



COVID-19

Omicron Update 1: Disability providers

3 February 2021

This is the first in a series of Omicron related updates to Disability providers. Updates will provide new or updated information as it becomes available. This includes information relevant to our progression through phases 1 to 3 of the Omicron response strategy, or other important information relevant to Providers.

Omicron response strategy – Phase 1

The COVID-19 variant Omicron is in the community. We are in Phase 1 of the response to Omicron. That means there are some cases in the community, but we continue to stamp it out. More information about our Omicron response strategy: [Our response to Omicron | Unite against COVID-19 \(covid19.govt.nz\)](#)

Responses to your questions

To help Providers prepare for Phase 2 we have collated responses to a selection of key questions, below. These questions have been received by Portfolio Managers, or have come through our disability@health.govt.nz inbox, or from Providers attending the Omicron Livestream for the Disability Sector on 1 February 2022: [Our approach to Omicron – Livestream playback with Dr Ashley Bloomfield | Livestream.com Section 1](#)

Question	Response
Do support workers need to have booster vaccinations?	<p>Yes, where workers are required to be vaccinated this has been extended to include boosters. More information can be found here: COVID-19: Mandatory vaccinations Ministry of Health NZ.</p> <p>The booster vaccination needs to be recorded with the primary course information you have for staff.</p> <p>There are plenty of booster vaccination appointments available for eligible people. Find a walk-in vaccination clinic or book your vaccine here: Book My Vaccine bookmyvaccine.covid19.health.nz</p>
How do I know if my staff members are vaccinated?	<p>Where staff do not provide their vaccination status on request, employers can request this information from the COVID-19 Vaccine Employee Vaccine Status team: employeestatus@health.govt.nz</p>

<p>What happens if staff members are exposed to COVID-19?</p>	<p>Now that New Zealand has moved to the COVID-19 Protection Framework (also known as the 'traffic light' system), and we prepare for higher numbers of Omicron cases in the community, the Ministry of Health has created some updated guidance for critical workers and critical health services that aligns more closely to the COVID-19 Protection Framework.</p> <p>All health and disability services and their workers can continue to operate under the COVID-19 Protection Framework, and this remains true at all levels: Green, Orange and Red.</p> <p>If the community spread of Omicron causes significant disruptions to services, we have defined critical health services that will be required to ensure their critical workers follow guidance at each phase of the response to Omicron.</p> <p>This guidance will be in relation to periods of self-isolation and Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs). Where operational changes need to be made, these will only apply to critical workers where face-to-face service delivery is required.</p> <p>The updated guidance documents cover the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The definition of critical worker in the context of the Omicron response.• What five criteria need to be met to be classed as a critical health service.• The steps a workplace should take to prepare for a COVID-19 outbreak during Omicron.• How return to work can be managed for workers who are COVID-19 cases or probable cases.• How return to work can be managed for workers who are COVID-19 contacts. <p>To learn more and to download the guidance documents, please visit the Ministry of Health Website: Guidance for critical workers and critical health and disability services during Omicron Ministry of health</p>
<p>Will Disability Providers be able to access Rapid Antigen Testing?</p>	<p>Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) are expected to be used more extensively in Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the response to Omicron. For example, where a 'test to return' policy is required to confirm close contact healthcare and other critical workers are asymptomatic before returning to work.</p> <p>Disability Support Services fall under the critical worker category regarding the distribution of RATs.</p>

	<p>All orders of RATs are assessed and approved against the Ministry’s Interim Guidance Framework for the provision of Rapid Antigen Screening for COVID-19 in clinical and non-clinical settings. The guidance is being updated</p> <p>The Ministry is committed to working with all health providers to introduce RATs to mitigate outbreaks in health care settings.</p> <p>Rapid antigen testing Ministry of Health NZ</p>
<p>Who should wear what type of mask, and when?</p>	<p>The Government requires mandated employees in health and disability settings to wear appropriate masks.</p> <p>The Ministry of Health supplies Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to the disability sector. The decision on what PPE is required and provided is determined by the Ministry’s Infection, Prevention and Control (IPC) guidance and Principles of Supply.</p> <p>IPC guidance recommends that a medical mask provides adequate protection for most interactions in health and disability settings.</p> <p>N95 particulate respirator masks are used for work in specific high-risk situations such as staff working at the border or in healthcare and are not generally provided to the disability sector.</p> <p>N95 masks need to be fitted properly, and all workforces using those masks in the healthcare system and at the border have proper fit-testing. If not fitted properly, N95 masks can be less effective than cloth or surgical/medical masks.</p> <p>The Ministry continually reviews the latest science, international and national evidence and advice on COVID-19 transmission and PPE, including considering the Omicron variant, to provide up to date advice.</p> <p>With any mask it is important that the mask fits tightly to the face and is used correctly and worn consistently in required areas, for effective protection.</p>
<p>What else can I do to support disabled people?</p>	<p>Disability Service Providers have an important role to play in supporting people with disabilities to be cared for in their homes under the COVID Care in the Community model. Existing disability services are required to be provided throughout all settings of the COVID-19 Protection framework (the traffic light system).</p>

With the onset of Omicron workforce shortages may occur and service delivery may need to be prioritised, or alternative processes put in place to ensure clients' essential needs are met. Therefore, we encourage you to support your clients to put personalised care plans in place.

COVID-19 care plans for people requiring support should identify alternative care if the main carer becomes unwell and can no longer provide support. A written emergency care plan should also be prepared. If alternative emergency support is required, the emergency care plan can easily be shared with a new carer. [Planning for emergencies | Carers.net.nz](#)

Be Prepared – Have a Plan

People with disabilities and their households need to prepare in case they or a member of their household, or their care support network is affected by COVID-19. Read more about how to prepare: [Prepare for COVID-19 | Covid-19.govt.nz](#) and use the [COVID-19 Readiness Checklist](#) to formulate a household plan.

Resources for Providers

The Ministry has updated guidance for critical workers and critical health services, particularly where the community spread of Omicron causes significant disruptions to services. The updated guidance documents cover the definition of critical workers, criteria for critical health service classification, and managing return to work for COVID-19 cases. To learn more and to download the guidance documents please visit the Ministry of Health website: [Guidance for critical workers and critical health and disability services during Omicron | Ministry of health](#)

Separately, additional resources are being developed to support Homecare providers with client communications about foreseeable COVID-19 Omicron workforce disruptions. We look forward to sharing these resources with you soon.

Sector Engagement

We are pleased to announce that the Disability Sector Leadership Group and the Engagement Groups will also be reinstated to ensure that your queries and feedback are being heard. More information on this will be shared shortly.

If you have further questions, please continue to liaise with your Portfolio manager, or email disability@health.govt.nz

Ngā mihi,

Disability Directorate
Ministry of Health