

Health and disability services at Alert Level 2

12 August 2020

This information sheet is a guide for health and disability services operating at Alert Level 2.

At all alert levels overarching infection prevention and control principles (eg, hygiene and cleaning protocols, appropriate use of personal protective equipment) appropriate for each clinical setting must be followed.

Physical distancing is also required, except in those situations where it's not possible to deliver health and disability services. In these cases, mitigating steps must be taken.

Staff and patients should be regularly reminded of the physical distancing requirements at Alert Level 2:

- keep at least 2 meters from strangers/people you don't know
- keep at least 1 meter from people who aren't close friends, family, or whānau or colleagues in your workplace
- you can have close physical contact with your friends, family, and whānau but you should use your judgement about any risk to you or to them
- if you have any cold or flu-like symptoms you should stay at home

Businesses and public venues (such as libraries, museums, cinemas, food courts, gyms, pools and markets) must have measures in place to maintain physical distance, as set out above, between workers, between patients or clients, and between staff.

Testing for COVID-19 is done at community-based assessment centres (CBACs), designated practices, and general practice where appropriate to do so. District health boards (DHBs) will review CBAC plans according to changing community needs and these will be communicated to primary care.

Key things to know

- Services will open and operate at their full scope where possible, while managing public health risks.
- Strict hygiene measures and physical distancing measures will remain in place.
- Infection prevention and control principles must be adhered to across the system.
- Testing for COVID-19 will continue at community-based assessment centres (CBACs), designated practices, and some general practices.

Hospital

The Government's COVID-19 Alert Levels and the National Hospital Response Framework alert levels serve different purposes. Regardless of the country's Alert Level, DHBs operate services aligned with the National Hospital Response Framework, which enables them to safely deliver as much clinical care and surgery as possible and respond swiftly and appropriately to COVID-19. Hospitals are open for the acute and emergency health needs of the population at all Alert Levels.

The National Hospital Response Framework includes guidance about making decisions to defer non-urgent treatment or to changing service models to online/telephone. Such decisions must consider equity and the clinical risk associated with delay or changes to treatment and take steps to mitigate harm or deterioration. For example, it's recommended DHBs review the waiting list for planned care regularly to ensure the highest priority needs are dealt with first.

Planned Care services also encompass care (including medical and surgical care) for people who don't need to be treated right away. Planned care, including elective surgery and radiology, will be provided in order of clinical priority. Depending on the demand for hospital services including as a result of both COVID-19 and other non-COVID conditions and needs, some non-urgent services or treatment may be deferred. Outpatient appointments will continue dependant on demand via online/telephone/contactless methods as much as possible (see the following infection prevention and control advice for guidance for appropriate physical distancing in specific outpatient settings).

Visiting friends or whānau in hospital

As New Zealand deals with COVID-19, there needs to be changes to visiting hospital to protect people, staff and patients. The National Hospital and Clinic Visitors Policy describes changes to visiting DHBs under the National Hospital Response Framework.

The number of visitors allowed per patient per day depends on where they are, and discretion may be applied on a case by case basis. People are encouraged to check with their DHB before visiting hospital to make sure they'll be allowed under the following COVID-19 Hospital Alert Levels.

- **ORANGE Alert Level:** A maximum of one visitor at any one time may visit a patient at the hospital or clinic. No non-essential visitors. For high risk areas (ED/Intensive Care Unit (ICU)/NICU/SCBU/Maternity (Antenatal Inpatient and Postnatal ward)/Aged Care or any ward with COVID-19 positive patients), a maximum of one visitor at a time will be allowed, and only one visit per day.
- **GREEN or YELLOW Alert Level:** A maximum of two visitors at any one time may visit a patient at the hospital or clinic. For high risk areas (ED/Intensive Care Unit (ICU)/NICU/SCBU/Maternity (Antenatal Inpatient and Postnatal ward)/Aged Care or any ward with COVID-19 positive patients), a maximum of one visitor at a time will be allowed, and only one visit per day.

Visiting must take place during usual visiting hours, unless there is a prior arrangement with the ward. When visiting relatives in hospitals people need to follow precautions such as good hand hygiene and physical distancing.

The hospital will record visitors' details, in case contact tracing is necessary. Visitors should be aware that they will be asked screening questions and may be refused entry to ensure patient, staff and public safety.

Primary and community health services

All primary and community healthcare services will operate if appropriate COVID-19 risk screening is in place. Risk screening includes an assessment of symptoms, travel history and history of contact with people with COVID-19 and aims to ensure patients pose no risk to staff or other patients. Public health protection measures must be used including infection prevention control, physical distancing measures, and appropriate use of personal protective equipment.

General practice

General practices continue to be open in Level 2.

Services such as screening, immunisations and referral for non-urgent services will operate. It's important that any appointments that may have been missed for the long-term management of long-term health conditions occur.

Physical distancing remains the mainstay of controlling COVID-19. This will mean as many consultations as possible continue to be offered by telehealth – telephone, video or email. People should expect that many fewer consultations with the general practice team will be in-person.

Where an in-person appointment is needed, a phone assessment is likely to occur first. Patients with any flu-like symptoms who need an in-person appointment should expect to be separated from other patients in waiting rooms.

Community health services

Pharmacies will remain open at Alert Level 2 and all pharmacy practice services continue – this includes dispensing, medicines advice, vaccinations, community pharmacy warfarin monitoring service, long term conditions services and provision of medicines related health information. Some services will use online/telephone with people, with in-person services available for people who do not have reliable access to technology and the internet.

For **at-risk people**, it's still encouraged to use delivery services to get medicines to them.

Midwifery appointments will be provided through a variety of methods which include in-person and virtual appointments. People at risk of a complicated pregnancy receive scheduled in-person appointments. Antenatal and newborn screening programmes continue.

Community dental services open as normal at Alert Level 2. Routine, urgent and emergency care may be provided for patients who aren't confirmed or probable cases of COVID-19, close contacts of confirmed or probable cases of COVID-19 and people waiting for test results. Confirmed or probable cases of COVID-19 or people awaiting test results can receive treatment that cannot be deferred, such as emergency and urgent dental treatment, with clinicians meeting PPE and room requirements. Telephone screening will be used to assign a patient's risk category. Scheduling of those with certain medical conditions or of those over 70 must be carefully managed. **Guidelines for oral health services are available [here](#).**

Community allied health professionals (eg, physiotherapy, podiatry, optometry) and Well Child Tamariki Ora providers can provide face to face consultations after an appropriate COVID-19 risk screen has been conducted. Public health precautions must be in place. Virtual appointments are still encouraged where possible.

Māori and community health providers

Māori and community health providers are open at Alert Level 2. They can operate as normal after an appropriate COVID-19 risk screen has been conducted, taking into account appropriate public health precautions when necessary and appropriate. Virtual appointments are encouraged where possible. Providers contracted to do so will also continue to provide community-based and mobile Covid-19 testing in their communities.

Disability and aged care services

Disability residential care

Disability residential care continues to operate with Alert Level 2 public health control measures in place. Services must have COVID-19 risk screening such as an assessment of symptoms, travel and contact with people with COVID-19 to ensure they pose no risk to staff or other patients and use public health protection measures including infection prevention control, physical distancing measures, and appropriate use of personal protective equipment.

- Extra consideration will be given to how the health of at-risk residents will be protected
- Moves for residents between residential facilities are allowed
- Community participation services such as sports and activities continue in a safe way using physical distancing, limits on the number of people gathering, hand hygiene and other measures.

Disability residential care visiting policy: Visits with agreed and named family and whānau and close friends are allowed, but all visitors are to be recorded to aid with contact tracing and visitors with known COVID-19 contact or respiratory symptoms will not be granted access. This is an important mechanism to ensure people's wellbeing and safety and will be managed by the provider.

For disabled people at risk of severe illness from COVID-19, it must be agreed between disabled people, residents, family and providers who should visit and how each resident's health will be protected.

All essential visitors, such as essential carers and tradespeople, must follow Alert Level 2 precautions. General visits are allowed at Alert Level 2, but there are restrictions on the number of friends or family members visiting and frequency of visiting.

Moves for residents between residential facilities are allowed, but must be supported with contact tracing, physical distancing and hygiene practices. For disabled people at risk of severe illness, additional precautions should be undertaken to limit the risk of those people contracting COVID-19.

Aged residential care

Aged residential care facilities operate at their full scope with Alert Level 2 public health control measures, and planned respite and urgent respite care will be available. A COVID-19 risk assessment must be undertaken before admission of residents including respite clients, and existing residents returning from hospital. PPE guidance is to be followed.

Home-based support

Home-based personal care services, such as showering and feeding, and home help, such as cleaning, remain available under Alert Level 2. Infection prevention and control measures must be adhered to for essential care services that require close physical contact and wearing a mask (disposable or washable) is advised. Staff movement should be minimised between homes and household management activities should maintain physical distancing where possible. All equipment and modification services are now available following Alert Level 2 rules.

There should be agreement between home-based support clients (disabled people, other chronically unwell people or older people), family and whānau, and providers on who should visit clients and how their health will be protected.

Other services

- **Respite** – Planned respite and urgent respite care will be available for older people in aged residential care facilities. Alert Level 2 also allows for limited opening of facility-based respite services for disabled people where urgent respite care is required. Facilities will contact disabled people and families and whānau to let them know how they will operate following Alert Level 2 rules. Flexibility for respite paid for under Individualised Funding remains under Alert Level 2.
- **Carer support** – There is flexibility for carer support under Alert Level 2, including that resident family members can be paid to provide support and more flexibility about what can be purchased.
- **Day services** – Many day services (funded by District Health Boards, the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Health) can open in a limited way with Alert Level 2 public health control measures in place and records of people working at, attending, or travelling to and from the service kept to help with contact tracing. Day services for older people will not be running out of aged residential care facilities. Day service providers are to contact users about availability, what they are doing differently to keep people safe, and what they can do for those who choose not to attend day services during Alert Level 2. People who are sick are unable to attend day services
- **Equipment and modification services** – Equipment, housing and vehicle modifications can be progressed if they can adhere to COVID-19 risk screening such as an assessment of symptoms, travel and contact with people with COVID-19 to ensure they pose no risk to staff or other patients and public health protection measures are used including infection prevention control, physical distancing measures, and appropriate use of personal protective equipment.
- **Behaviour support services** – At-home visits and residential provider visits can now take place, if they are able to do so safely. The continued use of virtual services via telephone support lines is encouraged.
- **Forensic services** – Regional Intellectual Disability Supported Accommodation Services and Regional Intellectual Disability Secure Services under the High and Complex Framework will operate with Alert Level 2 restrictions in place. Community participation (ie, sports or activities) continues in a safe way with appropriate leave provision in place.
- **Individualised funding** – Increased flexibility continues throughout all levels. See Home and Community Support Services section.
- **Disability and Information Advisory Services** – Operates as normal with Alert Level 2 restrictions.
- **NASCs** – Operate as normal with Alert Level 2 guidelines restrictions. In person visits can now resume in necessary.

Mental health and addiction services

Mental health and addiction inpatient and residential services operate at Alert Level 2. Services should operate at normal capacity wherever possible. Overall bed capacity may be reduced to enable good infection prevention and control measures or to enable consolidation of clinical staff.

Some inpatients may be considered high-risk and therefore may have additional steps taken to reduce movement within/outside the facility. Inpatient units must have separate COVID-19 positive/suspected and non-COVID-19 areas for patient care with no staff crossover between these areas. Any in-patient trips will be postponed where they do not meet restrictions on travel/gatherings for Alert Level 2.

The visiting policy is as per the intent in the general guidance for hospitals during Alert Level 2, with accompanying physical distancing and infection prevention and control protocols. Where visitors are permitted, inpatient services must record visitors to ensure contact tracing can be conducted if necessary. Record keeping must capture the following personal details: full name, date, time, location, attendee's/client's phone number and physical address. This information also needs to be rapidly accessible by health authorities, should it be required. It should also be kept for up to 2 months.

In-patient units must have ability to manage COVID-19 positive and suspected cases separately.

Community mental health services continue to use virtual/telephone appointments where possible. In-person appointments may be provided so long as the health professionals and support staff can take appropriate measures to manage public health risks as per Ministry guidance. Urgent/crisis services will operate as usual, with appropriate measures to manage public health risks as per Ministry guidance for Alert Level 2.

There are a range of welfare, mental health and wellbeing programmes underway to minimise harm to the community as part of the Government's psychosocial response.