

Kia ora koutou

Now we have reached Alert Level 1 and an extra emphasis now on the economic and social recovery from the impacts of COVID-19.

Health and disability services at Alert Level 1

Health and disability services will be running as normal under Alert Level 1, but some precautions will be in place to protect people who are vulnerable from potential exposure to the virus.

This includes strict adherence to infection prevention and control protocols and COVID-19 risk screening for patients may be a requirement prior to arrival, or on entrance to health facilities.

Testing all international arrivals

As we relax the restrictions in Level 1 and enjoy the new freedoms we have, our focus on border controls will intensify to keep COVID-19 out of Aotearoa. Anyone coming into the country from overseas must stay in managed isolation or quarantine for at least 14 days.

From Monday 8 June, we started testing all international arrivals for COVID-19, including those who have no symptoms. Previously, we have been testing those who have shown symptoms. The 14-day period allows us to isolate these travellers from other New Zealanders while they may be incubating the disease. The additional testing provides us with extra reassurance that they do not have COVID-19, and if they do, they can then be managed appropriately as per public health protocols.

Changes to exemptions to managed isolation

Until now, we have allowed some exemptions for people in managed isolation to enable them to attend funerals and tangihanga. Under Alert Level 1, there is no longer a limit on the number of people who can attend a funeral or tangihanga or a requirement for physical distancing. This poses a greater risk of exposure to many more people and if there was an outbreak of COVID-19, it would be much more difficult to track and trace people.

Those in managed isolation can no longer apply for an exemption to attend a funeral or tangihanga. They may still be allowed to leave managed isolation for a time to be with a loved one who is dying or to grieve with family when a loved one has passed away, but they will not be able to attend the actual event.

Contact tracing

Even at Alert Level 1, it remains important to keep a record of where we have been. We'll be interacting with more people so having a thorough record of where we've been and who we've seen will assist with rapid contact tracing if required.

We have released an update to the NZ COVID Tracer mobile app that provides new features and makes it more useful for contact tracing:

- You can now choose to receive a contact alert if you've checked into the same location at the same time as someone who has subsequently developed COVID-19.
- You can now use the app to send your digital diary to contact tracers if you are found to have COVID-19.
- To improve accessibility for blind New Zealanders and those with low vision, on supported devices the app will now vibrate your phone whenever you scan a QR code.

We're continuing to develop new features for future updates. We know Kiwis want to use the app to record their visits to friends and whānau, and we're also looking to support older phones and offer the app in languages other than English in a future update.

To find out more about the app, visit our website at www.health.govt.nz/NZ-COVID-Tracer.

Updated WHO mask guidance

We welcomed the latest guidance from the World Health Organization on the use of masks for control of COVID-19. The WHO's updated advice, based on their evaluation of the available evidence, is a useful addition to existing our advice.

The WHO emphasises that masks should be part of a comprehensive strategy and that much of their updated guidance relates to countries with a high degree of community transmission. Fortunately, in New Zealand we are increasingly confident we have no community transmission which supports our ongoing move down through our Alert levels.

Masks will continue to be part of New Zealand's approach to managing COVID-19. The Ministry will continue to monitor closely for any new cases in New Zealand and review the control measures needed to prevent and manage any spread of COVID-19 – including the possible use of masks by the public.

Independent Review of COVID-19 Clusters in Aged Residential Care Facilities

The Ministry of Health has today published the Independent Review of COVID-19 Clusters in Aged Residential Care Facilities report.

I commissioned the report in April to learn from clusters of COVID-19 in Aged Care facilities so New Zealand would be better placed to manage any further occurrences.

Thank you to everybody who contributed to the review and my sincere thanks to the reviewers.

The report includes a number of recommendations for improvements. The next step we are taking is to gather sector feedback on the prioritisation and ability to implement the recommendations that are in the report. This process will take place over the next three weeks.

Details of the review are available here: <https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/independent-review-covid-19-clusters-aged-residential-care-facilities>.

Essential health and disability workers

While the border is closed, there is an exemptions process in place for essential health and disability workers. The list of essential health and disability workers was recently updated. The criteria set reflect current immigration settings and balance the need to protect New Zealanders with ensuring we have the rights skills in New Zealand during this time.

The [list of essential health and disability workers](#) and information about the process for [applying for an exemption](#) is on Immigration NZ's website.

Health and Disability System Review report to be released soon

As I mentioned in my previous update, the Minister of Health has received the final Health and Disability System Review Report. It was considered by Cabinet earlier this week, and the Minister intends to release it publicly next week.

You can find out more about the background of the Review on the [Health and Disability System Review website](#).

The release of the final report is a significant step in ensuring our health and disability system is sustainable and achieves better and more equitable outcomes for all New Zealanders.

The Ministry of Health will work closely with the Government to support its work to progress the recommendations. I will keep you updated as more information becomes available.

Ngā mihi nui
Dr Ashley Bloomfield
Director-General of Health