

Omicron Update 2: Disability providers

17 February 2021

This is the second 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 2

Due to increasing community transmission of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 New Zealand will move to the second phase of the Omicron response strategy from 16 February.

At Phase 2 the focus is on minimising and slowing further spread of Omicron and assisting our vulnerable communities. In this phase, there will be more use of rapid antigen testing, and changes to isolation periods.

For more information about our Omicron response strategy visit: [Our response to Omicron | Unite against COVID-19 \(covid19.govt.nz\)](#)

What are the main changes in phase 2 compared to phase 1?

- The period of self-isolation for people who test positive for Covid-19 reduces from 14 to 10 days.
- The period of self-isolation for close contacts reduces from 10 to 7 days.
- Additionally, those who live in the same household as a confirmed case will also immediately self-isolate for 10 days as well. A test on day 8 is required. This will mean the household can complete isolation at the same time as the case if all tests are negative.
- Digital and automation technology is used more to speed up interactions. For example, at the start of self-isolation a case will fill out an online form for themselves and their household contacts that will help the health service work out how much support they need. Then close contacts will receive a text notification and will need to isolate for 7 days and have a test on day 5. There are alternative communication methods in place for those who aren't digitally inclined and those identified as high will risk will receive direct support from their local Care in the Community team.
- The final significant change is the commencement of Rapid Antigen Testing for critical workers. More can be read about this below.

Common Questions

Close Contact Exemption Scheme for critical workers	<p>The Government has announced a new scheme to allow close contacts of COVID-positive cases in critical services to remain working if they follow certain public health rules and meet criteria. This includes the disability workforce.</p> <p>Workers at critical services who are vaccinated and asymptomatic close contacts of a COVID-19 case will be able to continue to work</p>
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	<p>if they return a negative rapid antigen test (RAT) prior to each day/shift they are at work during the isolation period, and follow specific health protocols. They will only be allowed to go to work – not anywhere else.</p> <p>Under this scheme critical workers who have been identified as a close contact but have no symptoms of COVID-19 will be able to go to a local supply agent and pick up a RAT kit, which will include 10 rapid antigen tests.</p> <p>To find out more about the Close Contact Exemption Scheme or to register, visit business.govt.nz: <u>Testing and isolation requirements for businesses during Omicron business.govt.nz</u></p>
<p>Access to rapid antigen tests</p>	<p>Who can access rapid antigen tests at this time?</p> <p>Under the public health response rapid antigen tests (RATs) are being prioritised for three groups:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Healthcare and Emergency Service Workforce, including those who work as Disability support providers, at District Health Boards, GPs, Pharmacies, Aged Residential Care facilities, Police, Corrections, FENZ and Managed Isolation Quarantine Facilities. 2. Priority populations, who are at heightened risk when symptomatic, including disabled people 3. Critical workers registered under the close contact exemption scheme. <p>Where do they get RATs from?</p> <p>The Healthcare, Disability and Emergency Service Workforce will be able to access RATs from their employer.</p> <p>Priority populations, inclusive of disabled people will be able to have a supervised RAT performed by their GP or community provider, who will record the results.</p> <p>Critical workers registered under the close contact exemption scheme who are asymptomatic and fully vaccinated, have been identified as a close contact and need a test to go to work can get RATs from a collection site.</p> <p>Collection sites are listed on Healthpoint and in many cases are existing COVID-19 testing facilities. There are nearly 100 RATs collection sites ready to go and more will be added as demand increases due to increasing numbers and spread of cases and close contacts</p>

	<p>To find your nearest collection site visit Healthpoint and search your local area: COVID-19 RATs Testing sites for healthcare and critical workers Healthpoint</p> <p>What do workers need to provide at a collection site to collect RATs?</p> <p>Workers must be vaccinated to be eligible for the Close Contact Exemption Scheme, so as well as their vaccine pass, workers will need to show:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a letter from the Critical Services Register OR their critical worker authorisation letter from their employer to prove they are a critical worker in a critical business,• personal ID like a Driver's Licence to prove who they are, and• the text message confirming they are a close contact and therefore eligible for a test. <p>Should unwell workers use collection sites?</p> <p>People should not turn up to a collection site if they are unwell. They should call their health provider or Healthline, and they should still get a PCR test.</p> <p>Can an employer collect RATs on behalf of their workers?</p> <p>Yes, they just need to provide the above information.</p> <p>What happens if a site gets multiple close contacts as a result of a case?</p> <p>In some cases, there may be large number of contacts at a specific work site/location. The local DHB and Public Health Unit will work with the site to supply a quantity of RATs directly to the business.</p>
<p>Disability provider access to rapid antigen tests through the PPE portal</p>	<p>In addition, or as an alternative to the Close Contact Exemption Scheme, Disability support providers can order a supply of rapid antigen tests (RATs) for their staff directly from the Ministry's PPE Portal as a publicly funded health and disability system organisation.</p> <p>Rapid Antigen Testing guidelines for Community Providers are available here: Rapid Antigen Testing Guidelines for Community Providers Ministry of Health</p> <p>Additional information about accessing RATs for people employing their own support workers will be provided shortly by the Ministry.</p>

When to use rapid antigen tests	<p>In Phase 2 of the Omicron response rapid antigen testing should only be used to test workers identified as close contacts who do not have any symptoms of COVID-19. If a positive result is returned the person should get a PCR test to confirm the result and immediately self-isolate.</p> <p>Anyone who is symptomatic must get a PCR test and immediately self-isolate until the PCR test result is confirmed.</p> <p>Routine asymptomatic surveillance testing of workers who have not been identified as close contacts using RATs is generally not part of the Omicron testing plan.</p> <p>Read more about rapid antigen testing, including information for priority populations and community providers here: Rapid Antigen Testing Ministry of Health NZ</p>
When to wear N95 masks	<p>The Ministry's Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) guidance for selection of personal protective equipment (PPE) maintains that P2/N95 particulate respirators should be used in specific circumstances. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• when engaging with a confirmed case of COVID-19, or• when engaging with a person who is both a close contact of a confirmed case and symptomatic. <p>The Ministry will now supply '1870+' P2/N95 particulate respirators as part of the PPE kit. 1870+ particulate respirators fit a high portion of the workforce (80 to 90 percent and higher) and have a high level of fluid resistance.</p> <p>As a reminder, the Ministry does not supply PPE to be used outside of the Ministry IPC guidance, and autonomous decisions for receptionists and those screening and seeing patients in low and moderate risk settings to utilise P2/N95 or 1870+ particulate respirators must be met through alternative supply arrangements.</p> <p>A medical mask should be utilised in most other scenarios.</p> <p>The Ministry continually reviews its IPC guidance and in the event of changes, these will be communicated, including information around accessing appropriate PPE.</p> <p>Learn more here: COVID-19: Infection prevention and control recommendations for health and disability care workers Ministry</p>

	of Health NZ
How to access N95 masks	N95 masks and PPE kits are being distributed in different ways to the sector and the Ministry is working to finalise where kits will be deployed. In the meantime, N95s can be arranged through your local DHB for anyone who must engage with a confirmed case of COVID-19, or with a person who is both a close contact of a confirmed case and symptomatic.
Mask fit checks	<p>Workers should perform a fit check (also called a seal check) before engaging with confirmed COVID-19 positive cases, or people considered high-risk based on an IPC risk assessment. If the mask does not fit properly, they should take alternative precautions. For example, finding an alternative mask or having another staff member conduct the engagement.</p> <p>Guidance on fit checks can be found on the Ministry of Health's IPC webpage: Infection Prevention and Control recommendations for health and disability workers Ministry of Health NZ</p> <p>To read guidance on IPC practices and use of PPE in health and disability care settings for COVID-19 visit: IPC recommendations for health and disability workers Ministry of Health NZ</p>
Preparedness for people with disabilities	<p>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.</p> <p>The first step in planning is to prepare for self-isolating at home. Visit: Prepare for COVID-19 Covid-19.govt.nz and use the COVID-19 Readiness Checklist to formulate a household plan: COVID-19 Readiness Checklist Covid-19.govt.nz</p> <p>It is also important that anyone who is care dependent has a written care plan in place so that if their carer becomes unwell and emergency alternate care is required, the care plan can easily be shared with a new carer. This will help enable the safe continuity of care, regardless of the carer or the care setting.</p> <p>Care plans could be developed with the person's Care Provider or people with disabilities and their families can use the excellent Emergency Care Planning tools available on the Carers NZ website.</p> <p>Important things to consider include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tolerance of medications • tolerance around needles, etcetera

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tolerance around masks and nasal prongs • anticipated staffing/supervision requirements • care that can be provided in each site. <p>As part of the planning process, consider if there is someone in the person’s whānau or support network who could help with care if the usual carer is unavailable. We acknowledge that families are already stretched, and this may not be possible.</p> <p>While disability support providers must ensure that essential support services are provided, the disabled person may prefer to have someone they know providing their care. Now is a good time to think about who that person might be.</p> <p>Take a look at the Carers NZ Emergency care planning tools: Emergency Care Planning tools Carers.net.nz</p>
<p>Helping disabled people get their booster or vaccinations</p>	<p>The most important action right now is to encourage as many people as possible to get fully vaccinated and boosted. Booster shots help slow the spread of the virus and ensure more of us stay well. That means those of us who need hospital care will be able to access it.</p> <p>Did you know that there is a specific disability team set up in the wider COVID Healthline team to help people with information about the vaccine (and booster), with booking and with travel to attend a vaccination centre? This includes vaccinations for tamariki.</p> <p>Vaccinations can be booked by phone, text, email, or online.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call the COVID Healthline on 0800 28 29 26 and push ‘2’ to speak to the disability team. The COVID Healthline is open from 8am-8pm Monday to Friday. • Use the free text option by texting your message to 8988. • Email accessiblecovidvaccinations@whakarongorau.nz • Visit https://covid19.govt.nz/covid-19-vaccines/how-to-get-a-covid-19-vaccination/getting-your-booster-dose/ The website is accessible and can be used with a screen reader.

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