

Kia ora koutou

Thank you for all your effort to date in continuing to provide a high level of service and responsiveness during the country's response to COVID-19.

As we adapt to the move into lower Alert Levels, I wanted to ensure specific guidance was available to your staff on the Ministry's expectations for the treatment of the identifiable information regarding COVID-19 cases. Our collective effort to continue to protect the privacy of individuals' data and personal details will be critical to maintaining the public's confidence in our response to the threat of COVID-19, and the ability to share information between response agencies securely and with confidence.

Once this data is received by an organisation external to the Ministry of Health, it is that organisation's responsibility to ensure it is treated appropriately in line with the Privacy Act 1993, the Health Information Privacy Code 1994 and other relevant authority. That is, that the information is kept secure, is only used for the purpose for which it was shared (including that it is not shared more widely than absolutely necessary to ensure the safety of your personnel), and that the privacy of the individuals concerned is protected.

I have attached a set of guidelines developed by our legal team that outline the obligations of people in receipt of identifiable health data. These guidelines have also been shared with District Health Board Chief Executives, along with the Ministry's clear expectations that data should continue to be shared with the relevant response agencies as needed through our response to COVID-19.

I wanted to also reassure you that the Ministry of Health processes for sharing identifiable information regarding COVID-19 cases with relevant response agencies are robust. A range of internal processes have been put in place to ensure privacy is protected at this time, including:

- the establishment of a Ministry of Health Data and Information-Sharing Governance Group for COVID-19. Requests for data are escalated to this Governance Group where a decision by a responsible manager is unable to be reached
- development of COVID-19 specific guidance for internal Ministry processes for sharing information, including ensuring extensive and accurate documentation is kept of all assessment and decisions made regarding requests for data.

If specific concerns arise regarding the privacy of patient information and data sharing, please address your concerns to healthlegalexecutiveassistant@health.govt.nz and guidance will be provided.

Thank you again for your hard work in responding to the needs of New Zealanders during this time of unprecedented rapid change in the way we all work.

[attachment]

He waka e noa.

Ngā mihi,

Jane Kelley

Director Health Systems, COVID-19 Response

Ministry of Health