

Guidance for close contacts

23 July 2020

This fact sheet provides information for people who have been in close contact with a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19. As a 'close contact' you will have been contacted by your local Public Health Unit or the Ministry of Health to talk you through what this means.

It is important that you isolate yourself away from other people for 14 days from the last date of contact with the confirmed case, which means separating yourself from others in case you become unwell. The exact dates that you are required to stay away from other people will be discussed with you by the staff at your local Public Health Unit or the Ministry of Health.

You will receive regular communication during this time to check that you are well and that you have not developed any symptoms. You should follow the instructions below until you are told that you no longer need to isolate yourself from others.

Isolation at home or in a managed facility

Isolation is an effective measure to protect those around you – your family, friends, colleagues, and others – from potentially contracting COVID-19. It means taking simple steps to avoid close physical contact with other people as much as possible, like you would if you had the 'flu. It's important to do this even if you do not have symptoms as you can be infectious before knowing you've contracted COVID-19.

It is important to look after yourself, including your mental health, and if you feel that you are not coping it is important to talk with someone you trust or call 'Need to Talk' on 1737. We know it can be a stressful time, but taking these measures will help protect you, your family and all of New Zealand from COVID-19.

Talk to your friends and family and ask for their help to access the things you will need during this time. Talk to your employer to see if you can work from home or discuss what leave you might be able to access.

Seek prompt medical attention if you develop symptoms

Most people who have had close contact with someone confirmed as having COVID-19 do not get infected or become ill.

The symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to common illnesses such as a cold or the 'flu. You may develop one or more of the following:

- a new or worsening cough
- a high temperature (at least 38°C)
- shortness of breath
- a sore throat
- sneezing and runny nose
- temporary loss of smell

Shortness of breath, or trouble breathing, is a sign of possible pneumonia so you should call 111 and tell them that you have been in contact with someone who has COVID-19.

If you are at home and develop any of these symptoms, call Healthline (for free) on 0800 358 5453, your doctor or an after-hours clinic for advice. Follow their instructions about how and where you should go to get tested. You and all members of your household should not leave home until you have discussed these symptoms with Healthline or another health professional.

Before seeking care, always tell the health care professional that you have been in close contact with someone who is positive for COVID-19. Clean your hands with hand sanitiser and put on a face mask before you enter any healthcare facility. These steps will help the health care provider or ambulance service keep other people safe.

If you are in a managed facility, contact the on-site health professionals. Follow their instructions about how and where you should go to get tested.

Advice about staying at home

Staying at home and keeping away from other people can present its challenges, but there are things you can do to make the 14 days easier.

- You must not have any visitors in your home.
- You can keep in touch with friends and family over the phone or internet, but don't have physical contact with anyone who isn't isolating with you.
- Where possible, ask friends or family to drop off anything you need or order supplies online. Make sure any deliveries are left outside your home for you to collect. Many New Zealand companies are now offering a 'contactless' delivery option, where they notify you when they have delivered your order but remain nearby to ensure you receive it.
- You should not share dishes, drinking glasses, cups or eating utensils (including cups and glasses in the bathroom and bedroom).
- You should wash your own dishes thoroughly with detergent and water or place them in a dishwasher for cleaning.
- Do not share food and drinks or prepare food for others.
- You must not share personal items such as beds, linen, towels and washcloths.
- Use your own toothbrush and have a separate supply of products such as soap, toothpaste and toilet paper.
- Physical exercise is good for your wellbeing. Look for online classes or courses to help you exercise in your home.
- You can go outside, but you need to limit your contact with others. It's ok to go for a walk, run or ride your bike, as long as you do not have any symptoms and you avoid other people by staying at least 2 metres away from them.
- Don't use public transport, taxis or similar transport methods during these 14 days
- You can continue to live with others in your household during this time, but you need to avoid close contact with them by limiting any situations where you have face-to-face contact closer than 2 metres.

Clean your hands

Wash your hands often and thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, making sure you dry them thoroughly. You can also use hand sanitiser (containing at least 60 percent alcohol) if soap and water are not available and if your hands are not visibly dirty. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands. The same hand hygiene should apply to all of your household members.

Cover your coughs and sneezes

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue, your sleeve or elbow when you cough or sneeze. Throw used tissues in a rubbish bin and immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, making sure you dry them thoroughly, or use hand sanitiser.

Laundry

If you are in a managed facility, call the reception and follow the directions given by the staff.

Do not shake dirty laundry as this can disperse the virus through the air. Wash items according to the manufacturer's instructions on the clothing tag. It's ok to wash your dirty laundry with the rest of your household if you do the washing yourself, but you should only fold and put away your own items. It may be easier for someone else to fold and put away clean shared laundry items (such as towels and tea towels) and provide a supply for you.

If you do not have a washing machine, wait until 72 hours after you have been released before taking your laundry to a laundrette. You may need friends or family members to drop off basic clothing items to you.

Keep your home or accommodation clean and well-ventilated

If you are at home, you should not share a bed or a room with others during these 14 days.

Minimise the time you spend in shared spaces such as bathrooms, kitchens and sitting rooms as much as possible and keep shared spaces well ventilated. Clean surfaces like kitchen benches and sink tops after you use them and try to avoid touching them after you have cleaned them.

If you share a kitchen with others, avoid using it while others are present. Take your meals back to your room to eat. It may be easier for someone else in your household to prepare your food so you can avoid the kitchen area. If you have one, use a dishwasher to clean and dry your used crockery and cutlery. If this is not possible, wash them using your usual washing up liquid and warm water and dry them thoroughly, remembering to use a separate tea towel.

If you use a shared toilet and bathroom, it's important that you clean them every time you use them (for example, wiping surfaces you have come into contact with). You may wish to be the last to use the shower/bath in the morning or evening to make this easier on those you live with.

Living with children

You should try to reduce your contact with your children if they don't need to self-isolate with you, but that may not be possible, particularly with young children.

Try to explain what is happening in a way that is easy to understand. Tell them you are staying at home to protect other people. Try to avoid worrying them. Remind them that you are being very safe to protect them and other New Zealanders.

So far, children with COVID-19 appear to be less severely affected. It is nevertheless important to do your best to follow this guidance. If your child develops symptoms, you should contact Healthline.

Learning modules

The Ministry of Health has worked with Careerforce to create five learning modules with useful advice on how to halt the spread of COVID-19.

The following five modules are available on the Ministry of Health's LearnOnline website:

- Cleaning your hands – learnonline.health.nz/course/view.php?id=403
- Stop the spread of COVID-19 – learnonline.health.nz/course/view.php?id=404
- Caring for a person with COVID-19 at home – learnonline.health.nz/course/view.php?id=405
- Helping others with their personal care needs – learnonline.health.nz/course/view.php?id=406
- Working as a caregiver in your home – learnonline.health.nz/course/view.php?id=407

More information and support

For the latest health advice, information and resources, visit the Ministry of Health's COVID-19 webpage health.govt.nz/covid-19 or call Healthline on 0800 358 5453, it is free and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

It is important to look after yourself, including your mental health, and if you feel that you are not coping it is important to talk with a health professional. For support with grief, anxiety, distress or mental wellbeing, you can call or text 1737 – free, anytime, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week – to talk with a trained counsellor.