

COVID-19

Interim guidance: removal of the dedicated MIQF health workforce policy

20 October 2021

This interim guidance will eventually be incorporated into the next iteration of the MIQF Operations Framework (V9.0).

Background

The dedicated MIQ health workforce policy was implemented in August 2020 as a precautionary measure to protect vulnerable populations in other health care settings and mitigate the risk of community transmission of COVID-19 via the health workforce.

Following a review by the Ministry of Health with the support of the DHB leaders for MIQ and the Medical Officers of Health involved in the MIQ system, the Minister for COVID-19 Response, the Hon. Chris Hipkins, has agreed that this policy is no longer required given the range of public health and IPC measures now in place to protect the MIQF health workforce and prevent onward transmission of COVID-19 to the community.

These measures include:

- Frequent surveillance testing;
- Robust contact tracing systems and the contractual requirement to keep a record of movements;
- Strict adherence to IPC measures, including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), including P2/N95 particulate respirators in all returnee-facing zones;
- Reduction in frequency and duration of face-to-face interactions with returnees;
- Ongoing improvements to ventilation systems within MIQFs; and
- COVID-19 vaccination.

This will come into effect from Thursday 21 October 2021 and applies equally to workers in managed isolation facilities, dual-use facilities, and quarantine facilities.

What does the removal of the policy mean for MIQF healthcare workers?

The DHB MIQ health workforce is no longer required to be employed solely within a MIQF and can seek secondary employment in other non-clinical and clinical settings including hospitals, primary care, prisons, age related residential care, mental health and disability facilities and attend training sessions with non-MIQ staff. Likewise, healthcare workers in other settings may choose to also work in a MIQF without needing to quit their existing role.

This brings the MIQF health workforce into line with other MIQF workers such as New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) personnel or hotel employees who are not subject to the dedicated workforce policy and are free to be deployed to other settings.

It is however recommended that when seeking secondary employment, MIQF health workers inform their non-MIQF employer that they work in a MIQ facility. Health workers should also follow the DHB's existing policies and processes for secondary employment as applicable.

Testing and stand down requirements

The current requirement for MIQ health workers to stand down for 48 hours (minimum) and return a negative test result before moving from a quarantine or dual use facility to a managed isolation facility, or after ending employment in a MIQF to take up employment in another setting, is no longer required.

All other requirements relating to the MIQF health workforce remain unchanged:

- Vaccination requirements as detailed in **Section 4.1** of the MIQF Operations Framework;
- Healthcare workers will continue to undergo regular surveillance testing, as required under the Required Testing Order and detailed in **Section 12** of the MIQF Operations Framework. This includes the offboarding testing requirements detailed in **Section 12.7.1** of the MIQF Operations Framework, which applies to workers when they cease working in a MIQF (whether permanently or temporarily);
- Healthcare workers will continue to remain vigilant for any COVID-19 related symptoms. The requirement for symptom checking and isolation/testing of individuals who report any symptoms will continue to apply;
- Healthcare workers will continue to be contractually obliged to keep a record of their movements while outside of work, for example through the COVID-19 tracer app;
- Healthcare workers will continue to adhere to the IPC and PPE requirements while at work, including the use of P2/N95 particulate respirators in returnee-facing zones, as detailed in the **MIQF Operations Framework** and the **MIQF IPC SOP**.

Changes to employment agreements

Individual employment contracts for MIQF health workers were required to reflect the dedicated workforce policy. The removal of the policy therefore means that employers will need to explain the implications of the policy removal and update contracts accordingly.