

Primary Care Update

Information for general practices, PHOs and DHBs

Update Three: June 2020

Māuri ora ki a koutou

This is the third primary care update for general practice and primary health organisations (PHOs). Thank you for all the work you are doing to keep the primary care health system operating.

You can find previous primary care updates on the [Ministry of Health website](#).

Case Definition, Testing, and Infection Prevention & Control Advice

The Ministry is continuing to update advice around the management of patients with respiratory symptoms, and those who are at higher risk of being exposed to COVID-19. Specifically, among other Infection Prevention Control documents, there has been guidance released on the appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to wear when caring for patients who are known to be probable/confirmed cases of COVID-19 and for patients of unknown COVID-19 status (with/without respiratory symptoms). These updates are available on the Ministry of Health website at: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>

An updated case definition and testing strategy for COVID-19 has been released, which includes High Index of Suspicion criteria to help guide risk assessment. Clinical symptoms consistent with COVID-19 remain the same. We continue to encourage and support testing of people presenting to primary care with clinical symptoms consistent with COVID, **whether they meet the High Index of Suspicion criteria or not.**

You can find information for General Practice and Primary Care at: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-resources-health-professionals/covid-19-primary-care#quickref>

Āwhina App

A new mobile app, Āwhina, gives health workers quick access to the information they need about COVID-19 from their mobile device anytime, anywhere. Āwhina contains information such as case definitions, clinical care pathways and Personal Protective Equipment guidance.

The Ministry of Health developed the app with feedback from people working in the health sector, and by learning from approaches taken in other countries to get information about COVID-19 to health workers.

Āwhina is free to download from the **Google Play Store** and the **Apple App Store**. For more information visit **Āwhina app**.

Rural General Practice Roving Locum Support during COVID-19

In our May update we provided information about the Pandemic Emergency Roving Locum (PERL) scheme, which the Ministry has funded the New Zealand Rural General Practice Network to deliver. This contract has been put in place to address the unique challenges faced by rural practices responding to COVID-19.

As at 10 June 2020, the Network had received 32 applications for short term locum support from eligible practices and continues to receive daily applications.

The scheme includes the practice team; General Practitioners, Nurse Practitioners, Practice Nurses and Practice Managers, and will provide this locum support for smaller rural practices for up to two weeks. It will include funding to pay for the locum, their accommodation and transport/mileage to and from the practice. However, the scheme is flexible and other types of support will be considered.

Each application will be considered by an Application Assessment Panel.

Any rural practices needing additional locum support should contact: enquiries@nzlocums.com or **0800 695 628**.

Update on the border exemption process for essential health workers

Border exemptions have been extended until 31 August 2020. If this impacts any previous decisions made by Immigration New Zealand, please get in touch with them.

The border exemptions are in place while border controls are activated. This will be reviewed as our alert levels change and we will keep you updated on this.

The list of essential health and disability workers has also been updated to better reflect the critical needs of the New Zealand health system in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic. You can find the list here: <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/covid-19/border-closures-and-exceptions>

You will see that not all health and disability workers qualify for an exemption. The criteria that has been set reflect current immigration settings and balance the need to protect New Zealanders whilst ensuring we have the rights skills in New Zealand during this challenging time.

Note the process to apply has not changed. Applications under the essential health and disability worker exemption must be sent to Immigration New Zealand via this link:

<https://www.immigration.govt.nz/formshelp/request-for-travel-to-new-zealand>

Please do not send applications anywhere else as it risks them taking more time to process.

‘Other essential worker’ applications

Applications under the ‘other essential worker’ are made by the Minister for Economic Development and the relevant portfolio Minister (the Minister with the portfolio the work relates to).

Requests for approval as an ‘other essential worker’ will only be granted in very specific and limited circumstances. Holding an Essential Skills work visa is not sufficient to qualify as an ‘other essential worker’. Requests for approval must be submitted by employers on behalf of the workers they are seeking exceptions for. Requests from individual workers will not be considered.

To make a request, employers should initially contact the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) by email. The Ministry will coordinate requests and seek input from the appropriate sector lead agencies if needed. Lead agencies may contact employers for more information.

employerborderexceptions@mbie.govt.nz

For more information please go to the Immigration New Zealand website:

<https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/covid-19/border-closures-and-exceptions>

Prescriber Update

In June 2020, Medsafe published the latest edition of the *Prescriber Update*. This edition includes articles about tramadol and updated advice for use in children, ondansetron and oral cleft defects, the anticholinergic burden as a cause of adverse reactions in older patients, and more. You can find [Prescriber Update](#) on the Medsafe website.

If you have any questions please email medsafeadrquery@health.govt.nz.

Update on the Access and Choice Programme

Having the right mental health and addiction support available, when and where people need it most is a core part of integrated primary mental health and addiction services of the Access and Choice Programme.

In April 2020, the Minister of Health announced that a further \$40 million will be invested over the coming 18 months to expand integrated Health Improvement Practitioners and Health Coaches to approximately 130 general practices around the country. By June 2021, these services will be in place for around 1.5 million New Zealanders and the roll out will continue from June 2021 over the next three years.

Work is also underway to expand access to and choice of kaupapa Māori, Pacific and Youth primary mental health and addiction services, which will be delivered from a range of community settings.

Proposals from Pasifika-led organisations are now being sought for up to \$4 million in funding for new Pasifika primary mental health and addiction services. This funding is part of making it easier for Pacific peoples who might be experiencing mild to moderate mental health issues to have access to and choice of mental health and addiction services and support where and when it is needed.

The Request for Proposals (RFP) opened on 8 June 2020 and will run until 31 July 2020. Pasifika-led organisations that are interested should visit: <https://www.health.govt.nz/news-media/media-releases/proposals-sought-new-pasifika-mental-health-and-addiction-services>

0800 number offers free support to frontline health and disability workers

Battling COVID-19 can take a toll on our frontline healthcare professionals and those supporting them. To provide some extra mental health support at the moment, the Ministry of Health has funded HealthCare New Zealand to provide a new counselling service for frontline health and disability workers.

Your teams can access this confidential psychological support either by phone or video call via a dedicated number – **0800 820 080**.

The support line is open Monday – Friday 9am to 7pm. It's as simple as calling to book an appointment with an experienced team of therapists for a time that works for you. The service is flexible and works with what you need, whether it's a one-off appointment or across several sessions.

More information is available at: www.healthcarenz.co.nz/wellbeing-service.

The FluTracking programme

FluTracking is an online initiative that lets you help us track flu and COVID-19 symptoms across New Zealand. Each week participants receive a link to a short survey (it takes less than 30 seconds to complete) asking whether they have had fever, cough or other related symptoms in the last week.

It has over 90,000 registered participants and currently receives about 60,000 completed surveys each week. This information allows us to map out flu and COVID-19 symptoms across the country, which helps us prioritise surveillance efforts where needed.

FluTracking could be particularly valuable to help us detect a return of COVID-19. We encourage people to register online at www.flutracking.net and invite colleagues, friends, family and whānau to participate too.

National Primary Care Patient Experience Survey

The New Zealand patient experience primary care survey scheduled for May 2020 was not run due to COVID-19. The next survey is expected to go ahead for the August 2020 quarter, but this will be reviewed again closer to the time.

Instead, the Health Quality and Safety Commission (HQSC) is running a COVID-19 focussed primary care patient experience survey in June/July 2020. This survey seeks to understand the impact of COVID-19 on people's experiences of accessing health care during and after the COVID-19 lockdown, and how health services can learn and respond.

General practices from 23 PHOs across New Zealand are participating. The survey is being sent out to patients the week of 22 June 2020.

If you are interested or would like to know more, please contact Joanna Swanson via Joanna.Swanson@hqsc.govt.nz or **04 901 6052**.

Sign up for the Mental Health and Addiction newsletter

The Mental Health and Addiction Directorate sends a regular newsletter with updates on their work programme, RFPs, and news from across the sector.

If you would like to sign-up to receive the newsletter, [click this link](#).

Further information

We welcome your feedback on the information you would find useful from us. Please email Rachael.Bayliss@health.govt.nz with your suggestions or to be added to the email distribution list.

Thank you for your support and hard work to provide people with greater access to primary care, particularly during the response to COVID-19.

Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou katoa