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## New Zealand Claims a Victory Over Coronavirus, But Doubts Persist

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6-7 minutes

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SYDNEY—New Zealand declared a victory over the new coronavirus, the culmination of a tough social experiment that contrasted with less-restrictive efforts by Western countries to [contain the pathogen](#) but not eradicate it.

One new case was confirmed on Monday, the final day of a roughly monthlong lockdown that Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern described as the strictest constraints placed on New Zealanders in modern history.

The country's 4.8 million citizens were ordered to stay home on March 23 and not to socialize with anyone outside their household "bubble" for at least four weeks. Excursions had to be essential, and solitary. In grocery stores, customers lined up 6 feet apart, avoiding even eye contact—an oddity in a small country that prides itself on its community spirit.

"There is no widespread undetected community transmission in New Zealand," Ms. Ardern said on Monday. "We have won that battle."





**Bars were empty in a popular Christchurch night spot on Friday, before the lockdown ended.**

Photo: Getty Images

Governments around the world [are balancing the relaxation](#) of coronavirus-related shutdowns against the risks of fueling fresh outbreaks of the virus and against economic pain. A paper published in the journal *Science* on April 14 said one-time lockdowns likely won't be enough and that physical-distancing measures may need to be in place intermittently until 2022.

New Zealand's isolation as a small island economy far from anywhere helped it avoid the kind of outbreaks seen elsewhere. But it also makes it vulnerable to future flare-ups, if it relaxes current restrictions on travel.

Ms. Ardern said New Zealanders needed to remain vigilant and life wouldn't return to normal soon, leaving the door open for the restrictions to be tightened once more if infection rates rise again. There have been 1,122 cases confirmed in New Zealand, with 19

deaths, most of them elderly people with prior health conditions.

Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp's decision to open some nonessential businesses this week was embraced by some while drawing protests from others. WSJ's Cameron McWhirter reports from on the ground near Atlanta as business owners weigh saving their businesses and safety concerns. Photo: Ron Harris/AP

Under the newly loosened restrictions, schools and child care centers can reopen although children should study from home if possible. More businesses can reopen as long as they don't physically interact with customers.

"Provided we do not have an awful rebound in coming months, we stand virtually unique as the first country to defeat the virus and with the lowest direct human costs," said Peter Gluckman, who until recently served as the country's chief science adviser.

New Zealand had fewer than 100 cases and no deaths when it went into lockdown, hoping that by reacting quickly it could avoid the rapid community spread of the virus seen elsewhere. Ms. Ardern said modeling showed that New Zealand could have as many as 1,000 cases a day if the virus was allowed to spread unchecked.

Still, New Zealand's strategy has been controversial. A group of six scientists, calling themselves Plan B, had said striving for elimination is bound to fail and would generate worse economic and health outcomes than the virus itself.

The lockdown—known locally as Level 4—brought the country to a virtual standstill. A recession is expected. The most dire forecasts predict New Zealand's economy could contract by as much as 10%, and the jobless rate will triple its 4% rate in December to the highest levels in nearly 30 years.

Sue Mushet, a 55-year-old neonatal nurse who lives by herself in the New Zealand capital, Wellington, had felt her social support slipping away during the lockdown. She would usually go for coffee with her nursing pals to debrief after a stressful shift, but that was no longer allowed.

Her job had also become more stressful because of new Covid-19 regulations: the hospital recently made the heart-wrenching decision to restrict visitors to one per baby in the neonatal intensive-care ward.

Staff had to choose between mothers and fathers: “So of course we chose mothers because they need to feed their babies,” she said. The rules were strictly enforced by security on the hospital doors.

Ms. Ardern said the restrictions would be reviewed in two weeks, with the potential for them to be relaxed further.

New Zealand’s lowered level of restrictions broadly brings it into line with Australia, which didn’t go into full lockdown and has also seen cases steadily fall. Australia reported nine new coronavirus cases in the past 24 hours.

Both countries are pursuing more rapid contact tracing and testing. Australia has launched a mobile app that records an individual’s contacts with other people, and said on Monday that 1.89 million people had downloaded it within 24 hours of it becoming available. Still, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison wants at least 40% of the country’s 25 million population to have the app on their phones.

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