Information for community-based midwives

1 April 2020

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on preventing the spread of COVID-19 in home and community settings and protecting both pregnant and postnatal people and their community-based midwives.

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

How is COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19, like the flu, can be spread from person to person. When a person who has COVID-19 coughs, sneezes or talks, they may spread droplets containing the virus a short distance which quickly settle on surrounding surfaces.

You may get infected by the virus if you touch those surfaces or objects and then touch your mouth, nose or eyes. That’s why it’s really important to use good hygiene, regularly wash and thoroughly dry your hands and practise good sneeze/cough etiquette.

Who is more at risk of COVID-19?

- People who have conditions that compromise their immune systems or have compromised immune systems as a side effect of taking certain medications, such as chemotherapy.
- People who have chronic medical conditions such as liver disease, heart disease, kidney disease diabetes mellitus, lung disease or other long-term conditions.
- People with a disability and co-existing long-term conditions.
- People who have medical devices that enter the body (eg, a catheter, tracheostomy, ileostomy, feeding tube).
- People with surgical or large open wounds.
- Frail older people.

Additional information for community-based midwives at New Zealand COVID-19 Alert Level 3 & 4

At Alert Level 3 and 4, primary care consultations (including primary maternity care consultations) occur remotely where possible.

Face-to-face midwifery care for well people less than 37 weeks pregnant should be reduced unless clinically necessary (assessed on a case-by-case basis). Phone or video consultations should proceed, replacing face-to-face care, according to your regular schedule.

Face-to-face midwifery care for well people more than 37 weeks pregnant should be provided as per Table 1. All patients should now be treated as though they are in isolation.
Community-based midwifery care during the period of COVID-19 pandemic

Community-based midwifery care for pregnant, labouring and postnatal people and their babies should continue. However, where possible midwives should do telephone or video consultations instead of face-to-face. If a face-to-face visit is required, minimise time spent undertaking physical assessments. Pregnant and postnatal people appear no more susceptible to the consequences of COVID-19 infection than the general population.

Basic hygiene measures are the most important way to stop the spread of infections, including COVID-19. We advise the following.

- Avoid close contact with people suffering from any acute respiratory infection.
- Frequent and rigorous hand-washing and drying (or hand sanitiser), especially after direct contact with ill people or their environment.
- Keep hands away from your face (eyes, nose and mouth).
- Everyone should practice cough and sneeze etiquette (maintain distance, cover coughs and sneezes with elbow, disposable tissues or clothing and wash and dry hands).

Providing midwifery care to those in self-isolation after potential exposure to COVID-19

Extra precautions are needed to ensure midwives and the people receiving face-to-face consultations are safe, particularly those who are more vulnerable to infection and severe illness.

Refer to Table 1: Advice for community-based midwives caring for people who are in self-isolation due to recent travel or contact with someone with confirmed, probable or suspected COVID-19. This provides specific advice for care before and after 37w0d, during labour and birth and postnatally.

In general, we recommend the following.

- Reschedule any non-urgent appointments until after the isolation period is lifted, if possible.
- Conduct non-physical assessments and pregnancy or parenting education over the phone or via video call.
- Phone ahead to screen for any symptoms of respiratory illness. Avoid visiting and recommend contacting Healthline if symptoms of respiratory illness are present.
- Provide the patient with a surgical face mask to wear while you are face-to-face.
- Ask others in the home who are in isolation to leave the room if this is a home visit. Ask the person to attend clinic alone if this is a midwifery clinic appointment.
- Minimise time spent undertaking the physical assessments.
- Do not visit the pregnant or postnatal person if you are feeling unwell.

Providing midwifery care to those who have COVID-19

Refer to Table 2: Advice for community-based midwives caring for people who have suspected, probable or confirmed COVID-19. This provides specific advice for care before and after 37w0d, during labour and birth and postnatally.
Note:

- PPE includes: gloves, surgical face masks, disposable fluid resistant aprons and eye protection.
- Practice safe removal and disposal of PPE by putting it in a bag in the bin immediately.
- Midwives who require PPE supplies for this situation can contact their local district health board.

Going to work

Community-based midwives must not go to work if they have:

- experienced cold or flu symptoms. Workers should be symptom free for 48 hours before returning to work
- returned from an overseas visit to any country in the last 14 days
- been in close contact with someone confirmed with COVID-19 in the last 14 days.

If you have provided care to a COVID-19 confirmed person, or a person who is symptomatic and is awaiting test results, but have followed all the recommended protective measures, you should continue to work normally.

If you develop symptoms within 14 days of being overseas or within 14 days of close contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19, you should phone Healthline on 0800 358 5453 or your doctor.

Self-isolation means staying away from situations where you could infect other people, including going to work. Find out more about self-isolation at health.govt.nz/covid-19-self-isolation

About COVID-19

COVID-19 presents with mild respiratory symptoms, including a cough and fever, but in some people, it can be more severe and can lead to pneumonia or breathing difficulties. More severe infections mainly occur in those with chronic health conditions or other co-morbidities. More information can be found on the Ministry of Health website health.govt.nz/covid-19 or covid19.govt.nz

More information

For the latest advice, information and resources, go to health.govt.nz/covid-19 or covid19.govt.nz

If you are symptomatic or are at risk of exposure call Healthline on 0800 358 5453. It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

If you have concerns about your health, speak to a doctor.