

20 October 2020

[REDACTED]

By email: [REDACTED]  
Ref: H202006250

Dear [REDACTED]

### Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) on 18 August 2020 for:

*“-Reports (including but not limited to briefings papers and aide memoir) received or prepared by officials concerning the efficacy of mask use in combating the Covid-19 pandemic.*

*-Reports (including but not limited to briefings papers and aide memoir) received or prepared by officials concerning orders or recommendations for mask use by health, border and the wider public.”*

Please note, the information released in this response predates the latest Ministry of Health (the Ministry) advice on the use of mask or face coverings on buses, trains, ferries and on all flights at Alert Level 2 and above. Updates on the Ministry's advice about the use of masks by the public as part of New Zealand's ongoing response to COVID-19 will depend on the alert level in the community. Further information on this topic (including relevant advice about face masks and coverings in the context of COVID-19 from the World Health Organization) can be found at the following address:

<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/covid-19-use-masks-and-face-coverings-community>

Information within scope of this request is itemised in Appendix One of this letter. The table in Appendix One outlines the grounds under which I have decided to withhold information.

Under section 28(3) of the Act you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request.

Yours sincerely



Maree Roberts  
Deputy Director-General  
System, Strategy and Policy

## Appendix One: List of documents

#	Date	Title	Decision on release
1	15 May 2020	Memorandum- The supply chain impacts of recommending or requiring routine use of masks on public transport	Refused pursuant to section 18(d) of the Act as the information is publicly available at: <a href="https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202005121.pdf">https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202005121.pdf</a>
2	15 May 2020	Masks supply and demand A3	Refused pursuant to section 18(d) of the Act as the information is publicly available at: <a href="https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202005121.pdf">https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202005121.pdf</a>
3	N/A	Rapid literature review- transmission of SARS-CoV-2 through air travel	Refused pursuant to section 18(d) of the Act as the information is publicly available at: <a href="https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202005121.pdf">https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202005121.pdf</a>
4	N/A	Inflight transmission of respiratory illness - Rapid Review	Withheld in full under section 6(b)(i) of the Act, to protect information where the making available of that information would be likely to prejudice the entrusting of information to the Government of New Zealand on a basis of confidence by the Government of any other country or any agency of such a Government
5	N/A	Request for rapid review on air travel passengers use of face masks on planes	Refused pursuant to section 18(d) of the Act as the information is publicly available at: <a href="https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202005121.pdf">https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202005121.pdf</a>
6	26 May 2020	ELT Memorandum:  Updated Ministry website content on community use of face masks for COVID-19	Refused pursuant to section 18(d) of the Act as the information is publicly available at: <a href="https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202005121.pdf">https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202005121.pdf</a>
7	29 May 2020	Draft: Rapid review on air travel passengers' use of face masks on planes	Refused pursuant to section 18(d) of the Act as the information is publicly available at: <a href="https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202005121.pdf">https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202005121.pdf</a>

8	5 June 2020	Ministry of Health COVID-19 response- Science and Technical Advisory. Request for independent advice and response	Refused pursuant to section 18(d) of the Act as the information is publicly available at: <a href="https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202005121.pdf">https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202005121.pdf</a>
9	19 June 2020	BARNZ- Facemasks for passengers on international flights	Refused pursuant to section 18(d) of the Act as the information is publicly available at: <a href="https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202005121.pdf">https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202005121.pdf</a>
10	19 June 2020	Memorandum- Face masks use by air travel passengers	Refused pursuant to section 18(d) of the Act as the information is publicly available at: <a href="https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202005121.pdf">https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202005121.pdf</a>
11	30 June 2020	Guidance on the provision of face masks on inbound international flights	Refused under section 18(d) of the Act, as the information is publicly available at: <a href="https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/face-masks-on-planes-25june2020.pdf">https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/face-masks-on-planes-25june2020.pdf</a>
12	6 May 2020	Review of science and policy around face masks and COVID-19	Refused pursuant to section 18(d) of the Act as the information is publicly available at: <a href="https://covid19.govt.nz/assets/resources/proactive-release-2020-june/Document-Review-of-science-and-policy-around-face-masks-and-COVID-19.pdf">https://covid19.govt.nz/assets/resources/proactive-release-2020-june/Document-Review-of-science-and-policy-around-face-masks-and-COVID-19.pdf</a>
13	29 July 2020	Health Report 20201207: Oral Item: COVID-19 Update 5 August 2020	Excerpts released under section 16(e) of the Act. Please note out of scope information has been excluded and some information has been withheld pursuant to the following sections of the Act: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Section 9(2)(g)(i) to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinions by or between or to Ministers of the in the course of their duty</li> </ul> Please note this document has not been seen by Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Health or used by the Office of the Minister of Health. It was superseded by Document 14. Note that in Table 1; the referred standard is for particulate respirators, not face masks.

14	5 August 2020	SWC talking points for the Minister	Refused pursuant to section 18(d) of the Act as the information is soon to be publicly available at: <a href="https://covid19.govt.nz/updates-and-resources/legislation-and-key-documents/proactive-release/health-response/">https://covid19.govt.nz/updates-and-resources/legislation-and-key-documents/proactive-release/health-response/</a>
15	13 August 2020	Health Report 20201414: Advice on the mandatory use of masks by the general public at Alert Level 3	<p>Released with some information withheld, pursuant to the following sections of the Act:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section 9(2)(a) to protect the privacy of natural persons</li> <li>• Section 9(2)(f)(iv) of the Act to maintain the constitutional conventions for the time being which protect the confidentiality of advice tendered by Ministers of the Crown and officials</li> </ul> <p>Please note this document has not been seen by Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Health or used by the Office of the Minister of Health. It was superseded by Health Report H20201498.</p>

# Excerpts of Health Report HR20201207

## Oral item: COVID-19 Update 5 August 2020

### Purpose of report

To provide background information and talking points to support your oral item at the Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee on 5 August 2020.

### Summary

- You are providing an oral update at the Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee on Wednesday 5 August 2020 on two aspects of the planned approach to managing new cases of COVID-19 in the community:
  - the potential use of reusable non-medical grade masks in the wider community [CAB-20-MIN-0330 refers].
- The use of **non-medical masks** by the public is a prominent issue. The World Health Organization's advice on mask wearing applies to places with widespread or community transmission. At the time of writing this report, New Zealand has no identified community transmission.
- Correctly used non-medical masks can be effective in helping to prevent undetected transmission of diseases such as COVID-19 alongside other actions like physical distancing and hand hygiene. This report provides you with high level information on how any potential 'use of masks' requirement could be deployed.
- To enable you to report back to Cabinet in more detail, the Ministry will brief you in August 2020 on scenarios where the use of non-medical masks could help to prevent undetected transmission in community settings. This paper will be developed in consultation with COVID All-of Government Response Group.
- This report provides more information on these issues and responses to high-level questions to support any questions raised by Committee members. Talking points are set out in Appendices 1 and 2.

## Recommendations

We recommend you:

- a) **Note** the enclosed talking points to support your COVID-19 update to the Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee on 5 August 2020.
- b) **Note** that the Ministry of Health will provide you with comprehensive, whole-of-government advice on the widespread use of masks in late August.



Sue Gordon  
Deputy Chief Executive  
**COVID-19 Health System Response**

Hon Chris Hipkins  
**Minister of Health**

Date:

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# Oral item: COVID-19 Update 5 August 2020

## Overview

1. We have learnt that the single biggest transmission factor for COVID 19 is amongst those who live and work close to the confirmed case. Therefore, whilst detection and isolation at the border remains the priority for Aotearoa New Zealand, when operating at the lower alert levels we also require a strong assurance mechanism for managing self-isolation in the community for confirmed (or probable) cases and for their close contacts.
2. The Ministry is leading development of a Health and Disability Sector Resurgence Action Plan to ensure there is an immediate and effective response to any 'second wave' emergence of COVID-19 in the community. This is multi-faceted, including enhanced surveillance, testing, contact tracing, and isolating cases and contacts, whilst aiming to minimise disruption to the ongoing provision of essential health and disability services.

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## Potential use of reusable non-medical grade masks in the community

### Overview

14. The role of masks as a prevention and control measure in reducing the impact of COVID 19 has emerged as a subject of considerable debate, and often misunderstanding, in the community.
15. This is because the term “face masks” is often used generically, without further clarification of the differing types of mask and their purpose.
16. To date, advice from the Ministry has promoted personal hygiene measures and physical distancing as the key mechanisms to restrict the transmission of COVID 19 in the community. It has not recommended the use of non medical masks to date. This approach is consistent with the advice of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
17. WHO has reviewed emerging evidence and recently updated its advice on the use of masks. This includes a recommendation that governments should encourage the general public to wear masks in specific situations and settings as part of a comprehensive approach to suppress COVID 19 transmission.
18. Following release of the updated WHO guidance, Cabinet asked you to report back on the potential use of reusable non-medical grade masks in the wider community as part of a response to any resurgence in cases in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### The role of masks in helping to prevent and limit the spread of viral disease

19. Within a COVID 19 context, there are two types of mask, each with a different purpose:

Table 1: Types of face masks

Type of mask	Purpose	Comment
Non-medical-grade mask	Help <b>prevent affected individuals from spreading the disease</b> (primarily in areas with widespread or community-based infection)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May be made from a variety of woven and non woven fabrics, such as polypropylene</li> <li>• May be commercially produced or 'DIY'</li> <li>• May be washed and reused, depending on the fabric they are made from</li> <li>• Are not required to conform to any specified Standard and therefore are not recognised as forming part of personal protective equipment (PPE)</li> <li>• Commercially produced reusable non medical-grade masks can cost anywhere from \$10 to \$20 per mask.</li> <li>• Single use masks can cost \$1-\$2 each</li> </ul>



Table 1: Types of face masks (cont.)

Type of mask	Purpose	Comment
Medical-grade mask  (also known as surgical grade)	<b>Protect wearer</b> from becoming infected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognised as one form of PPE</li> <li>Required to conform with Standard AS/NZS 1716:2012 'Respiratory protective devices' (i.e. proven to filter out at least 95% of airborne particles)</li> <li>Strongly recommended for use as part of DHB hospital planning and implementation strategies to prevent and control COVID-19</li> </ul>

### Emerging evidence – amended World Health Organization (WHO) guidance

20. The **use of masks is part of a comprehensive package** of prevention and control measures that can limit the spread of certain respiratory viral diseases, including COVID-19.
21. WHO recently updated its guidance on the use of masks to control COVID-19. Key changes included:
  - a. In areas with **widespread transmission**, medical-grade masks (PPE) should be worn by all people working in clinical areas of a health facility (whether patients may have COVID-19 or other diseases).
  - b. In areas with **community transmission**, those aged 60 years or over, or those with underlying conditions should wear a medical-grade mask (PPE) where physical distancing is not possible.
  - c. Governments should encourage the general public to wear non-medical-grade masks where there is **widespread transmission** and physical distancing is difficult.
22. Masks have been used in several countries in these circumstances including Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and more recently in Australia.

### New Zealand situation

23. New Zealand has run a successful elimination strategy and now has only a very low number of active or new cases of COVID-19. There is no detected community transmission in New Zealand, meaning that the responses of other countries do not provide a useful comparison.
24. Nonetheless, the international situation will continue to affect New Zealand's COVID-19 preparedness and response activities.
25. Officials are considering the key components of any decision that might be taken to suddenly require or strongly recommend the use of non-medical masks.
26. The equity issues arising from any decision to strongly recommend or require the use of masks will need to be carefully considered so that those in lower socio-economic groups are not disproportionately affected.

### Supporting potential mass-use scenarios

29. The retail stock of non-medical grade masks is being ascertained but we estimate that approximately 20 million non-medical masks could be readily available via various outlets nationwide.

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### Possible Cabinet Questions and Answers

Oral item component	Possible Cabinet Q & A
s 9(2)(g)(i)	[Redacted]
s 9(2)(g)(i)	[Redacted]
s 9(2)(g)(i)	[Redacted]
s 9(2)(g)(i)	[Redacted]

## Appendix 2 – Talking points

### Potential use of reusable non-medical-grade masks in the community

- My officials have considered the World Health Organization's updated guidance on the use of masks in helping to control COVID 19. This advice:
  - notes that mask use is only part of a comprehensive package of prevention and control measures that can limit the spread of certain respiratory viral diseases, including COVID 19;
  - reiterates the importance of other measures such as hand hygiene and physical distancing to prevent human to-human transmission of the disease;
  - advises on the use of masks for certain people in areas of widespread transmission and areas where there is community transmission; and
  - suggests that at the present time, the widespread use of masks by healthy people in the community setting is not yet supported by high quality or direct scientific evidence.
- Currently, New Zealand does not have any widespread transmission and has no evidence of community transmission.
- The Ministry's advice for Aotearoa New Zealand continues to be that healthy people in the community are not required to wear a mask for protection against COVID-19. This is consistent with the updated advice from the World Health Organization.
- My officials continue to plan for a possible resurgence in COVID 19 and are developing comprehensive, whole of government advice on the use of masks and possible scenarios where the use of non medical grade masks might be appropriate.
- This advice will also consider the appropriate grade of mask in different scenarios, reliability of production and supply, distribution, cost and equity issues. I am expecting this advice before the end of August.

## WHO ADVICE

Governments should consider encouraging the general public to wear masks in specific situations and settings as part of a comprehensive approach to suppress COVID-19 transmission.

The advice:

- Notes that mask use is only part of a comprehensive package of prevention and control measures that can limit the spread of certain respiratory viral diseases, including COVID-19;
- Reiterates the importance of other measures such as hand hygiene and physical distancing to prevent human-to-human transmission of the disease;
- Recommends governments encourage the general public to wear non-medical-grade masks where there is widespread community transmission and physical distancing is difficult;
- Suggests that at the present time, the widespread use of masks by healthy people in the community setting is not yet supported by high quality or direct evidence;
- States the use of masks by the public must not compromise health workforce stock of medical-grade masks.

## Ministry of Health position

To date, the Ministry's position has been guided by the WHO.

The Ministry has promoted personal hygiene measures and physical distancing as the key mechanisms to restrict the transmission of COVID-19 in the community. These prevention and control measures will remain a priority in any response situation.

It is likely if COVID-19 was to re-emerge in the community the use of non-medical-grade (reusable) masks may be appropriate in certain situations in line with WHO guidance.

Policy work underway will define these situations and we intend to brief Ministers by mid-August.

## MINISTRY-LED POLICY DEVELOPMENT

As part of resurgence planning, the Ministry is leading the development of advice on the use of masks and possible scenarios where the use of non-medical-grade masks might be appropriate.

The advice will consider:

- public messaging;
- evidence of effectiveness;
- encouragement vs enforcement;
- operational readiness (purchasing, stocks, distribution);
- risks and unintended consequences (complacency toward important infection prevention and control measures);
- our Alert System framework and localised response plans;
- equity issues (high deprivation and rural);
- cost. -

This advice is being developed in consultation with the COVID All-of-Government Response Group, to inform public health decisions.

## Public messaging

A public messaging campaign will be required to support any change of advice. This will need to continue to emphasise the importance of basic hygiene, physical distancing, staying at home if you are sick, and getting tested.

There is clear information about medical-grade masks, including how to use them, on the Ministry's website.

Opportunity to introduce preparedness messaging to encourage people to source their own reusable mask. Needs to be carefully developed to minimise panic or stock piling.

## International examples

Masks have been used in countries with widespread transmission, like Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Australia. Most countries ask their residents to source their own masks.

Distribution and equity issues will be worked through in the policy advice.

## Supply chain

Medical-grade

Out of scope

Non-medical-grade

Out of scope

# Health Report

## Advice on the mandatory use of masks by the general public at Alert Level 3 and 4

<b>Date due to MO:</b>	14 August 2020	<b>Action required by:</b>	N/A
<b>Security level:</b>	IN CONFIDENCE	<b>Health Report number:</b>	20201414
<b>To:</b>	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Health		

### Contact for telephone discussion

Name	Position	Telephone
<b>Maree Roberts</b>	Deputy Director-General, System Strategy and Policy	s 9(2)(a)
<b>Caroline McElnay</b>	Director of Public Health, Population Health and Prevention	s 9(2)(a)

### Action for Private Secretaries

**Return** the signed report to the Ministry of Health.

**Date dispatched to MO:**

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# Advice on the mandatory use of masks by the general public at Alert Level 3 and 4



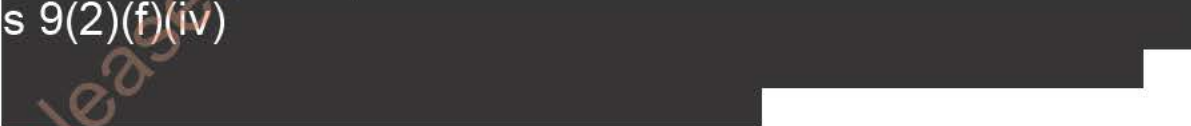
## Purpose of report

This report responds to your request for advice on the mandatory use of masks by the general public at Alert Level 3 and 4. The report seeks your direction on whether you would like further advice on how to operationalise this policy change, and outlines:

- The legal powers for requiring people to wear masks and the public health rationale for mandatory mask use at Alert Level 3 and 4.
- The Ministry's approach to appropriate mask wearing, this will ideally involve non-medical grade masks, home-made washable and reusable masks, or if none of these are available other face coverings, such as scarves and bandanas.
- Challenges with introducing an immediate requirement for mandatory mask use at Alert Level 3 and 4, including retail supply chain issues for non-medical masks.

## Summary

- In early August 2020, we provided you with updated advice on the use of masks by the general public that recommended mandatory mask use at Alert Level 3 and 4. Wearing a mask can reduce the risk of infected people spreading COVID-19. Mask wearing complements other public health measures, such as physical distancing and good hygiene, and does not replace these measures.
- We recommend introducing mandatory mask use by the general public at Alert Level 3 and 4. The recommended approach for mask wearing by the public is set out below.
  - Ideally, a reusable, washable non-medical mask (or disposable if reusable ones are not available).
  - If this is not available, a home-made washable, reusable mask. There is WHO guidance on how to make your own mask on the Ministry's website.
  - Lastly, if neither of the above options are available, we recommend using some form of face covering over the mouth and nose (e.g. scarves or bandanas).
- We do not recommend the use of medical grade masks for use by the general public, as it is important to ensure we reserve these for health workers and other people working in high-risk COVID-19 roles.
- Following evidence of community transmission in South Auckland, you agreed to implement an Order under Section 11 of the COVID-19 Public Health Response Act 2020 (the Act) which imposed Alert Level 3 restrictions in the Auckland region and Alert Level 2 restrictions across New Zealand from midday 12 August 2020 until Friday midnight 14 August 2020. Section 11 of the Act also provides the legal power to direct people to wear masks.
- At the time, the Order did not stipulate mandatory use of masks by the general public for the following reasons:
  - Cabinet had not yet provided a mandate to introduce mandatory mask wearing for the general public.

- There were supply and distribution issues that needed to be worked through. Most people purchase their masks from private retailers. The lead in time for sourcing masks overseas is at least a month, although large orders are already on their way to New Zealand.
- Equity of access implications for low-income and other vulnerable groups. The ability to use face coverings (such as scarves) as masks reduces the detrimental impact to these groups and the Ministry has provided 5 million masks to address access issues for these groups.
- There are also challenges with introducing an immediate requirement for people to wear masks in the Order. These include:
  - Issues with retail supply chains and limited ability to meet short and medium term demand.
  - Lack of socialisation in New Zealand of mask wearing. Further work is needed to encourage and socialise the use of masks.
  - Equity implications for low-income and other vulnerable groups who may have less access to non-medical grade masks.
  - Potential for confusion around mask requirements, leading to people being denied access to services.
- The demand for masks will primarily be met through retail sector provision. International supply chains are more robust than in March and disposable masks are now cheaper. The retail sector has put in large international orders for masks expected to arrive in New Zealand in multiple shipments over the next few weeks. The Ministry is unable to provide exact figures as these masks are being sourced by private retailers.
- **Out of scope**  

- **Out of scope**  

- **s 9(2)(f)(iv)**  

- We seek your direction on whether you would like further advice on how mandatory mask use could be operationalised, including:
  - an update on supply chains
  - suggested lead in times.
- If you wish to receive further advice, the Ministry will provide this advice to you in early September.



- If you would like to introduce a mask wearing requirement, we suggest signalling to the public that masks will become mandatory as soon as possible. This will provide some time to replenish retail stocks, socialise the policy change with the public, and for people to procure or make their own masks. Officials will need to do further work to socialise the public to mask wearing and provide clear public messaging on:
  - the proper use and handling of masks
  - how the public can make their own masks
  - what constitutes a mask.

## Recommendations

We recommend you:

- a) **Note** there is evidence to suggest that mask use can reduce the spread of COVID-19 and the most recent public health advice is to wear masks at Alert Level 3 and 4, with some exceptions (e.g. for children under six).
- b) **Note** the Ministry recommends mandatory mask use at Alert Level 3 and 4, and that a face covering (such as a scarf) is suitable if a person does not have access to a mask.
- c) **Note** there are supply issues with non-medical grade masks and private retailers have placed large orders with the masks expected to arrive in multiple shipments over the next couple of weeks.
- d) **Note** the Ministry does not recommend releasing further procedure masks to the retail sector as this jeopardises the supply available to the health and disability sector.
- d) **Indicate** whether you would like the Ministry to provide further advice on operationalising mandatory mask use. **Yes/No**
- e) **Note** if you wish to receive further advice, the Ministry will provide this advice to you by early September

Dr Ashley Bloomfield  
 Director-General of Health  
**Ministry of Health**

Hon Chris Hipkins  
**Minister of Health**  
 Date:

# Advice on the mandatory use of masks at Alert Level 3 and 4

## Background

1. You have requested advice on implementing the mandatory use of masks at Alert Level 3 and 4. In early August, we provided you with updated advice on the use of masks by the general public which recommended non-medical grade masks be made compulsory at Alert Level 3 and 4:
  - a. When in enclosed spaces where physical distancing is not possible
  - b. When people are outside of a work or home 'bubble'.

## Moving Alert Levels in response to recent evidence of community transmission

2. Following evidence of possible community transmission of COVID-19 in South Auckland, you agreed on 11 August 2020 to implement an Order (the Order) under Section 11 of the COVID-19 Public Health Response Act 2020 (the Act) which imposed Alert Level 3 restrictions in the Auckland region and Alert Level 2 restrictions across the rest of New Zealand from midday 12 August 2020 until Friday midnight 14 August 2020. Section 11 of the Act also provides the power to direct people to wear masks.

## Legal powers for requiring people to wear masks

3. Under Section 11 of the Act, it is possible for orders to be made requiring all persons to wear a face mask (this would need to be defined), and to specify the circumstances in which it must be worn.
4. Mandatory face mask use has New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 implications. This means decision-makers need to have regard to the proportionality of such a requirement and determine that the limitation of rights relating to wearing a face mask is justified. It is likely for human rights and practical reasons we would need to consider exemptions.
5. The Act also has enforcement provisions which make it an offence to not comply with a Section 11 order. Penalties include imprisonment for a term up to 6 months and a fine not exceeding \$4000
6. At the time, the Order did not stipulate mandatory use of masks by the general public for the following reasons:
  - a. Cabinet had not yet provided a mandate to introduce mandatory mask wearing for the general public.
  - b. There were supply and distribution issues that needed to be worked through. The majority of masks are provided by the private retail sector and there is insufficient quantity for all people in New Zealand if a mandatory mask requirement was introduced. There is also a lead in time of at least three weeks for procurement of masks from international suppliers which restricts our ability to source a suitable number of non-medical grade masks quickly.

- c. Equity of access implications for low-income and other vulnerable groups. Permission to use face coverings (such as scarves) reduces the detrimental impact to these groups as it broadens the range of options available for face coverings.

## Public health rationale for the use of masks at Alert Level 3 and 4

7. Wearing a mask can reduce the risk of infected people spreading COVID-19. Masks are particularly useful if there is known community transmission, and people are in close proximity to each other (e.g. public transport, in shops, or in other confined environments).
8. Mask wearing is not recommend for everyone. Exemptions should apply in some circumstances, for example young children under the age of six or people affected by a relevant medical condition, including problems with their breathing, a serious condition of the face, or a mental health condition.
9. Masks are an additional tool to help reinforce physical distancing behaviour, not to replace it. The best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is through physical distancing and other public health measures, such as good hand hygiene, and staying home when sick.
10. There is some evidence to suggest that promoting the appropriate use of masks by the general population can help reinforce other public health measures as well. For example, one recent Italian study found that the use of masks increased the likelihood of physical distancing in public as people were more likely to actively avoid those wearing masks, and masks serve as a reminder to those wearing them of the need to physically distance.
11. Clear guidance on the proper use of masks is needed for them to be effective. The Ministry has advice available, and can adapt further guidance for the public on how to wear and handle masks appropriately. For example, we need to promote public awareness of:
  - a. Good hygiene when handling masks (e.g. washing hands before and after handling),
  - b. How to properly fit masks, and
  - c. Appropriate disposal without causing further contamination.

## What type of masks should be worn by the general public?

12. The community are advised to wear some form of face covering. The use of medical grade masks is not recommended for the general public, as these should be reserved for health workers and others in high risk COVID-19 roles. The recommended guidance is four washable and reusable masks per person. Single use disposable face masks can also be used.
13. The Ministry's recommended approach to mask wearing in the community is set out below.
  - a. Ideally, a reusable, washable non-medical mask (or disposable if reusable ones are not available).
  - b. If this is not available, a home-made washable, reusable mask. There is WHO guidance on how to make your own mask on the Ministry's website.
  - c. Lastly, if neither of the above options are available, we recommend using some form of face covering over the mouth and nose (e.g. scarves or bandanas). This type of

covering is not as effective as non-medical grade masks at preventing the spread of infection but provides some protection for the wearer and are better than no mask at all.

14. This is why it is important to provide public messaging in a variety of formats and languages that lets the public know that if they don't have access to a non-medical mask:
  - a. they can make their own masks (using cloth or other materials) and should follow best practice as established by WHO guidance
  - b. a face covering worn over the nose and mouth is sufficient if a person does not have access to a medical grade mask (e.g. a scarf or bandana).
15. We will ensure our public messaging and communications are clear and people are given the information they need to make their own masks, and that we make clear face coverings may be worn in lieu of masks as a last resort (e.g. scarves). Public messaging also needs to emphasise that mask use is not a substitute for physical distancing or other public health measures, rather it sits alongside and complements them.

## Challenges with implementing an immediate requirement to wear masks at Alert Level 3 and 4

### Issues with retail supply chains and limited ability to meet short and medium-term demand for masks

16. The demand for masks is primarily met through retail sector provision and there is insufficient quantity for all people in New Zealand if a mandatory mask requirement was introduced. International supply chains are more robust than in March and disposable masks are now cheaper. The retail sector has put in large orders for international shipments expected to arrive in multiple shipments over the new few weeks. The Ministry is unable to provide exact numbers as these are being sourced by private retailers.

17. Out of scope

18. Out of scope

### New Zealanders are not socialised to wearing masks in public

19. New Zealand does not have a mask wearing culture. However, given the recent cases of community transmission there is likely to be greater demand and uptake of mask wearing, particularly in the Auckland region.
20. Officials will need to do further work to promote and socialise the use of masks among the general public. Any public communications relating to mandatory mask use should clearly set out the public health rationale behind this requirement.

## There are equity implications with introducing immediate requirements for mask use at Alert Level 3 and 4

21. We expect a number of groups will suffer inequitable access to non-medical grade masks which provide greater protection than face coverings. These include:
  - a. Socially isolated or hard-to-reach communities and groups
  - b. People who may not easily understand the encouragement or requirement to wear a mask
  - c. Low-income groups
  - d. People at risk of severe illness should they contract COVID-19.
22. It is difficult to estimate the number of people that fall into these groups although proxy measures can be used, such as those who hold a Community Services Card, SuperGold Card, school teachers and school children. A rough estimate of the number who fall into these groups is 1.2 to 1.8 million people across New Zealand. The Government may wish to procure and provide masks to some of these vulnerable groups. The All of Government group are currently exploring supply and distribution options.

23. **Out of scope**

## People without access to a mask may face barriers to accessing services

24. We also envisage that situations will arise where people will not wear masks, when trying to access goods and services, thus resulting in a barrier. A barrier to access to services may include, but is not limited to, boarding a bus, entering a supermarket, or accessing medical care. The reasons for persons not to wear a mask/face covering may vary, and could include that the person:
  - a. is exempt from wearing a mask (due to exception qualification);
  - b. has barriers to obtaining a mask (fiscal or other practical constraints);
  - c. has barriers to understanding what the requirements are (language or cognitive); or
  - d. is non-compliant because they object to the mask policy.

## Next steps

25. We recommend introducing mandatory mask use for the general public under Alert Level 3 and 4. We seek your direction on whether you would like further advice on how mandatory mask wearing could be operationalised, including an update on:
  - a. Supply chains
  - b. Suggested lead in times.
26. If you would like to receive further advice on how this requirement could be operationalised, we will provide this in early September. If you would like to introduce a mandatory mask requirement, we suggest signalling the expectation that masks will be made mandatory as soon as possible. This will provide some time to replenish retail stocks, socialise the policy change with the public, and for people to procure or make their

own masks. We will also need to carefully communicate the requirement to the public, including providing guidance on:

- a. what is considered an acceptable mask (e.g. non-medical grade masks, face coverings such as scarves)
- b. how to make and source your own masks (including instructional material on the Ministry's website).

27. s 9(2)(f)(iv)

The demand for masks will primarily be met through retail sector provision. The retail sector has put in large orders for international shipments expected to arrive in multiple shipments over the new few weeks. The Ministry does not recommend releasing further masks to retailers if there is a gap in the supply as this jeopardises the supply to the health and disability sector.

28. Out of scope

ENDS.

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