

Information for home and community support service workers

23 March 2020

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on preventing the spread of COVID-19 in home and community support settings, to protect both the clients and the support workers.

This information sheet should be read in conjunction with information available at health.govt.nz/covid-19

How COVID-19 spreads

COVID-19, like the flu, can be spread from person to person. When a person who has COVID-19 coughs, sneezes or talks, they may spread droplets containing the virus a short distance which quickly settle on surrounding surfaces.

You may get infected by the virus if you:

- inhale these droplets, which are usually less than 2 metres from the infected person
- touch those surfaces or objects and then touch your mouth, nose or eyes.

At-risk populations

COVID-19 presents with mild respiratory symptoms, including a cough and fever but in some people it can be more severe and can lead to pneumonia or breathing difficulties. People who are more at risk of COVID-19 infection include:

- people who have conditions that compromise their immune systems or have compromised immune systems as a side effect of taking certain medications, such as chemotherapy
- people who have chronic medical conditions such as liver disease, heart disease, kidney disease, diabetes mellitus, lung disease or other long-term conditions
- people with a disability and co-existing long-term conditions
- people who have medical devices that enter the body (eg, a catheter, tracheostomy, ileostomy, feeding tube)
- people with surgical or large wounds
- people older than 70 years of age.

Supporting people at home who are more at risk of COVID-19

Extra precautions are needed to ensure people receiving supports at home are safe, particularly those who are more at risk of infection and severe illness. That's why it's really important to practice good hygiene.

- Cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or your elbow.
- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water and dry them thoroughly:
 - Before commencing work in a new setting
 - before eating or handling food
 - after using the toilet
 - after coughing, sneezing, blowing your nose or wiping noses
 - after caring for sick people.

- If soap and water are not available, clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand sanitiser that has at least 60 percent alcohol, covering all surfaces of your hands and rubbing them together until they feel dry.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean.
- Try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects, such as doorknobs. The normal cleaning protocols are enough to prevent the spread of COVID-19. For information on cleaning guidelines, please see General Cleaning information at [health.govt.nz/covid-19](https://www.health.govt.nz/covid-19)
- Stay home if you feel unwell.

Supporting people at home who may have COVID-19

In addition to your usual infection control practices, we recommend the following measures for those clients that are required to self-isolate because they may have COVID-19.

- Support workers that are with clients for more than 15 minutes and within 2 metre need to wear personal protective equipment (PPE). For example, support workers who provide essential **personal care support** need to use PPE if there is potential for contact with blood, bodily fluids, mucous membranes or non-intact skin, or when supporting disabled people to shower or bathe.
- PPE includes gloves, surgical face masks, aprons or gown and eye protection.
- Practice safe removal and disposal of PPE by putting it in a bag in the bin immediately.
- Support workers who provide household management should: ask clients to stay in a room away from where they are working, practice good hand hygiene and/or wear gloves. If cleaning rooms, they may also wish to wear a surgical mask as an added precaution.

Going to work

Home and community support workers **cannot** go to work if they:

- have cold or flu symptoms. Workers should be symptom-free for 48 hours before returning to work
- have been overseas in any country in the previous 14 days
- have been in close contact with a suspected, probable or confirmed case of COVID-19.

Self-isolation

If a support worker has been overseas or in close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19, they are required to self-isolate for 14 days from date of departure or date of close contact.

Please register your details with Healthline if you have not already on **0800 358 5453**.

If you develop symptoms (listed below) within 14 days of being anywhere overseas or within close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19, you should phone Healthline on **0800 358 5453** or your doctor.

Self-isolation means staying away from situations where you could infect other people, including going to work. For more information on self-isolation, please see [health.govt.nz/covid19-self-isolation](https://www.health.govt.nz/covid19-self-isolation)

The symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- a cough
- a high temperature (at least 38°C)
- shortness of breath
- sore throat.

Advice for employers

- Provide information and brief all employees and contract staff, including domestic and cleaning staff where applicable, on relevant information and procedures to prevent the spread COVID-19 and how to protect people who are more at risk of infection.
- Provide employees with information on your organisation's business continuity plan or pandemic plan if you have one.
- Order extra PPE equipment from your local District Health Board if you have clients who need to self-isolate or have COVID-19.
- Plan and make provisions for staff absences.
- Circulate or put up posters about staying away if sick and how to practice good hand hygiene and cough/sneeze etiquette. These posters are available at health.govt.nz/covid-19.

More information

For the latest advice, information and resources, go to health.govt.nz/covid-19 or covid19.govt.nz

Call Healthline on **0800 358 5453**. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

If you have concerns about your health, speak to a doctor.