

# COVID-19

## Guidance for household Close Contacts

9 December 2021

This fact sheet provides information for fully vaccinated, partially vaccinated, and unvaccinated people who live with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 (a case). As a household 'Close Contact' you will have been contacted by public health officials or the Ministry of Health to give you information about what this means.

**You must self-isolate until the case has been released from isolation. Once the case has been released, you will also begin an additional 10 days of isolation. It is important that you isolate away from other people, including those in your household, even if you have negative test results.**

Do not attend work, school or public places. The exact dates that you are required to isolate will be given to you by your local Public Health Unit or the Ministry of Health. They will also advise you what days to have your tests and where you can get these done.

As a household Close Contact, you will need to have a COVID-19 test immediately when the case is identified, and on day 5 of the case's isolation period. Once the last case in your household case has been released, you will start your 10-day isolation period and you will need to have two more tests - on days 5 and 8 of your isolation period.

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 away 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 make arrangements to work from home if possible or discuss what leave you might be able to access.

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## Seek prompt medical attention if you develop symptoms

Many people who have had close contact with someone confirmed as having COVID-19 do not get infected or become ill, but it is important to take note of any relevant symptoms.

Common symptoms of COVID-19 are like those found with illnesses such as a cold or the 'flu. You may have one or more of the following:

- new or worsening cough
- sneezing and runny nose
- high temperature
- temporary loss of smell or altered sense of taste
- sore throat
- shortness of breath

Less common COVID-19 symptoms may include diarrhoea, headache, muscle aches, nausea, vomiting, malaise, chest pain, abdominal pain or confusion/irritability.

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 a health professional.

Before seeking care, **always** tell the health care professional that you live with someone who is positive for COVID-19. This will help them take steps to keep you and other people safe. Clean your hands with hand sanitiser and put on a face mask before you enter any healthcare facility.

**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 self-isolating at home

Self-isolating and keeping away from other people can present its challenges, but there are things you can do to make your time in isolation easier.

- 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.
- You must not have any visitors in your home.
- 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

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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) with others in your household.
- 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 stay on the property.
- Don't use public transport, taxis or similar transport methods during your isolation period.
- 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. Do not share your towel with anyone else in the household. 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. If using hand sanitiser, cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands. The same hand hygiene should apply to all household members.

For more detailed instructions see the Cleaning your hands learning module at [learnonline.health.nz/course/view.php?id=400](https://learnonline.health.nz/course/view.php?id=400)

## Cough or sneeze into your elbow

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.

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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 from isolation 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 ventilated

If you are isolating at home, you should not share a bed or a room with others during your isolation period. 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.

If you are unable to isolate from your children, then your children must continue to stay home until you complete your isolation period.

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.

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## 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](https://health.govt.nz/covid-19) or the Unite Against COVID-19 webpage [covid19.govt.nz/about-this-site/contact-and-support/](https://covid19.govt.nz/about-this-site/contact-and-support/)

You can also call Healthline on 0800 358 5453, it is free and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Healthline has interpreters available if you would prefer to talk to someone in a different language.

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.

## Learning modules

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

The modules are available on the Ministry of Health's **LearnOnline** website