

COVID-19 Guidance for Community Allied Health, Scientific and Technical Providers in Alert Level 3

30 AUGUST 2021

This guidance covers community allied health, scientific and technical services. It does not cover Laboratories, Radiology, or Pharmacy services and it is acknowledged that DHB Allied Health community services will be operating under their own readiness and response plans.

This document provides high level guidance and cannot cover all questions that may arise. Please refer to available information on the health.govt.nz/covid-19 pages and raise any remaining concerns with your DHB or Ministry of Health relationship manager.

At all Alert Levels, equity should remain central to care with a focus on Māori, Pacific, people with disabilities and vulnerable populations.

This document should be read in conjunction with information available at health.govt.nz/covid-19 and covid19.govt.nz.

Community Allied Health, Scientific and Technical Services

- Community allied health, scientific and technical services are an important service during all Alert Levels. However, there are challenges for the allied health workforce operating and delivering services during an active pandemic.
- This document provides guidance for community allied health, scientific and technical (AHST) services operating and delivering services in Alert Level 3.
- This guidance intends to help the AHST workforce to navigate the tension and competing priorities of delivering effective treatment to prevent deterioration or sustain the progress of healing in other health conditions, while protecting the public from COVID-19.
- However, the delivery of services must not come at the expense of providing public protection that underpins the Alert Level framework.

Allied Health Delivering and Operating in an Active Pandemic

- Working with the sector and clinical leadership, the Ministry of Health has updated the 'Urgent Care' criteria for AHST services delivered in Alert Level 3.
- The criteria have been expanded for use in the delivery of effective treatment, preventing deterioration or sustaining the progress of healing in other health conditions, while protecting the public from COVID-19.

- The following statements **in bold** have been added to the scope of 'Urgent Care' services for Alert Level 3:
 - a. a condition which is life or limb threatening; or
 - b. treatment required to maintain the basic necessities of life; or
 - c. treatment that cannot be delayed or carried out remotely without risk of significant harm or permanent and/or significant disability, or
 - d. **where failure to access services will lead to an acute deterioration of a known condition; or**
 - e. **where delay in access to services will impact the consumer's ability to maintain functional independence and significantly negatively impact quality of life**AND
 - f. which cannot be delivered by a service which is currently operating or by clinicians that are already in contact with the patient for ongoing care.

Clinical Reasoning

- At all times during Alert Level 3 the provider needs to ensure their clinical reasoning for choosing an 'in person' contact is within the scope of 'Urgent Care' criteria and can be justified in line with protecting the consumer.
- The workforce is therefore asked to:
 - a. Consider and weigh up the risk of contact to the consumer versus the risk of not seeing them, and the impact of deterioration on the consumer.
 - Refer to the **Risk Assessment Guidelines** for PPE on the Ministry of Health website. This will guide you on the level of PPE required.
 - b. Consider the appropriate use of digital technologies to facilitate delivery of services.
 - c. Prepare an alternate plan for treatment and be equipped to respond to changed circumstances.

Personal Protective Equipment and Transmission Precautions

- At all Alert Levels PPE should be used according to the Ministry of Health **guidance**.
- The Ministry has updated its advice on the use of face masks in the community as part of New Zealand's ongoing response to COVID-19: <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>

- Standard and Transmission based precautions should be used for all patient/client care activities regardless of their diagnosis or suspected infectious status. Please refer to the Ministry's website on **PPE, cleaning and hand hygiene**.
- For Alert Levels 2, 3 and 4: Workforce Risk Assessment and Guidance tools should be used to identify staff vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19, to assess and mitigate their risks, including through workplace restrictions and modifications.
- Useful guidance and assessment tools being used by DHBs can be found here:
<https://tas.health.nz/employment-and-capability-building/employment-relations/dhb-covid-19-workforce-faqs-and-resources/>

COVID-19 information and resources for health professionals

- The National Telehealth Service advice lines are available at all Alert Levels. This includes Healthline (0800 611 116) and the dedicated COVID-19 health advice line (0800 358 5453) – both available 24/7. The COVID-19 clinical advice line for community health professionals is available Monday to Saturday 8am to 7pm.
- Health workers can use the Āwhina app to stay up to date on the latest COVID-19 information and receive notifications when information is updated. More information can be found here:
<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid19-resources-health-professionals/covid-19-awhina-app>

Mental health and wellbeing resources

- Information and tools to support health and disability workers' mental wellbeing during the COVID-19 response are available at: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novelcoronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-general-public/covid-19-mental-health-and-wellbeing-resources>
- Frontline healthcare workers can access free confidential psychological health and wellbeing support by calling 0800 820 080. The service is open Monday to Friday 9am to 7pm and will be provided by Health Practitioner Competency Assurance registered health professionals who are skilled and experienced in delivering short psychological interventions targeting acute stress and adjustment reactions.