

01 May 2020

Chief Nursing Officer letter to Nurses across Aotearoa

Tēnā koutou katoa,

This pānui comes as we get used to life at Alert Level 3. I'd like to thank you for your hard work and sacrifices. It is due to nurses and other frontline workers health efforts, as well as all New Zealanders that has made shifting alert levels possible. Alert Level 3 brings a new set of challenges. This pānui updates us on some of the ongoing work to ensure the continued safety of our health workers, whānau and communities.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

As Chief Nursing Officer, I am involved in ongoing clinical discussions about PPE. There is a good supply of PPE in Aotearoa/New Zealand. New orders are confirmed, and shipments of equipment are arriving regularly.

The Ministry of Health (the Ministry) guidelines for the use of PPE for frontline workers, developed in consultation with representatives of health unions including NZNO, continues to be updated, and is available on the Ministry's website [here](#). It is important that everyone receives the necessary training and follows the guidance for using PPE correctly.

On 7 April, the World Health Organisation provided updated advice on mask use. The WHO does not recommend the use of medical masks by the general public, except when someone is sick and wearing a mask protects others, or when someone is caring for a sick person and the mask can help protect them.

We continue to seek a range of advice and standards from experts around the world, and consider all of it to set the standards that we need for the situation in New Zealand.

The Auditor-General has announced an independent review of our PPE supply chain and stock management, which will provide assurance to those working in the health and disability sector, as well as to all New Zealanders.

COVID-19 Health and Disability System Response Plan

The Ministry has released a framework to prepare for and manage the national response to COVID-19 in New Zealand. The plan is aimed primarily at the health and disability sector to inform operational planning, and ensure a coordinated and consistent response. It is available here on our [website](#).

Research trials

The Health Research Council (HRC) has announced funding for researchers from the Medical Research Institute of New Zealand to lead three internationally significant trials in the fight against COVID-19.

The clinical trials will provide hospitals and patients with access to the most promising COVID-19 treatments, and the latest evidence on which treatments are most effective. They will assess potential therapeutic agents to fight COVID-19, including hydroxychloroquine which is one of several drugs gaining attention as a potential treatment for the virus. More information can be found on the [HRC website](#).

Aged Residential Care (ARC)

New Zealand currently has five significant COVID-19 clusters in ARC facilities – two in Christchurch, two in Auckland and one in Waikato. Aged care facilities are susceptible to rapid transmission of viruses including COVID-19. Residents are more susceptible to illnesses due to their age and increased likelihood of having underlying health conditions.

The Ministry and DHBs have worked closely with the Aged Residential Care Association since early in the COVID-19 pandemic, and action in this sector continues to be a priority. Kathy Glasgow is involved in this work alongside others including HealthCert and the Healthy Ageing team, ensuring a strong nursing perspective.

The Director-General of Health has contacted DHBs asking them to systematically assess the readiness of ARC providers in their area, and provide support and assistance as necessary. DHBs are looking at each facility's plans and procedures to reduce risk to staff and residents, including assessing PPE stocks and ensuring there is a good process for resupply.

The Ministry has also commissioned a short review of our experience so far with preventing and managing COVID-19 in ARC facilities, carried out with input from the Aged Care Association. The review will include facilities that have had cases of COVID-19 to better understand what measures/processes have worked well, and identify opportunities for improvements. The review will also include facilities where there have been no cases.

The Ministry has provided guidance to the sector on managing staff and residents with potential COVID-19 infections. More information is available on our [website](#).

Advanced Care Planning

During the COVID-19 response, it is more important than ever that clinicians understand what really matters to a patient.

We encourage nurses and other health workers to connect with vulnerable patients and their whānau, and talk about their priorities and preferences if their health does change, and they were no longer able to speak for themselves. Document key information and shared goals of care in their medical records so this information can be easily accessed if needed.

The Health Quality & Safety Commission (HQSC) have launched the talking COVID webpage, which provides a toolkit to help you navigate care planning and decision-making in an empathetic and person-centric way in the current changing environment. More information about advanced care planning can be found at www.myacp.org.nz.

Alert level 3 hospital visitor policy

The National Hospital and Clinic Visitors Policy describes changes to visiting arrangements for DHB hospitals and clinics that will come into effect for each level of the National Hospital Response Framework. These changes are necessary in order to protect the safety of patients, visitors and staff. The policy states that visitors with no suspicion of COVID-19 will be able to enter.

In high-risk hospital areas (ED/ ICU/ NICU/ SCBU/ Maternity (Antenatal Inpatient and Postnatal ward)/ Aged Care, and/ or any ward with COVID-19 positive patients), the policy is only one visitor per patient per day, and only one visit per day.

In other hospital areas, the patient may have more than one visitor per day, but only one visitor at a time, and each visitor can only visit once per day at Hospital Response Level Orange; two visitors at a time at Hospital Response Level Yellow and Green. Discretion may be applied on a case-by-case basis.

Inpatient services must record visitors to ensure contact tracing can be conducted if necessary. Expectant mothers in the birthing suite can have one support person from their extended bubble.

More information can be found on the Ministry's website [here](#) and [here](#).

Telehealth

To support a shift toward telehealth services and online consultations for patients during the COVID-19 response, we provide a range of virtual health resources for health providers at the [New Zealand Telehealth Forum](#) and on the [Ministry's website](#).

We have also introduced new rules to make it easier to issue signature-less prescriptions through the New Zealand Electronic Prescription Service (NZePS). The prescription can then be sent directly to pharmacies through a range of approved electronic systems. The new rules also temporarily allow prescribers who do not have access to NZePS to issue signature-less prescriptions if they meet certain conditions.

Disability support and residential care providers

We are working hard to ensure that disabled people, whānau, carers and providers get the support they need to stay healthy and safe. Information on our website is being regularly updated, more information can be found [here](#).

We are working with specialist advisors from the disability community to ensure that this information is accessible to everyone. We have written to all disability support service providers with specific guidance on what Alert Level 3 means for them.

Supporting Māori

The Government has provided an additional \$30 million to respond to the needs of Māori during the COVID-19 response. We continue to consult with Māori providers, organisations and iwi to better understand their needs and the needs of whānau.

Activity to date includes:

- additional resources and support for Māori providers to reprioritise and redirect efforts towards COVID-19,
- supporting providers to deliver locally-specific support to kaumātua, as well as for Māori who are self-isolating or unwell,
- facilitating priority access to flu vaccinations and COVID-19 testing for vulnerable whānau such as kaumātua,
- providing on-the-ground insights to government, on the challenges whānau are facing due to COVID-19, informing emerging support requirements and enabling targeted support.

We're now building on our Māori health communications by communicating directly with Māori through social media. The campaign has been launched which includes Q&A style videos with Māori health experts, and a series of videos with Māori influencers to educate, inform, and uplift the spirits of whānau Māori.

The Ministry is establishing a strategy that will enable easy access to flu vaccinations for Māori, such as:

- through Māori-focused,
- Māori-led pop-up vaccine stations in local kura,
- marae, and
- community halls.

We are collecting data weekly that looks at how many Māori over 65 are receiving the influenza vaccine in comparison to non-Māori. As at 24 April 2020, vaccinations of Māori aged 65 and above are sitting at 47.9 percent compared to 57.0 percent for Non-Māori non-Pacific aged 65 and above.

Supporting Pacific peoples

The Government has announced a \$17 million COVID-19 Pacific Response Package to support New Zealand's Pacific communities. This funding is already being made available to a range of Pacific providers to make an immediate difference. The response package will deliver three key priorities:

- Increase the capacity of Pacific health and disability services to deal with increased demand,
- Increase the availability of public health messaging and guidance in Pacific languages,
- Establish an outreach programme that gives Pacific communities direct access to non-clinical health support staff, who can link high-risk people and households with important services.

A national network of Pacific clinicians has been established and is engaging with national and regional Pacific media channels on a daily basis to provide key COVID-19 messages in English, and a variety of Pacific languages.

The Ministry has also appointed a new Director Health Pacific, Gerardine Clifford-Lidstone, who was previously at Capital & Coast DHB, and is now leading the multi-disciplinary Pacific COVID-19 Response team.

Thank you to those who shared stories with us of health and disability sector workers. We will be sharing these stories on Twitter over the next few weeks, be sure to follow the Ministry of Health @minhealthnz to read them.

As we adjust to life at Alert Level 3, we can be very proud of what we have achieved as a nation. I encourage you to continue to check the official NZ COVID-19 website and the Ministry's COVID-19 website pages for updates and guidance for our health workers, whānau and communities.

Nāku noa,

Margareth Broodkoorn
Chief Nursing Officer
Ministry of Health