

# COVID-19: Information for hospice staff in home and community settings

27 August 2020

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance for hospice staff on preventing the spread of COVID-19 in home and community settings to protect both staff and patients. District health boards (DHBs) are expected to work closely with palliative care services to ensure there are adequate supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) to meet requirements.

This information sheet should be read in conjunction with information available at [health.govt.nz/covid-19](https://health.govt.nz/covid-19) and [covid19.govt.nz](https://covid19.govt.nz).

## Managing staff with COVID-19 symptoms, confirmed (or probable) COVID-19 infection (including close contacts)

Extra precautions are needed to ensure people who receive palliative care are safe.

- It is critical that staff who are unwell, even with mild respiratory symptoms or a fever do not come to work.
- All staff with confirmed (or probable) COVID-19 infection are required to isolate in a managed quarantine/isolation facility or other suitable accommodation as determined by the public health unit.
- Staff who meet the clinical criteria for COVID-19 should phone Healthline or their GP/nurse practitioner, specify where they work, and arrange to get tested. If the test is negative, then unless advised otherwise by their GP/ nurse practitioner, provided they are well, they can return to work.
- Staff who are close contacts of confirmed (or probable) cases should not be at work. They should self-isolate at home for 14 days since last exposure with the case and will be followed up with daily symptom checks by Healthline or public health.
- For information on how to identify and investigate any cases of novel coronavirus (COVID-19), as well as how to apply appropriate contact tracing and infection control measures to prevent its spread, refer to the Advice for Health Professionals: [health.govt.nz/covid19-hp-advice#advice](https://health.govt.nz/covid19-hp-advice#advice)

## Supporting people with COVID-19 symptoms, confirmed (or probable) COVID-19 in the community (including close contacts) – Level 1 and 2

Under alert level 1 and 2, home and community palliative care can be provided in person. All home visits will require a pre-visit screening phone call to assess COVID-19 risk. See the document Alert Level 1: Risk assessment questions if COVID-19 status is unknown at [health.govt.nz/ppe-health#guidelines](https://health.govt.nz/ppe-health#guidelines) for further information.

The pre-visit screening should also consider who will be in the home during the visit.

If an increased risk was identified in the pre-visit screening phone call, the following steps must be introduced:

- where required, rapidly re-assess, using phones or digital platforms, clients who haven't been assessed recently to ensure risk levels are current
- providers check/monitor clients through digital/phone platforms where clinically appropriate
- inpatient facilities, where capable, to deliver community care where clinically appropriate
- Infection prevention controls (IPC) and personal protective equipment (PPE) must be used where clients are at higher risk of infection. Read more about the use of PPE in health care at [health.govt.nz/ppe-health](https://health.govt.nz/ppe-health)

## Supporting people with COVID-19 symptoms and/or confirmed (or probable) COVID-19 in the community (including close or causal contacts) – Level 3 and 4

To address increased risk of COVID-19 transmission with home and community hospice care, the following steps are required to be introduced:

- Phone ahead to assess for risk of exposure to and presence of any symptoms of COVID-19 and to establish if any self-isolation is happening in the home.
- Providers to urgently identify higher risk clients to prioritise care and identify these for assessment and treatment
- Where required, rapidly re-assess, using phones or digital platforms, clients who haven't been assessed recently to ensure risk levels are current
- Non-essential services to stop:
  - Household management where not essential to maintain client wellbeing
  - Social connection visits
- Providers check/monitor clients through digital/phone platforms
- Use personal protective equipment (PPE). The safety of staff is a top priority as we work through this challenging time. Read more about the use of PPE in health care at [health.govt.nz/ppe-health](https://health.govt.nz/ppe-health)

## Visitors to people who are receiving care at home – All Alert Levels

Visitors to support people while receiving palliative care services is important. Under **all Alert Levels** the following guidelines should be followed:

- families advise all visitors and staff to stay away from the home if they have cold or flu symptoms
- visitors also should stay away if in self-isolation or if they have in close contact with someone confirmed with COVID-19 in the last 14 days
- visitors stay away for 14 days from the date of close contact with the person who has been confirmed with COVID-19.
- if in the last 14 days a visitor has been in contact with someone else who has recently travelled overseas, the facility considers the risk before visiting and any potential PPE requirements. See the document **Alert Level 1: Risk assessment questions if COVID-19 status is unknown** for further information.

## Visitors to people who are receiving care at home – Levels three and four

While in Alert Level three and four, family/friends should consider having only one companion who should stay with the person receiving palliative care. Visitors should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

## Infection prevention and control

Hand hygiene is one key essential action that prevents transmission of infection. In addition to hand hygiene measures, all staff must adhere to standard precautions and droplet and contact precautions as necessary when caring for patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 and patients who have respiratory and influenza-like symptoms. Advice on PPE for droplet and contact precautions can be found in the Ministry's guidance on PPE used by community care providers for prevention of COVID-19 at [www.health.govt.nz/ppe-health](http://www.health.govt.nz/ppe-health)

## More information

For the latest advice, information and resources, go to [health.govt.nz/covid-19](http://health.govt.nz/covid-19) or [covid19.govt.nz](http://covid19.govt.nz)

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