

12/6/2020

Chief Nursing Officer letter to Nurses across Aotearoa

Tēnā koutou katoa,

What a journey the past few months have been! With New Zealand having moved to Alert Level 1 at midnight last Monday, I imagine a lot of you, like me, have been busy working on what your 'new normal' will be, both at work and at home.

It is incredible to think what our team of 5million has achieved over the past 12+ weeks and moving to Alert Level 1 is testament to the collective effort of many and the ability as a nation to unite against COVID-19.

The risk of exposure to COVID-19 and transmission in the community in New Zealand is now very low and the majority of COVID-19 related restrictions have been removed. However, it's still important to keep in mind that COVID-19 is uncontrolled in many areas overseas, so strict border measures will remain.

We cannot and should not fall into complacency mode but use this time to reflect on what has been achieved, take forward the great learnings, review what could be improved on and be prepared in the event we need to stand up the required systems and processes.

Updated PPE and IPC advice

With the move to Alert Level 1, the Ministry has been working hard to review the PPE and IPC guidelines. Many of the website documents and pages have been updated over the past couple of weeks, these include:

- [Alert Level 1: health and disability sector risk assessment for interactions with people of unknown covid-19 status to determine appropriate initial infection prevention and control \(IPC\) approach](#)
- [Alert Level 1: Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) required when caring for a covid-19 case in health and disability care settings including care provided in place of residence](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions about PPE and COVID-19](#)

Keep an eye on the [MoH PPE in health and disability care settings](#) page to ensure the most up to date information is being used.

This advice will continue to be updated as needed based on feedback and the evolving COVID-19 context in New Zealand.

PPE – Masks

We welcomed the latest guidance from the World Health Organization on the use of masks for control of COVID-19. The WHO's updated advice, based on their evaluation of the available evidence, is consistent with the Ministry's current advice and is a useful addition to existing advice.

The WHO emphasises that masks should be part of a comprehensive strategy and that much of their updated guidance relates to countries with a high degree of community transmission. Fortunately, in New Zealand we are increasingly confident we have no community transmission which supports our ongoing move down through our Alert levels.

Masks will continue to be part of New Zealand's approach to managing COVID-19. The Ministry will continue to monitor closely for any new cases in New Zealand and review the control measures needed to prevent and manage any spread of COVID-19 – including the possible use of masks by the public.

Essential health and disability workers

While the border is closed, there is an exemptions process in place for essential health and disability workers. The list of essential health and disability workers was recently updated. The criteria set reflect current immigration settings and balance the need to protect New Zealanders with ensuring we have the rights skills in New Zealand during this time.

The [list of essential health and disability workers](#) and information about the process for [applying for an exemption](#) is on Immigration NZ's website.

Independent Review of COVID-19 Clusters in Aged Residential Care Facilities

The Ministry of Health has published the [Independent Review of COVID-19 Clusters in Aged Residential Care Facilities report](#). The report was commissioned by the Director-General of Health in April to learn from clusters of COVID-19 in Aged Care facilities so New Zealand would be better placed to manage any further occurrences.

The report includes a number of recommendations for improvements which the Ministry will be seeking sector feedback on. Following this feedback, the approach, priorities and agreed actions can be confirmed. Both the independent reviewers and the Ministry have acknowledged the work of staff and others involved in aged residential care to protect a vulnerable group of the New Zealand population, and in preventing and managing the cluster outbreaks.

The Ministry also recognises the willingness of the sector to participate in the review and to put in place measures to limit further clusters or infections. The review examines in detail five clusters, as well as looking at a similar number of facilities which were largely unaffected.

The panel report has confirmed that the infections were introduced to the facilities by staff or visitors. ESR data shows that three facilities experienced staff cases first. The key focus of both the reviewers and the Ministry is to improve systems to prevent similar occurrences. Addressing faults in our systems reinforces the quality improvement focus used throughout health and disability services. No blame is being attributed to any staff involved.

The Ministry will be seeking feedback from aged care representatives, DHBs and PHUs on feedback on the Review recommendations over the next three weeks to inform a response and an agreed action plan for improvement.

Contact Tracing

Even at Alert Level 1, it remains important to keep a record of where we have been. We'll be interacting with more people so having a thorough record of where we've been and who we've seen will assist with rapid contact tracing if required.

We have released an update to the NZ COVID Tracer mobile app that provides new features and makes it more useful for contact tracing:

- You can now choose to receive a contact alert if you've checked into the same location at the same time as someone who has subsequently developed COVID-19.
- You can now use the app to send your digital diary to contact tracers if you are found to have COVID-19.
- To improve accessibility for blind New Zealanders and those with low vision, on supported devices the app will now vibrate your phone whenever you scan a QR code.

We're continuing to develop new features for future updates. We know Kiwis want to use the app to record their visits to friends and whānau, and we're also looking to support older phones and offer the app in languages other than English in a future update.

Other Office of the Chief Nurse updates

Thank you to everyone who contributed to our postcard testimonials. Almost all of them are now live on our website [here](#).

Our webinar to mark the launch of the State of the World's Nursing report can be found on the College of Nurses Aotearoa New Zealand's website [here](#).

This will be my last weekly letter to you all, from this point we will revert back to our standard Office of the Chief Nursing Officer quarterly sector updates. My updates from the past few months, along with our quarterly updates, can be found on our website [here](#).

Thank you all for reading, sharing and staying connected in what has been a very uncertain and stressful time for many. And thank you, once again, for everything you have done and continue to do to keep our health care workers, patients, whanau and communities safe.

Nāku noa,

Margareth Broodkoorn
Chief Nursing Officer
Ministry of Health