athletes and participants and make it more difficult to attract and retain talented support people.
Accelerating trends in alternative physical activity away from structured sport	• Ongoing disruption to competitions and decreased comfort with being in the presence of others (particularly those we do not know well) may lead to declines in physical contact and organised sport, but increased demand for non-contact, informal and home-based activity. • We need to be resilient in our delivery of structured sport, with ongoing pandemic responses and associated behaviour changes calling for more flexible approaches that respond to changing participant behaviours and motivations.
The role of the local club	• The financial viability of clubs may be threatened by changing activity patterns and Councils redirecting support aligned to this. • The flipside to this is the increased importance clubs have in rebuilding the trust and community connections damaged by the polarisation that Covid-19 has caused. • Points to the need to not just focus on retaining membership, but also refocusing their mission to be more relevant and to broaden appeal.
Global sport model impacted	• Event disruption, a decline in current and prospective athlete motivation, and easily accessible and cheap international travel no longer being available will require a rethink of the international model for sport.
The importance of elite sport	• Elite sport is a welcome distraction to virus-related anxiety and may take on increased importance in re-establishing global allegiances damaged by the pandemic. Or will it increasingly be viewed as less relevant within the context of bigger issues and further impacted by heightened sensitivity about international travel given its association with virus spreading and carbon emissions.
Heightening existing inequalities	• The speed and comparatively low percentage rates for Māori getting vaccinated will impact their participation in organised sport and recreation. This will exacerbate existing inequalities and set back the country's bicultural progress. • Greater time flexibility through hybrid working environments will only be available to some, heightening access inequalities.
Politicisation of sport and recreation	• The delivery of sport has now become political. The sector will be drawn into taking positions on issues in which the general populace is divided. This will impact the broad cross societal support sport has enjoyed.
Transformed work will reshape leisure	• The need for sport and recreation to be flexible and adaptable to the changing tempo of people's lives, and their motivations to being physically active. • The home and local communities will take on increased importance in the delivery of sport and recreation.
Mobility and proximity behaviour	• Sport and recreation providers will be required to take on greater policing of fake passports and appropriate pandemic behaviours. • While athletes may be comfortable with the increased risks with international travel it is unlikely Directors will be, conscious of their increased health and safety responsibilities.

Uncertain Landscape

The pandemic has disrupted our sector, with volatile lockdowns and social responses, uncertain outcomes, complex policy environments and ambiguous evidence. Our challenge is to become more accustomed to operating in this unstable environment, and to remain alert and responsive to further pandemics and other disruptions on the horizon.

Overview

- Pre-pandemic 'normality' is unlikely to return even as vaccination rates rise and borders re-open. Anticipate the unexpected.

- The potential for new virulent strains is high, and low global vaccination rates heighten this potential. Omicron is an example.

- Aggressive suppression strategies are likely to remain, even as high vaccination rates open borders. This will result in ongoing disruption, nationally and regionally.

What's changing?

Medium Term Pandemic Trajectory

The trajectory of the virus is uncertain. Key Covid-19 advisor to the New Zealand government Sir David Skegg acknowledged that "no-one knows what the outcome of the pandemic will be in 3-5 years' time". This uncertainty is echoed in the COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group (PHAG) advice to the UK Government, where several future scenarios are acknowledged, with the most optimistic being a virus that becomes far less serious over time. At the other extreme is the emergence of a more transmissible, lethal, and vaccine-resistant variant, reinforcing the need to develop strategies that respond to a range of unfolding scenarios. *NZ Government Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group June 21*

The UK Government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies outlines four potential scenarios that align with New Zealand's PHAG advice. These are considered the most likely for the longer-term evolution of the virus: *SAGE July 21*

Scenario	Likelihood	Impact
A variant that causes severe disease in a more significant proportion of the population than has occurred to date.	Realistic possibility	High
A variant that evades current vaccines.	Almost certain	Medium
The emergence of a drug-resistant variant after anti-viral strategies.	Likely - unless the drugs are used correctly	Medium
SARS-CoV-2 follows an evolutionary trajectory with decreased virulence.	Unlikely in the short term. Realistic possibility in the long term.	Low

The more pessimistic scenarios are given credence with the emergence of Omicron, that has an unusually high level of mutations, some of which may make the virus more transmissible or undermine the effectiveness of vaccines *Daily Telegraph Nov 21*.

On 28 November New Zealand joined several other countries in banning travellers from South Africa and nearby countries. The travel closures triggered a wave of resentment among Africans who believed that the continent was yet again bearing the brunt of panicked policies from Western countries, which had failed to deliver vaccines and the resources needed to administer them. At the point of this outbreak just over 10 per cent of people in Africa have received one dose of a vaccine *New York Times Nov 21*.

There is confidence that current vaccines can be adapted to combat Omicron. The historically fast development of COVID-19 vaccines is partly due to the pharmacological response to the earlier SARS outbreak. However, the SARS example also highlights the possibility of a new virus outbreak that complicates matters further, given that zoonotic diseases are emerging at an unprecedented rate. *National Geographic Oct 21*

Uneven Global Impacts

As of December 2021, 56% of adults worldwide had received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, although only 7.1% from low income countries *Our World in Data Dec 21*. The world's most impoverished nations will struggle to vaccinate even 20% of their populations by mid-2022 *Independent Aug 21* *and* neither India nor the African continent (outside of South Africa) are expected to reach a 60% vaccinated level until 2023 *Science and Enterprise Oct 21.*

Vaccination rates for poorer countries are likely to remain modest given the costs are beyond many national budgets and rely on international assistance and coordination. Pfizer/BioNTech are charging their lowest reported price of $6.75 to the African Union, but this is still nearly six times more than this vaccine's estimated potential production cost. One dose of the vaccine costs the same as Uganda spends per citizen on health in a whole year *Oxfam July 21.*

This significant disparity between high-income and low-income nations will grow more acute before it diminishes *CSIS Sept 21*, and will leave large numbers of people unprotected and support the emergence of new vaccine-resistant strains that may undermine health in vaccinated communities. Again, Omicron is an example of this.

This trend will increase the genuine prospect of persistent and seasonal COVID-19 in countries that have failed to maintain aggressive suppression strategies.

Uncertain Economic Prospects

Beyond the health impacts (estimated to date at 260 million infected, 5.2million dead *Worldometer)*, the economic fallout continues to reverberate across the world even though New Zealand appears to have weathered the initial shock better than most *The Spinoff March 21*.

The inability of most governments to move beyond short-term action has led to unnecessarily high economic impacts from the pandemic. Estimates suggest it would have been 500 times cheaper to prevent the outbreak than fight it. The agreements struck and delivered on climate change post COP26 could provide insight on whether future pandemic action will be more proactive given the crossover between the two challenges. For example, investment in the retention of tropical forests to slow the rise of novel zoonotic diseases is now critical *World Economic Forum Aug 20.*

Another economic parallel with climate is the effect COVID-19 has in exacerbating health and wellbeing disparities both within countries and across the global community. This is reflected in the cost economies will now incur in slow vaccination rollouts. It is estimated that countries that fail to vaccinate more than 60% of their population by mid-2022 will register GDP losses totalling US$2.3 trillion in 2022-25 *Economist Intelligence Aug 21*.

The interconnectedness of the present global economy is amplifying both the uncertainty and impacts of the pandemic. A high-profile illustration of this was Toyota's decision to reduce output by 40% following the discovery of one COVID-19 case in a Vietnamese component manufacturer. The ripple effects of such examples are likely to intensify in the short term and potentially morph into shortages of energy, labour, and transport. This will be exacerbated while China maintains its strategy of aggressive suppression *Reuters Nov 21*.

Implications for play, active recreation, and sport

- New Zealand will need to create a new normal. The opportunity is to 'build back differently' and design a system that gives physical wellbeing a higher status, with benefits to physical and mental health and rebuilding trust and community connection. This will involve articulating a strong value proposition and being at the table with central and local government and iwi.

- In addition to there being no return to a pre-Covid 19 society, we need to become more adept with operating in an unstable environment that experiences ongoing disruption. This will require a change of mindset, more agile operating models, and new capabilities.

- We need to be resilient in our delivery of structured sport, with ongoing pandemic responses and associated behaviour changes calling for more flexible approaches that respond to changing participant behaviours and motivations.

- Ongoing disruption to competitions and decreased comfort with being in the presence of others (particularly those we do not know well) may lead to declines in physical contact and organised sport, but increased demand for non-contact, informal and home-based activity.

- A new variant that causes further global lockdowns would be damaging to the motivation of current and aspiring athletes and make it more difficult to retain people in the high-performance industry. The impact on disruptions to date on aspiring athletes (not currently on the radar) will unlikely be felt for another few years.

Questions

- How do we articulate and position our value proposition to influence the new normal?
- How do we move a relatively static system to one that is more agile, and what does this look like?
- How do we balance immediate support for the sector with the longer term need for heightened sector agility and independence?
- What is our response if there are further lockdowns and restrictions?
- What are the health and safety implications/obligations of travel to high risk countries?
- What implications have lockdowns and restrictions had on the athlete pathway?
- What implications will new variants and associated responses have on global events, including the cricket and rugby world cups in NZ in 2022?

Balancing Societal and Individual Trust

The retention of societal trust will, in part, determine the extent to which governments can continue to pursue more aggressive pandemic policies. New Zealand has performed well by international standards to date, but several factors could cause this to change. The significance of the crisis has persuaded the majority to accept unprecedented individual constraints in response to government pandemic controls. A future question will be the extent to which individuals continue to consent to such approaches and the levels of resentment they may engender as the crisis matures.

Overview

- Trust in government has proven resilient and critical. Maintaining a wider, cross-community, sense of trust and cohesion will become increasingly important over the medium term.

- The debate over individual rights associated with access and identity is likely to intensify and potentially generate a wider conversation of New Zealand values and identity.

- The societal disparities that existed pre-pandemic have been exacerbated by the crisis. 'Building Back differently' will fail as an approach if the aim is to get back to 2019. There is an increasing impatience for new societal approaches.

- Misinformation strategies are becoming embedded as political tools. The approaches seen in the pandemic will likely be replicated in the challenges to come (e.g. climate policy responses).

What's changing?

Trust in Government and Institutions

Trust in government increased under the elimination strategy with 75% of respondents to a study agreeing management of the pandemic had increased their trust in government *Australian Journal of Public Administration July 20.* This trust continued well into 2021 with 84% of New Zealanders supported the government's decision to go into lockdown in August 2021 *The Spinoff Aug 2021.*

The elimination strategy's success united the majority of the nation in 2020 and (most of) 2021, helped considerable with scientists, who New Zealanders have a high trust in, supporting the government's position *PNAS Oct 21*.

However, trust in government is not universal, and unrest from the length of subsequent restrictions and public disagreement between scientists, public health experts and the government post elimination strategy has eroded trust *Stuff Oct 21*.

The unrealistic expectations created by the elimination strategy and the need to "demonise" Covid-19 to some extent to help forge widespread public support has also led to diminished trust. For some eliminating Covid-19 had become a "moral issue" with efforts to combat it perceived as promoting the 'greater good' because they presumably reduce overall suffering *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology March 21*.

A decline in trust is mirrored globally, with the *Edelman Trust Index Dec 21* showing drops in trust in government, media, non-government organisations and business as a result of the pandemic.

Unprecedented Government Interventions

The additional information now being collected by governments is leading to calls for privacy legislation to be reviewed and tightened as pandemic policies put even the most stringent privacy regulations under pressure *Mckinsey and Company June 20.*

In New Zealand, the government is facing calls to tighten privacy laws to ensure personal information collected through contact tracing is not misused *NZ Herald Sept 21.* As the crisis develops over the next few years, all

agencies will need to develop an awareness of these issues and become even more sensitive to the data they collect and its storage security. This will be especially challenging for volunteer organisations with limited resources.

A heightened understanding of the role data plays in mediating social activity is likely to lead to a broader discussion of identity that revolves around the sanctity of the individual's data and the broader impacts that digital identity can have on individuals' human rights *Cambridge University Press July 21.* This may also be set within the wider context of a renewed debate on the identity of New Zealand as a bicultural nation. A very new New Zealand is on the horizon, driven by unprecedented migration between 2013 and 2020; and the current immigration pause provides the opportunity for a renewed national debate *Spoonley Aug 20.*

Exposure of Societal Fault Lines

The pandemic has almost universally stressed the fault line of inequality and disadvantage, and that challenge is significant within New Zealand with inequality higher than most advanced countries *OECD April 21*. Vaccination levels continue to vary from across suburbs as a mirror of respective socio-economic conditions *Stuff Oct 21.*

Calls to release restrictions on areas of higher vaccination have been perceived as another injury to Māori in their ongoing colonial experience. "Māori are being problematised as defiant and uncaring of society, while ignoring the fact that Māori lives have been deprioritised, for the benefit of the state, for generations' *E-Tangata Oct 21.* This echoes the challenge laid down through the 2020 Sport NZ foresight programme where Māori vividly expressed their experience of perpetuated disadvantage.

Māori are 3.7 times more likely to catch Delta, 2.3 times more likely to suffer severe sickness and be hospitalised, and 3.1 times more likely to die. These statistics have led to some viewing the vaccination rollout as structurally racist, with the descending age structure privileging 650,000 Pākehā aged over 65 years while under-prioritising 220,000 Māori aged over 45 years whose risk profile was the same. The age structure also prevented the vaccination of Māori as whanau *Waatea News Nov 21.*

New Zealand society faces a choice for the future. Does it accept a default future which further entrenches societal inequalities laid bare by the pandemic *RNZ Nov 21,* or does it re-imagine community relationships to ensure a more inclusive and participatory social environment where Māori and Pasifika have a strong role in both decisions and guiding philosophy?

How this cultural tension plays out over the coming period will depend on the pandemic's progress together with the broader community's sense of cohesion and willingness to embrace wider perspectives. It is a microcosm of the dynamic being played out at the global level. Until every individual is protected, the entire community remains vulnerable. Community organisations and associations will need to consider how they manage the interplay of perspectives.

The Politics of Misinformation

New Zealand is generally seen as a cohesive society, but it is not immune to division, and Covid-19, has amplified issues of trust in government, and the role of disinformation.

One major challenge to social cohesion is the rapid emergence of the relatively ungoverned virtual world. On one hand, the internet has empowered some groups by enhancing communication and knowledge access. On the other, it has provided opportunities to cultivate and disseminate misinformation and disinformation, and to increase polarisation *Koi Tū Dec 21*.

At the same time, the long-established role of the fourth estate in filtering and providing reliable information has been adversely impacted by cut-backs, and replaced by attention-seeking tactics that privilege a desire to be entertained above the need to be informed.

This business model has reinforced the ability for people to self-select online and driven attention towards manipulated and often highly prejudiced world views. Negative messages spread much faster and further than positive messages in this viral world, so commercial advantage comes from amplifying messages containing strong negative emotions rather than from offering neutral, informative, or even positive messages *Koi Tū Dec 21*.

Unsurprisingly, the media's trustworthiness has taken a hit, and in 2021, fewer than half of New Zealanders trusted news in general. General trust in news declined from 53% to 48%, and trust in the news people themselves consumed fell from 62% to 55%. Trust in information found via social media and social engines also declined, with 26% of people trusting news they found via search engines and 14% trusting news on social media. All news brands in New Zealand experienced an erosion of trust, with statistically significant declines occurring for Newshub and Newstalk ZB *AUT 2021.*

This is perhaps good news for those concerned about the manipulative power of media, both mainstream and social, and suggests that common sense has more influence on long term perspectives.

Implications for play, active recreation, and sport

- The speed and comparatively low percentage rates for Māori getting vaccinated will impact their participation in organised sport and recreation. This will exacerbate existing inequalities and may accelerate separate models for participation. It will also set back the country's bicultural progress.

- Health screening to select athletes within high performance sport will add to perceived inequities.

- Sport and recreation, accurately or otherwise, has widely been viewed as politically agnostic. This will no longer be possible, with Sport NZ already being required to make Covid-19 related judgement calls. The sector will be further drawn into taking a position on issues in which the general populace is divided.

- With the influence of government and media eroding (for some) and societal divisions increasing, local clubs have a heightening role to reconnect communities, re-establish trust, and facilitate conversations.

- Elite sport is a welcome distraction to virus-related anxiety. The flipside of this is that government support for elite sport may increasingly be viewed as less relevant within the context of bigger issues. This will be exacerbated through heightened sensitivity about international travel given its association with virus spreading and carbon emissions.

- Conflict resulting from non-vaccinated access limitations will become more commonplace and problematic for sport and recreation providers to deal with, notably volunteer-led organisations.

- Data privacy and increased health and safety requirements will become increasing issues for sport and recreation to be mindful of.

Questions

- To what extent is sport and recreation part of the damage to pandemic related bicultural relations?
- How can Sport NZ listen effectively to understand Māori needs and support them effectively?
- How will the sector's response align with our Te Tiriti obligations?
- Will sport and recreation being drawn into political positions strengthen or weaken its social licence?
- What areas, if poorly managed, are more likely to create longer-term trust issues for our sector?
- How will decisions on health status impact those considering a high-performance pathway?
- How can Sport NZ facilitate more innovative conversations and build new capability to support this?
- How do we help the sector to build know how to define wellbeing and where to start in terms of improving and protecting it?

Mobility and Interconnectedness

Restriction of movement has been the primary policy response of governments ahead of vaccination. However, as vaccination rates rise and these constraints become relaxed, the evolution of individual travel patterns and regional relationships is unlikely to revert to that seen in 2019.

Overview

- Vaccine passports, which will continue to generate contention, are anticipated to be a permanent feature of travel.

- Standardisation of passports and the status of vaccines will generate a highly variable and dynamic travel environment.

- For the medium term, high-hazard countries and their citizens are likely to feel excluded from international networks which will drive political consequences. It will also make the staging of inclusive events extremely challenging.

- Domestically, those unable (or unwilling) to embrace vaccination may find themselves constrained both in terms of access to specific venues and through high risk regional or seasonal episodes.

- The pandemic experience could either reinvigorate international cooperation or accelerate alignment toward emerging spheres of influence.

- Just as Delta reset the rulebook earlier in early 2021, the anticipated emergence of new strains such as Omicron could again terminate anticipated travel patterns.

What's changing?

Vaccine Passport to Normality?

The apparent solution to restart individual travel patterns is the issuing of a vaccine passport, which raises significant questions around equity and human freedoms *Stuff March 21.*

The evidence that vaccinations prevent transmission is ambiguous, which is one reason why the WHO is not backing the idea currently *WHO July 21*. There are also concerns that a passport targeted at international travel will entrench discrimination between *"the jabs and jab-nots" Bloomberg Jan 21.* This is likely to remain a politically charged issue if a significant minority domestically remain unvaccinated as those critical of the idea suggest it would introduce an unequal society in which an inoculated elite get the freedom to fly, attend concerts or play sport *MIT Technology Review July 21*.

Like more traditional public health measures such as mask wearing or physical distancing, passports may reduce risk but can't guarantee safety. Unlike masks or social distancing however, they may introduce profound risks into society such as segregation, over-policing and enduring surveillance *bmjMedical Nov 21.*

New Zealand Rugby's decision *Stuff Dec 21* that club and college rugby players will need a Covid-19 vaccination certificate to play in competitions from 2022 to avoid disruption is one of many examples of segregation and follows most Councils closing facilities to the unvaccinated. Should the government extend vaccinations to those aged 5-11 years, further segregation is likely to follow. This will be further complicated by the uncertain volume of booster shots required to remain vaccination compliant.

The widespread rollout of vaccine passports will place strain on the sport and recreation sector, and those involved in travel and hospitality. Already hampered by a year and a half of slackened demand and heightened regulation, these industries will be further pressed by the responsibility to validate vaccine passports and handle situations with customers who may incorrectly feel they ought to be exempt *Lawyer Monthly 2021.*

The dimension of inequality between countries is slightly different as the passports' availability is more dependent on the availability of the vaccine or the international regard in which their vaccine is held. Citizens of countries with low vaccine access, or access to vaccine regarded as second tier, will therefore be at a disadvantage if a COVID-19 passport is an entry requirement. This is reflected in the concerns at COP26 where some delegations were denied entry on this basis. This is early evidence of an emerging challenge of an *"international vaccine apartheid in which the divide is not between the vaccinated and unvaccinated but instead between those who get the elite vaccines and the rest" Ideasroom July 21.*

The emergence of treatments other than vaccination could provide an alternative approach to enable a broader level of freedom. For example, Australian researchers have identified a potential monoclonal antibody treatment that may overcome challenges associated with emerging variants and the need for booster shots that align with a passport system *The Newdaily Sept 21*. However, it raises the question of whether such treatments could be made more widely available to reduce barriers or, as with vaccinations, they become another source of differentiation between communities?

Re-Globalisation or Post-Globalisation?

The progress toward a more interconnected global economy appeared inevitable before the emergence of firstly the Trump administration and now the pandemic. Will the world now revert to a focus on globalisation to address COVID-19 fall-out (and climate beyond), or will it lead to an unwinding of global links and a retreat to nationalism?

Some researchers are optimistic that suggestions that globalisation may be retreating are misplaced and instead argue that the recovery from the pandemic is an excellent example of an economically, socially and politically connected global network *The Conversation June 21.*

A joint report from the UK's Wellcome Trust and the Institute for Government agree with these sentiments and the need for coordinated action but is sombre on the current evidence. It notes that the recent G7 summit was supposed to be a turning point but did not live up to its billing, with rich countries falling short on practical action to beat Covid-19 *Institute for Government June 21.*

The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated wealth disparities between countries, and between the poorest and wealthiest citizens. It has also exposed inadequate surveillance systems worldwide and the inability to detect and control the pandemic, which is symptomatic of a more fragmented world order *One Health Dec 20.*

Ongoing global collaboration in the medium to long term will be determined by the extent to which this is a temporary pause in the trend toward increasing connectedness, or the start of a shift toward nationalist self-sufficiency measures and nationalism *The Guardian Oct 21.*

Geopolitical Re-alignment

The response of geopolitical actors is as much designed to realign current global power relationships as it is to resolve the pandemic's humanitarian challenges. Vaccine inequity is also fuelling vaccine diplomacy. Since the start of 2021, China and Russia have sent hundreds of millions of coronavirus jabs to emerging countries as part of

a 'vaccine diplomacy' operation. Russia's attempts to project influence through this approach have been regarded as a failure *The Guardian Oct 21.*

China's programme has proven more successful and aims to provide a total of 2 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines to the world by the end of this year. To date, it has provided more than 1 billion doses of vaccines to over 100 international organisations and multiple countries *China Daily Sept 21.*

Supporting the vaccination of emerging nations provides an opportunity not only to aid humanitarian efforts but also to mitigate COVID-19's global economic impact, and the ability of the global community to broaden vaccine access is likely to have longer-term consequences for international relations *The Actuary Aug 21.*

As the Economist report notes, *"most Western countries do not recognise inoculation with Chinese jabs. This will hinder travel, further widening the divide between richer and poorer economies"* *Economist Intelligence Oct 21.* Will countries that have taken advantage of Chinese vaccination support place pressure for this to be changed, or will it simply reinforce barriers between different global spheres of influence? Rather than 'vaccine apartheid', could the world be heading into a future of different influence zones being entrenched not just by geo-politics and economics, but health too?

International vaccination reciprocity will be further undermined if different 'elite' vaccines are found to have variably effectiveness against emerging variants such as Omicron (e.g. Moderna not as good as Pfizer).

Intra-Regional Movements

Domestic travel is also likely to become more complex even as most of the population is vaccinated. Even with the introduction of the traffic light system, there is still the option of the imposition of localised lockdowns as part of the public health response and potentially wider lockdowns too. So uncertainty will remain, making event planning challenging and potentially encouraging behaviours that assume higher levels of restrictions than pre-pandemic communities enjoyed *RNZ Nov 21.*

The pandemic's impacts may also impact settlement patterns within countries. There could be an increase in pressure on regional centres as a significant portion of urban dwellers move to rural and suburban areas as widespread telework frees many from regularly commuting for employment. Current trends in demographics and ageing will come into play here, too, as rural regions already face significant challenges delivering medical services. Furthermore, some rural communities have a substantial share of their populations at higher risk. This issue could see regional borders become more prevalent as communities seek to maintain the health of their people, as has been attempted with recent outbreaks *RNZ Oct 21.*

Alternatively, urbanisation could be accelerated due to the concentration of (medical and knowledge) infrastructure within metro centres. This would also be supported by the move toward concentrating population densities to align with climate mitigation strategies in the longer term *Keele University June 20.*

Implications for play, active recreation, and sport

- Sport and recreation memberships and pathways will be impacted by the exclusion of the non-vaccinated.

- The rise of informal and home-based recreation at the expense of organised sport will be further driven by the unvaccinated being excluded from organised sport and recreation.

- The international sport model will be threatened by event disruption, a decline in current and prospective athlete motivation (given disruption and quarantine requirements), and easily accessible and cheap international travel no longer being available.

- Multi-nation events will become increasingly problematic given countries' variable vaccination status, the risk of transmission, and the possibility of new variants. The viability of the Paralympics is further threatened by immune compromised athletes.

- NSO Directors will be under more pressure to consider the health and safety risks associated with athletes travelling and competing internationally.

- Event insurance will become more expensive and, in some cases, inaccessible.

- High quality fake vaccine passports and exemption certificates could emerge. The associated policing of this and increased health and safety regulations will add unwelcome complexity to sport and recreation.

- Financial viability of indoor and outdoor stadia may become more problematic for debt conscious Councils, with physical distancing, general anxiety, and heightened travel costs and logistical difficulties deterring attendance and use.

- Privacy and data management will require a global solution.

- Global allegiances will take on increased importance, and New Zealand's focus may become narrower and more Pacific/Asia focused.

Questions

- How will the vaccination divide impact participation in sport and recreation?
- What are the opportunities for sport and recreation to add back social connectedness?
- How viable are multi-nation events, and what is the resulting impact on the sport funding model in NZ?
- What impact will vaccination status have on the athlete base?
- What does this mean for immune compromised athletes, notably within disability sport?
- Will international travel for sport be an acceptable or unacceptable luxury?
- Will the boycotting of international events return, with vaccination status the justification?

Live to Work?

New Zealand's fortune in avoiding the worst health effects of the pandemic has enabled the country to observe international developments and use this to develop adequate policy responses. It has however meant that workplace disruption has perhaps not been as significant as that experienced in similar economies such as the US or UK. The evidence from those countries suggests the pandemic has provoked a fundamental reappraisal of the nature of work. Will the New Zealand workplace start to reflect similar perspectives and what impact will this have on sport and recreation?

Overview

- The death of the office appears greatly exaggerated, but hybrid working environments now appear here to stay.

- As the population at working age starts to decline, employers will need to consider how they match employee's aspirations for work-life balance. The pandemic has potentially accelerated this process.

- General work-associated wellbeing (especially mental health) has trended negatively through the pandemic. The pre-existing issue of effective demarcation between work and leisure activity appears to be becoming entrenched.

- The pandemic's negative workplace impacts have fallen disproportionately on specific population groups (e.g. women).

What's changing?

Out of Office

The shock of the pandemic, and the shift out of the office routine, has led to several questions that have significant implications for the way working life will develop. Will we go to the office again – and, if so, how often? What impact will a 'hybrid' way of working have on how we communicate, connect, and create? Will work-from-home be the great leveller in terms of gender equality and diversity? And what will work mean if our offices are virtual and we lose those day-to-day social interactions?

What happens to people who can't work from home and those whose jobs depend on a steady flow of traffic into urban hubs. Can we learn from Covid-19 and build better safety nets for the most vulnerable workers? And if the future is digital, how do we make sure swathes of the global population aren't left behind?

A global survey of 4,700 knowledge workers found the majority never want to go back to the old way of working and only 12% want to return to full-time office work. However, 72% want a hybrid remote-office model moving forward that tends to suggest that a wholesale shift that empties out CBDs is unlikely *Slack Oct 20.*

An area of concern found in New Zealand studies was the need for improvement in two key areas relevant to active recreation: wellbeing, and health and safety. It also noted the key challenge experienced by respondents was not being able to switch off from work *University of Otago July 20.* A similar study of Australian workers found that after months of working from home, team members feel the implicit pressure to be 'always on.' They are also experiencing blurred boundaries that are eroding their mental health. For example, 32% of team members report a low ability to manage stress *PWC 2021.*

The sudden shift to telecommuting may lead some companies to conclude it's less expensive and more efficient to allow people to work from home with potential second-and third-order effects for individual wellbeing. Post-pandemic, 30% of US residents plan to take walks more frequently than they did before the pandemic, and nearly 15% plan to bike more. These results include walking and biking for both transportation and recreation, with those who were frequent walkers or cyclists pre-pandemic expecting more change than those who were not. Overall, more than 20% identify taking more walks as one of the top three aspects of pandemic life they enjoy *PNAS July 21.*

An interesting dimension of this shift in work-life perceptions is the extent to which it supports or hinders aspirations already evident in younger employees. For example, those talking with Gen Z-ers (born mid-90s to early 2010s) about jobs note their value on diversity, equity, inclusion, economic security, communication, and transparency. In addition, they want a stable work-life balance and 90% value a 'human touch' in their work teams, beyond their eagerness for technology. This constellation of issues makes the generation very different from those preceding it—and far different from the Boomers who are often making strategic hiring decisions *Government Executive Sept 21.* Given the desire for hybrid environments noted above, it could suggest a greater sense of disconnect between employers and employees emerging over the next few years *Economics Observatory April 21.*

The "Great Resignation"

The pandemic's impact on global workplaces has been so profound that it has led to an apparent reappraisal of the value of jobs in some countries. McKinsey notes that a record 15 million employees have quit their positions in the US since April 2021 *Mckinsey Sept 21.* It does not look like the trend is likely to slow either, with a recent Monster.com survey noting that 95% of respondents were considering leaving their jobs. A third of these people cited burnout as the reason *Business Insider July 21.*

A similar State of the Global Workplace survey from Gallup specifically tracked this increase in stress levels among employees. It noted, "with global borders closing, workplaces shutting, and jobs being cut, workers' daily stress reached a record high, increasing from 38% in 2019 to 43% in 2020. Leaders and managers at every level should address this as it could lead to increased burnout, upset and disengagement" *Gallop 2021.*

These studies suggest that employees have started voting with their feet in employment situations where stress levels have reached unprecedented levels. This could be starting to play out in the New Zealand context to, but the evidence appears ambiguous. AUT's Wellbeing at Work study supports the trend as it found the proportion of employees not considering leaving their jobs had halved, from 19.1 per cent in May 2020 to 9.2 per cent in April this year. Those people keen to change jobs, increased from 34.7 per cent to 46.4 per cent *AUT Sept 21.* So this suggests that potential challenges for employers over the coming years as the cost of rehiring is considerable together with the ongoing challenge of an ageing workforce. Over the next couple of years, the majority of New Zealand will experience a net loss of people to retirement *Stuff Oct 21.*

However, the same survey finds job anxiety rising significantly across the last 18 months and a marked increase in job-related depression *AUT Sept 21.* It also notes that females are now reporting greater job insecurity than males. This aligns with international observations that the pandemic has also potentially reversed gains made across the gender divide in recent years. A PwC study finds evidence of a 'shecession' with progress for women in work now back at 2017 levels in some countries due to the unequal burden of care carried by women during the pandemic, causing more women than men to leave the labour market during the pandemic *PWC March 21.*

Implications for play, active recreation, and sport

- Hybrid working environments and non-commuting will provide increased time and flexibility for physical activity and participation in sport and recreation for some.

- These benefits will not be enjoyed by those that cannot work from home and will heighten access inequalities.

- Physical activity connected with the work environment will decline, including walking and cycling to work, and city-based gyms and corporate leagues.

- Physical activity services and support will shift locally as more people work from home. This will include support for high-performance athletes, adding to the difficulty of attracting and retaining quality people.

- Disruption will bring increased financial pressure and uncertainty to parts of the sector and will be amplified by very human worries about job security for people leading these organisations.

- The cost and stigma associated with international travel will result in fewer athlete support people travelling, potentially at the expense of athlete wellbeing.

- The increased isolation from work colleagues may exacerbate mental health. Physical activity and participation in sport and recreation could be positioned as an antidote.

Questions

- What are the implications for physical activity, volunteering, and facility and programme provision with a more distributed workforce?
- What data points could be used to assess increased time and flexibility?
- How might physical activity be incorporated into new ways of working, including as an inducement to attract people to the office?
- Can required high performance support roles be resourced regionally?
- How can athletes be supported from distance if less support people are able or willing to travel?

Living Well

If the pandemic has started to change the individual perception around the value of work, what impact has it had on the broader aspects of wellbeing and physical activity, and will any shifts here be transitory or long term?

Overview

- Employment is but one of several factors driving negative mental health trends globally. While active recreation may provide a counter here, some evidence suggests that such activity declines as populations become stressed.

- No surprise that some evidence of a retreat to the home environment is the rational response for many which has driven the adoption of virtual sport and exercise patterns. A related question for the medium term is the extent to which virtual sport complements or replaces physical interaction.

- Physical activity levels and the participation landscape has been negatively impacted by the pandemic, exacerbating existing negative trends, notably motivation to engage. Will this be long-term?

- Looming beyond these potential lifestyle changes is the influence of climate-related concerns. Even if international aviation opens-up, the commercial dynamics for the airlines change if business travel is substituted by remote working. It could also be an activity which attracts greater levels of social stigma that reduces leisure flying too.

What's changing?

Mental Health Impacts

Mental health appears to be a key area of concern for pandemic wellbeing impacts beyond the immediate physiological implications of the virus. Across a variety of countries and cultures, there seems to be clear evidence of the broader wellbeing impacts of Covid-19.

An Indian survey found high incidences of a range of mental stresses among participants. In addition, weight gain and decline in physical activity were also observed and sleep quality and quantity were affected by Covid-19 *NZB1 Jan 21.* Similarly, around 40% of U.S. adults have reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder over the pandemic period compared to 10% prior *KFF Feb 21.*

This is consistence with findings published by the UK's Lancet, which noted that the pandemic had created an increased urgency to strengthen mental health systems in most countries. Mitigation strategies could incorporate ways to promote mental wellbeing and target determinants of poor mental health and interventions to treat those with a mental disorder. It notes the extreme risks to societies if no action is taken to address the burden of major depressive disorder and anxiety disorders being observed *Lancet Oct 21.*

Covid-19 has altered the mental health landscape through the fear and anxiety associated with the risks of becoming infected and the psychological effects of lockdowns, school closures, self-isolation, and joblessness. The psychosocial impact of some of these restrictive measures has been profound, and the most vulnerable are likely to suffer over the long term *Open Access Government Oct 21.*

These broader mental health impacts are in addition to the specific challenges suffered by those with long-Covid. A new study out of Oxford found that one in three people who have survived Covid-19 are diagnosed with a neurological or psychiatric condition within six months of being infected *CNBC April 21.* It appears to be an aspect of the pandemic which is still not well understood in terms of medical implications, with long term symptoms following Covid-19 being observed across the spectrum of disease severity *BMJ Medicine Aug 21.* It is also noted that if socioeconomically disadvantaged groups begin to suffer disproportionately from long COVID-19 (which is likely, as they are hit hardest by the virus itself), that will compound societal disparities *Axios Sept 21.*

Shifts in Living Patterns and Consumption

The health and psychological impacts of the pandemic appears to be causing individuals to realign their wellbeing behaviours to reduce the broader risk associated with social interaction.

Research from Ireland points to people who are *"building their whole lifestyles around their homes as centres of gravity where they work, play and stay healthy"*. More than half of respondents told researchers they plan to stay fit at home beyond the pandemic, with about a third saying they will invest more in where they live, intending to work more from there *Irish Times Sept 21.*

The natural winner of such a shift would appear to be the burgeoning eSports market *yahoo finance Nov 21.* However, studies suggest there is not a strict substitution effect at work here and physical and virtual appear to be complementary in many instances *MDPI Sept 21.*

A focus on in-home exercise and the desire for professional, on-demand workouts has sparked an enormous increase in health and fitness app downloads such as Peleton. Brad Olson, its chief membership officer, believes that *"the pandemic has compelled consumers to re-evaluate their fitness routines, and many have discovered that the best, most connected workout can actually be experienced at home."* The company reported revenue of $758 million, a 232 per cent increase from the same period the previous year *Washington Post Jan 21.*

The online shift is contributing to what some observers regard as a permanent change to how the $32 billion fitness industry works. While 75% of consumers surveyed said they would eventually return to pre-pandemic routines and the actual gym, many indicated they would retain a virtual component—a phenomenon with broad implications for the sector.

The shift to virtual workouts, however, has increased access to different types of classes. It also highlighted the need for balance between physical and mental wellbeing, notes Jason LaRose, CEO of Equinox Media, focusing on expanding the luxury gym group's digital platform. In addition, he's observed a significant uptake in meditation since the beginning of the pandemic and believes thinking around overall wellness has been expanded by the shift online *yahoo finance Nov 21.*

The pandemic's impact could (as with previous pandemics) even lead to changes in home design to accommodate new living, working and consumption habits *World Economic Forum July 21.* This will be influenced by the parallel trends of technology acceleration, social equity and justice, and the broader challenges of climate change *World Economic Forum Aug 20.*

One of the consequences for the potential emergence of a hybrid work model is the demand it may cause for new mobility patterns. Demographer Paul Spoonley suggests this may lead to a rising demand for cross-city travel rather than what he describes as single direction travel. This could imply a greater impetus for the provision of better and safer walking and cycling infrastructure with consequent benefits for individual wellbeing.

There could be real positives to the pandemic experience if it leads to a rethinking of the social contract around work and greater levels of active transport *Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport Sept 21.*

Impact on physical activity and participation

Research studies have raised concerns about the potential negative effect of the pandemic on physical activity and sedentary behaviour *Exercise Science Sept 20.* All reported significant pandemic-related decreases in physical activity however, one article by Meyer suggests that this change may be moderated by pre-pandemic physical activity. In this study, participants that were active pre-pandemic reported 32% reductions in physical activity during the pandemic while participants who were inactive pre-pandemic increased physical activity by 2.3%. This suggests that pandemic-related restrictions, such as the closure of swimming pools, are more likely to affect the physical activity behaviour of the active.

These findings are consistent with a *Sport NZ cohort study Oct 21* which tracked New Zealanders participation over a 12-month period from April 2020 aligns to these findings. It found the physical activity of all New Zealanders remains significantly lower than pre-pandemic, with highly deprived New Zealanders more impacted. There has been a change in the activities of young people and adults, and the 'motivation to be active' is the barrier that has increased the most.

The emerging evidence suggests the pandemic has exacerbated existing trends, with inequalities in activity for the most deprived increasing. Specifically, people 'missing-out' are not motivated to engage with what is currently offered, and those that have dropped out are not re-engaging with what was offered before.

These findings are consistent with those from Sport England where, while activity levels have remained constant, existing inequalities have widened, enjoyment and confidence in taking part are down there's also been a drop in activity levels for boys that brings them in-line with girls' activity levels *Sport England Dec 21*.

Links to the Climate Crisis

The extent to which pandemic-influenced lifestyle changes become more entrenched may be governed by deepening concern around the ongoing climate crisis, which is likely to become more predominant over the next decade.

International travel would appear to be a litmus test of global consumption patterns, and research at the beginning of the pandemic seems to suggest that people will be keen to resume flying once restrictions are lifted *Journal of Sustainable Tourism Jan 21*. However, this may be changing with the carbon cost of business flying coming under increased scrutiny by organisations that have experienced the financial benefits of remote working and need to maintain their green credentials. Moreover, given the profitability of air travel is underpinned by the business sector, it could render international travel increasingly unaffordable even if consumers are again willing to purchase tickets *RNZ Oct 21.*

Implications for play, active recreation, and sport

- The pandemic had created an increased urgency to strengthen mental health systems. This is an opportunity for sport and recreation to position itself as part of the antidote and increase its relevance.

- Included in this repositioning is the need for our infrastructure to adapt to support better access to nature, given the heightened wellbeing benefit from being physically active in nature settings.

- If pandemic trends continue, there could be a significant decline in organised sport. We need to understand and respond to behaviour changes that have resulted from the pandemic and be willing to change our offerings. This might include a heightened emphasis on a pay to play model, informal activity and more home-based or localised services.

- Consideration of home-based activity needs to include virtual activity and eSports and how these can complement physical activity and participation in sport and recreation.

- The athlete experience is likely to change. This might include extended time overseas (given the cost of travel and quarantining), less travelling support staff, and competing in a bubble. This prompts the need to reconsider how to best support athlete welfare.

- With less international travel, elite sport may have heightened importance in retaining global cohesion.

- Travel restrictions will make attracting and retaining talent more difficult. Geographic remoteness may be viewed as a positive or negative in this regard, and the health status of countries will become an important factor.

Questions

- Does responding to mental health take on greater importance for Sport NZ? What does this mean for its current value proposition?
- Is the home setting considered strongly enough in the delivery of sport and recreation?
- How can virtual activity be used to complement physical activity and participation in sport and recreation?
- Will the cost of flying increase pressure on athletes to perform?
- How can we continue to attract the talent that we need? Is flexible working conditions part of the answer?