

# Memo

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**Date:** 2 September 2020

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**To:** Dr Ashley Bloomfield, Director-General of Health

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**Copy to:** Sarah Turner, Deputy Director-General, Office of the Director-General (ODG)  
Robyn Shearer, Acting Director-General of Health (29 Aug - 1 Sept 2020)  
Paul Giles, Group Manager, Communications, ODG

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**From:** Sue Gordon, Deputy Chief Executive, COVID-19 Health System Response

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**Subject:** Internal Rapid Review – COVID-19 Key Communications

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**For your:** Noting

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This memo informs you of some changes to improve the sign-out of communications relating to COVID-19.

## Background

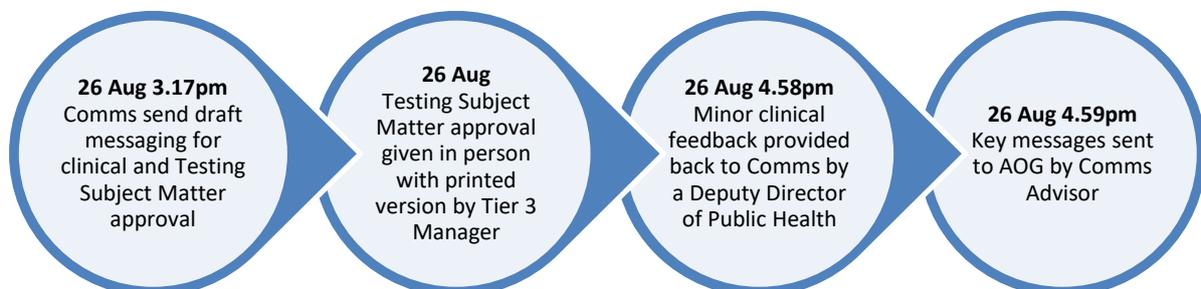
On the weekend of 29/30 August, incorrect messaging provided by the Ministry of Health was publicised by the AOG communications team.

The Acting Director-General of Health, the Deputy Director-General of ODG, the Group Manager for Communications and myself met to understand how an incorrect message regarding COVID-19 testing was disseminated, and how to ensure it would not happen again.

## What happened

On 26 August, you signed a letter to the sector outlining the Ministry's expectations for testing over the coming 2-3 weeks (attached). A request was made by AOG for some public facing messaging that complemented those expectations.

The key messages were developed at an operational Manager and Communications advice level. They were signed out by senior subject matter experts, but not by a COVID-19 Health System Response directorate senior responsible officer.



The key messages were then distributed to AOG for creation of assets used to communicate to the public (including the AOG Unite Against COVID-19 public messages used on social media and Ministry of Health website.)

One element of the key messages regarding the testing of those in South and West Auckland regardless of symptoms was amplified in the AOG messaging. That message was incorrect.

The Ministry of Health email sent to AOG said *'If you're in South or West Auckland, or if you have a greater risk of poor health outcomes if you were to get COVID-19, even if you don't have symptoms, please have a test.'*

The second 'or' should have read 'and' (i.e. '...South or West Auckland, **and** if you...'). This is consistent with the Ministry of Health guidance that was sent to the sector.

Based on the Ministry of Health message, AOG distributed the message *'Over the next week, even if you don't have symptoms, please have a test if you live in South or West Auckland or if you have a greater risk of poor health outcomes if you were to get COVID-19.'*

On Sunday 30 August the offices of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health were made aware of the message, and actions were immediately taken to remove the incorrect information.

### Internal Rapid Review

Across Monday and Tuesday, the Acting Director-General of Health, the Deputy Director-General of ODG, the Group Manager for Communications and myself met to understand how the incorrect message had been provided to AOG. Once it had been confirmed that the correct level of sign-out had not been attained, actions were discussed to ensure a more robust sign-out process could be operationalised. These actions are:

- reinforce the sign-out process, ensuring the DCE of the COVID-19 Health System Response directorate (or named Tier 3 delegate) approves any public facing messages;
- establish a communications lead who is responsible for the development of key messages and the relationship with the team delivering the AOG campaign;
- by Monday 7 September, agree the most appropriate organisational arrangements to provide the communications support required by the COVID-19 Health System Response directorate; and
- work with AOG to develop a communications protocol, to be in place by Wednesday 9 September.

### Recommendations

It is recommended that you:

1.	note	the establishment of a communications lead who is responsible for the development of key messages and the relationship with the team delivering the AOG campaign	Yes/No
2.	note	that by Monday 7 September, the most appropriate organisational arrangements to provide the communications support required by the COVID-19 Health System Response directorate will have been agreed	Yes/No
3.	note	work with AOG to establish a develop a communications protocol	Yes/No

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date:  
Sue Gordon, Deputy Chief Executive, COVID-19 Health System Response

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date:  
Dr Ashley Bloomfield, Director-General of Health