



# COVID-19

## Alert Level 4 guidance for disability support services

26 AUGUST 2021

For the most up to date rules on Alert Level 4, please see [Alert Level 3 | Unite against COVID-19 \(covid19.govt.nz\)](https://www.covid19.govt.nz/alert-level-3-unite-against-covid-19)

### What are essential and 'safe' services under Alert Level 4?

Under Alert Level 4, services that can be delivered 'safely' can continue. These are services that can be provided while maintaining:

- the physical distancing of two metres (outdoors) and one metre (indoors) between people
- good hygiene and infection control standards

It is still mandatory to wear a face-covering when you are outside your home and in a place where it is hard to keep your distance from other people unless you have an exemption.

Services that require close physical contact, which is not essential for a person to keep living safely in their home and out of the hospital, will not physically open at Alert Level 4. They may, however, be able to provide remote service via telephone, video chat, email and the web; this will be agreed upon with the people who are receiving the service.

### What happens if someone tests positive?

In the first instance, providers should follow usual isolation procedures for the positive person and close contacts. Further information is provided in the link here: [COVID-19 Outbreak Response Toolkit for Aged Residential Care: Outbreak](#)

The Ministry of Health has provided some funding to the DHBs to support higher needs COVID-19 cases and their contacts to isolate/quarantine in the community if required successfully. The funding can be used for health services, cultural support, mobilising resources to support access to general welfare needs, and security if necessary to ensure compliance. DHBs will continue to cover all health-related costs.

Community Supported Isolation and Quarantine services is for people in the community who have been identified by, or referred to, a Medical Officer of Health as posing a public health risk because they either have COVID-19 or have been exposed to COVID-19. They have been assessed as needing enhanced management

and support to isolate/quarantine in the community successfully; this includes considering the impact on other residents.

The services do not cover existing support arrangements that you may have in place for the people you support. Continued service delivery of supports will be required unless there are barriers to providing this. It may be sensible to identify support staff in advance who would be willing to provide supports in alternative accommodation. These staff may require additional training and support to continue supporting clients once they have been identified in this group. The other supports assure that services can manage public health risks for those required to isolate/quarantine in the community. Questions about the service can be directed to the local Public Health Unit (PHU).

In some cases, alternative accommodation options should be considered, mainly if providers cannot maintain people's safety. Alternatively, the other residents could be removed to a vacant property while they await their test results. The expectation is that these are self-contained dwellings/units intended for domestic use by one or more people (a bubble) to complete isolation/quarantine with support and management safely. The Medical Officer of Health will consider the specific needs of individual situations when determining the best location for isolation/quarantine. In the first instance, in situ accommodation will be considered.

- [View Table 1: Community Supported Isolation and Quarantine Process](#)

Enquiries about Community SIQ can be directed to DHBs or by emailing the Ministry at: [covid-19CommunitySIQ@health.govt.nz](mailto:covid-19CommunitySIQ@health.govt.nz).

## Specific guidance by service type for Alert Level 4

The following information is detailed Alert Level 4 guidance for:

1. Respite (Facility Based and In-home)
2. Day services
3. Supported Living, Home and Community Support Services and Choice in Community Living
4. People who employ their support workers through Personal Budgets
5. NASC services
6. Other services

### 1. Respite

#### Facility-based Respite

Facility-based respite services will be closed at Alert Level 4. People are encouraged to consider alternative ways to access respite (through virtual supports or accessing alternative supports through flexible funding options). Providers can provide emergency respite can be delivered via triaging situations with families, supported by NASCs.

- one person or family group at a time only
- a staff team to work across a maximum of two people or family groups
- the whānau should provide transport to and from the respite
- providers should ensure thorough hygiene practices during and between stays to eliminate the risk of transmission.

## In-home Respite

In-home respite services will be closed at Alert Level 4. People are encouraged to consider alternative ways to access respite (through virtual supports or accessing alternative supports through flexible funding options, However, essential in-home respite which may be provided by providers or the family and whānau upon identification of urgency of need, and in agreement with family and NASC

- one person or family group per community support worker per day only
- up to three people across a week.

## Carer Support

Please note that the flexibility applies to those funded by the Ministry of Health for disability support services only (i.e. not funded through DHBs).

You can continue to use Carer Support more flexibly so that:

- you can pay family members who you live with to provide you with a break
- relief care can be used when you are doing your other paid work (even if you are working from home)
- You can continue to use your Carer Support funding to buy things that will provide you with respite, as long as you stay within your total budget. Examples are art and craft supplies, books or DVDs.

As it is up to you to choose what support or service to buy, it is your job to make sure the respite is good quality, covers all your requirements and meets the Purchasing Guidelines. You can find them here: [What People Can Buy with Disability Funding: Ministry of Health Purchasing Guidelines | Ministry of Health NZ](#)

You cannot use your Carer Support for the following:

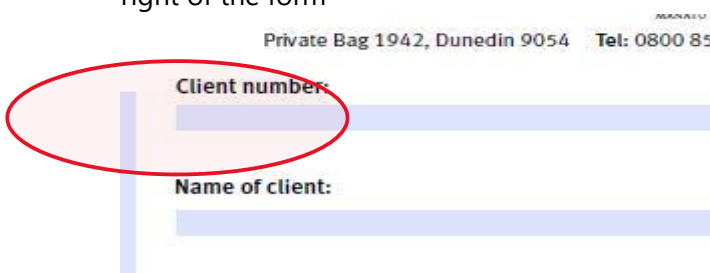
- illegal activities, gambling or alcohol
- Pay for things that are not disability supports rent/mortgage, food, personal debt, gifts, power, regular household items etc.

If you have not received any relief care, you do not need a signature from a relief carer on your Carer Support forms. Payments will continue to be made in half days or days as usual.

Over COVID-19 Alert Levels 4 and 3, you can send Carer Support forms to the Ministry of Health via email. You can email [csclaims@health.govt.nz](mailto:csclaims@health.govt.nz)

There are some requirements to help the team to get the high volumes of claims processed in the usual timeframes. The requirements are:

- only one email per claim
- client number must be in the subject line of the email. You can find the client number on the top right of the form



Private Bag 1942, Dunedin 9054 Tel: 0800 85

Client number: [redacted]

Name of client: [redacted]

- the claim should be scanned first and then the supporting documentation (receipts etc.) after it
- the claim (including supporting documentation) must be saved as a pdf.

Have a look at the document before you send it to ensure it is straightforward and easy to read. The Contact Centre is experiencing high call volumes. If you do have a query, please call the Contact Centre on [0800 855 066](tel:0800855066).

## Other ways of getting a break during Alert Level 4

Some options to access Respite during Alert Level 4 are:

- consider asking someone within your bubble to help you have a break
- consider extending your bubble to someone who can help you have a break
- consider using your Carer Support more flexibly
- Specialist Behaviour Support is available over the phone. You can call 0800 000 421 to receive advice from Explore Behaviour Specialists on wellbeing and behaviour support. You can call from 9 am – 5 pm Monday to Friday
- Carers NZ also has some information about respite - <http://carers.net.nz/respite>.

If you are concerned about your wellbeing or the wellbeing of your family or whānau and or feel desperate for support, you should talk to your NASC immediately. Emergency respite within a disability support service may be available. You should make your concerns clear when you speak to your NASC.

## 2. Day services

These services will remain closed at Alert Level 4. Services should provide support in alternative ways.

## 3. Supported Living providers, Home and Community Support Services and Choice in Community Living providers

All community services that provide personal care to people (e.g. supporting people with personal daily routines etc.) can continue with the use of PPE.

For providers of essential personal care services, it is recommended that staff movement between homes be minimised. However, we recognise that to maintain continuity of care; this may not be possible. For example, staff are working across several homes where people require essential support or substitute staff when others are not available.

Service visits, where possible, should be limited to those that can be undertaken safely (that maintain physical distancing, good hygiene and infection control practices, and support contact tracing).

Household management is allowed where the disabled person's wellbeing is at risk without it; this can be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Where Supported Living Services are primarily focused on facilitating social connections, at Alert Level 4, providers are expected to continue to use alternative forms of communication to connect with people they support.

Those services that can work from home, without face-to face-visits, should continue to do so unless deemed essential.

## 4. For people who employ their support workers through Personal Budgets (e.g. Individualised Funding, EGL)

You can continue to use your funding to buy things that will provide you with a break as long as you stay within your total budget. Examples are art and craft supplies, books or DVDs.

You can also find out more about what you can buy at: [What People Can Buy with Disability Funding: Ministry of Health Purchasing Guidelines | Ministry of Health NZ](#)

Talk to your IF Host or Coach, your Connector or Kaitūhono about what is reasonable for you to buy.

If you have a restriction placed on you by the Ministry for Individualised Funding, the flexibility may not apply to you. Please contact your IF Host or Coach, your Connector or Kaitūhono.

### If your support worker can't come to work

In Alert Level 4, your support workers must not come to work if they or someone they live with:

- are sick with COVID-19 and must self-isolate until a doctor tells them they can leave the isolation
- are identified as someone who has been with close contact, i.e. someone who has COVID-19 and have been told to self-isolate for a period by a health official through the National Contact Tracing process
- are the parent or caregiver of a dependant who has been said to self-isolate for a period by a doctor or health official through the National Contact Tracing process, and the dependant needs support to do so safely
- have been directed to self-isolate, or are the parent or caregiver of a dependant who has been required to self-isolate by a Medical Officer of Health following the Health Act 1956
- are considered 'higher risk' if they contract COVID-19 and a doctor has told them to self-isolate while there's active community transmission
- have household members who are considered 'higher risk' if they acquire COVID-19. A medical practitioner has told them to self-isolate to reduce the virus's risk to vulnerable household members.

If any of these apply, you should discuss and agree with your support worker and their employer, if they have one, that they must not come to your home to work.

In Alert Level 4, you can apply to the Ministry of Social Development for funding for support workers who cannot work for the reasons above. This funding is called COVID-19 Leave Support. You can apply for this funding here: [COVID-19 Leave Support Scheme - Work and Income](#)

### Paying resident family members as carers

While contracts with support workers need to be honoured, during Alert Level 4, you can employ family and whānau members who live with you to support you if your usual support worker cannot come to work because of COVID. If you decide to do this, you should:

- make sure you pay them the same amount as you would any other care or support worker. Speak to your Host, Coach, Connector or Kaitūhono about pay equity rates or see: [Pay equity settlement - information for employees | Ministry of Health NZ](#)

### Keeping you and your support workers safe

To keep your bubble safe, you may want to reduce the number of support workers who provide support to you during Alert Level 4. If this is the case, you will need to get your support workers' agreement. You must comply with the employment agreements you have in place. If you engage with a self-employed contractor,

please refer to your contract regarding notice times. Self-employed contractors can access the Wage Subsidy; this is their responsibility. [COVID-19 Wage Subsidy August 2021 - Work and Income](#).

Keep a record of this leave that you have paid, as you may be able to apply for COVID-19 Leave Support. You are not obliged to continue to pay self-employed contractors but again, this would be a discussion you would have with them. If you ask a support worker not to come to your home during Alert level 4, you will still have to pay the support worker for the time they are not required. Talk to your Host, Coach, Connector or Kaitūhono if you are unsure about this.

If your support worker also supports other people, they should take precautions to work safely with you. Safe working means keeping two metres (while outdoors) or one metre (indoors) away from you. Washing and drying their hands thoroughly, coughing or sneezing into a tissue or their elbow will also allow you to work safely. Wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) like gloves and a mask will also allow you to work safely if someone can't maintain a safe physical distance from you. People should also not visit you if they, or you, are unwell or either of you has been in contact with someone who is sick or has COVID-19 symptoms.

For guidance about using PPE, see [Personal protective equipment used in health and disability care settings | Ministry of Health NZ](#). If you do not have PPE but think you and your support worker need to use it, talk to your IF Host or Coach, Connector or Kaitūhono. They can help get PPE for you.

## 5. NASC services

NASCs should provide their services in alternative ways (e.g. virtually, remotely). Essential visits are allowed under Alert Level 4 if this can be done safely, ensuring physical distancing, good hygiene and infection control practices, and the ability to support contact tracing.

## 6. Other services

### Equipment and Modification Services

Equipment and modification services are essential. Under Alert Level 4, the necessary equipment can be provided that can be delivered to a person's home and safely set up by the people in that home.

Providing more complex equipment will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Urgent housing modifications by a provider which can be done safely can go ahead.

Providers will consider vehicle modification requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

### Behaviour support services

Specialist Behaviour Support is available over the phone. Whānau and support workers can call 0800 000 421 to receive wellbeing and behaviour support advice and support from Explore Behaviour Specialists. You can call from 9 am – 5 pm Monday to Friday. You can find out more and access some resources here: [Explore Specialist Advice - HealthCare NZ](#)

### Audiology services

Clinicians can provide face to face assessments only for urgent care. Urgent care for community allied health professionals is defined as:

- a condition that is life or limb-threatening,
- treatment required to maintain the necessities of life, or

- treatment that cannot be delayed or carried out remotely without the risk of significant harm or permanent and or significant disability,

AND

- that cannot be delivered by a service that is currently operating or by health professionals already in contact with the person.

Appropriate PPE and workplace practices need to be in place. Virtual appointments should be provided where possible.

### Other disability services (including Disability Information Advisory Services, Child Development Services etc.).

Providers should deliver non-essential support (e.g. virtually, remotely). Essential visits are allowed under Alert Level 4 if this can be done safely, ensuring physical distancing, good hygiene and infection control practices, and the ability to support contact tracing.

Disability services cannot offer services that involve close personal contact unless it is an emergency or critical situation.

## Further information

We will continue to share information as it becomes available. In the meantime, stay calm, care for yourselves and others, and keep doing the healthy core activities, including checking the leading websites:

- [Unite against COVID-19 \(covid19.govt.nz\)](https://www.covid19.govt.nz/)
- [Ministry of Health NZ](https://www.health.govt.nz/)

For COVID-19 health advice and information, contact the Healthline team (free) on 0800 358 5453.

The Disability Directorate will provide additional information and advice for the disability sector as needed. For queries about disability support services, contact your local NASC or email [Disability@health.govt.nz](mailto:Disability@health.govt.nz)

### Respite

All **planned respite** is cancelled under Alert Level 4. If you are concerned about resulting vulnerability, please contact the NASC services.

**Emergency Respite** is available, after discussion with ARC and the district health board's (DHB) Planning and Funding/Health of Older Persons team, with permission of the facility. The Screening form must be completed to assess whether it is safe for a resident to be admitted for urgent respite care. New emergency respite must be managed under requirements as those residents entering long-term ARC. This should be considered when emergency respite is considered. An exit plan for the return to the community should be discussed with the facility, NASC services and the family.

### Admission into a secure unit (dementia or psychogeriatric care)

**If the person is not under investigation for COVID-19**, ARC facilities should accept an admission into a secure unit. The unit is then considered to be the person's 'household bubble'. Staff should practice safe distancing, mask wearing and hand washing protocols, and use PPE appropriately as per the advice on our website for health and disability workers about when to use PPE to help stay safe: [www.health.govt.nz/ppe-health](https://www.health.govt.nz/ppe-health).

**If the person is under investigation for COVID-19**, the NASC services will liaise with community services to continue to support the person at home while waiting for test results and/or completing self-isolation as required. They **will not** be transferred to an ARC facility while waiting for test results. Once a negative test result has been confirmed, the person should still complete self-isolation requirement as required before admission to the facility.

## Transfers to hospital from ARC

### Non-COVID-19 related transfer

Residential facilities should continue to seek medical advice through their contracted GP/NP.

The GP and/or ARC facility (when GP is unavailable) will access specialist advice (geriatrician/general medicine) by telephone prior to any transfer to hospital. DHBs will make this advice available to ARC. This advice will seek to support people in their facility for as long as possible and will approve any transfer to hospital in advance. The advance care plan of the resident will be considered.

If a major medical event or injury has occurred, and the GP/NP has been consulted, an ambulance will be called as normal.

### Ambulance transfers

Any transfer of residents (with prior geriatrician/specialist approval) to hospital will be managed by ambulance transfer.

## Discharge from ARC to family bubble

Any request to transfer a resident from the ARC bubble to the family household bubble during Alert Level 4 should be determined on an exceptional basis. The family and resident will need to understand that the transfer is one way, and there will be no opportunity to return to ARC until Alert Level 4 has ended and there is agreement from the facility manager.

The person's family need to be prepared to support the person. The family must take the same precautions as if anyone new enters the bubble.

## Emergency Department (ED) visits/Essential outpatient appointments

Essential medical appointments at outpatients should proceed only if they are non-deferable and cannot be done using telemedicine, (discuss with appropriate department) and residents should be accepted back by the facility afterwards.

The Screening form, a COVID-19 test or self-isolation are **not** required for residents returning to their ARC facilities following a hospital ED visit, outpatient or other health appointment that is less than 24 hours in duration.