

Health and disability services at Alert Level 2

13 May 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 particular 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
- 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 are have cold or flu-like symptoms you should stay at home

Businesses and organisations 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 normally 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, traditionally known as ‘Electives,’ encompass 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 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. More information is available [here](#).

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.

- Hospital COVID-19 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.
- Hospital COVID-19 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 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.

General practice

General practices are open at Alert Level 2 and may look to work with patients who have had hospital or specialist activities cancelled or postponed during Alert Levels 3 and 4.

Appointments should be conducted online/by telephone where possible, with face-to-face consultations made available if required. All usual primary care continues – this includes screening, acute care, long-term condition support, preventative services, antenatal and new-born care, and routine health needs (including mental health consults, prescription of contraception and other medication, treatment of common illnesses), and the referral of patients to secondary/tertiary care according to clinical need and status of hospital sector.

Essential preventative care will continue including influenza vaccinations and primary care-administered childhood immunisations.

Community health services

Pharmacies are open at Alert Level 2. Person-to-person medicines services will be resumed at Alert Level 2 such as medicine use reviews and long-term conditions support. 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.

There will be an increase in over-the-counter sales of 'pharmacy only' medicines and an increase in non-essential pharmacy sales. 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 face-to-face and virtual appointments. **At-risk people** will receive scheduled face-to-face 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 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 professions (eg, physiotherapy, podiatry, optometry) and Well Child Tamariki Ora providers 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.

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 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. No non-essential visitors are allowed at Alert Level 2.

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.

At Alert Level 2 visiting will be allowed, including general family visits and non-essential service visits. However, providers will take precautions and manage visiting in a controlled way to minimise the risk of COVID-19 transmission to residents and staff.

Measures for managing visits will include:

- Visits may be limited to designated visitors.
- There may be a limit on the number of designated visitors at one time, by appointment and sign in process. Check with the provider directly prior to organising a visit.
- Lengths of visits and visiting areas will be determined at the discretion of the provider. Consideration will include the resident's health, preference and request, and the number of appointments the facility already has.
- Health 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 residents and assessment of visitors will be completed before entering the facility.
- Visitors must follow the Ministry of Health's and the facility's infection prevention and control measures, for example hand hygiene, physical distancing and appropriate use of PPE.

External contractors may be able to recommence visits for services, however these will be managed by the provider who will consider the national Alert Level 2 framework, assess any COVID-19 risks and implement controlled measures to mitigate these risks.

Home-based support

Home-based essential personal care services eg toileting, washing, feeding should be provided under Alert Level 2. Infection prevention and control measures must be adhered to for essential care services that require close physical contact. Staff movement should be minimised between homes and household management activities should maintain physical distancing where possible. Urgent in-home equipment will be provided where needed.

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 families of disabled people where urgent respite care is required, so long as public health measures are in place. 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. That is, the disabled person, and/or their family have choice around how relief is provided to the disabled person's carer, and what the disabled person does while their usual carer is given a break.
- **Day services** – There can be very limited opening of day services (funded by the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Health) for people who live at home (rather than residential care

residents) as a preference; or carers who want to return to work, with public health measures adhered to. Options to provide day services virtually are encouraged.

- **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 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 within Alert Level 2 guidelines.

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.

Inpatient 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. Face-to-face 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.