
All District Health Boards

COVID-19 (Coronavirus): Employee Related General FAQs

Updated 12 October 2020 at 1600HRS

COVID-19 ALERT LEVEL 1

This advice is accurate as at 12 October 2020 at 1600HRS.

This has been developed by 20 DHBs in conjunction with the Ministry of Health to provide clarity for DHB employees on issues such as travel, leave, occupational health and safety, and wellbeing. It has been informed by a range of clinical experts and approved by 20 DHBs for implementation.

At Alert Level 1 there is little risk of community transmission and DHBs have no COVID-19 positive patients at the current time. We are in effect transitioning back to a “new” normal and all current rules and restrictions applied by the government are essentially lifted.

This document will be reviewed and updated and you can always find the most up-to-date version on the [TAS website](#). Should the Alert Level change, you should pay attention to announcements from your DHB.

Introduction

The contribution of New Zealand’s health workforce to supporting the wellbeing of our communities is highly valued by DHBs as employers and by the public in general. As we manage the current COVID-19 situation together, we recognise the importance of you having access to consistent national advice on key employment-related issues.

Please take a few minutes to read this document and understand the temporary changes to normal processes that the DHBs are introducing, while we work through these challenges together.

This document will continue to be updated as required and will be recirculated at this time. You can always find the most up-to-date version of this document on the [TAS website](#). The short-term measures put in place will be regularly reviewed and will be removed as soon as possible. If you have any queries, please reach out to the points of contact outlined in this document.

Thank you for your willingness to demonstrate a degree of flexibility in the interests of continuing to provide best care to our patients.

General Principles

The following principles underpin this guidance:

Collaboration: All healthcare workers are an essential part of our national response to COVID-19. We will succeed by working together and supporting each other.

Flexibility: The situation is rapidly changing. We will succeed by being willing to change or compromise.

Agility: The situation is fast moving. We will succeed by being quick, innovative and flexible in our response.

Duty of care: We have a duty of care to provide quality essential health services, and we have a duty of care to look after our own health and wellbeing. The health, safety and wellbeing of ourselves and each other is vitally important to our whanau, our patients, DHBs, unions, and our response.

COVID-19 ALERT LEVEL 1

Contents

Introduction	1
General Principles	1
Contents.....	2
About COVID-19.....	2
About my Health and Wellbeing.....	3
About my Leave	5
About my Business and Personal Travel.....	7
About Reimbursements	9
About Casual Workers	10
About Occupational Health.....	10
Definitions.....	11

About COVID-19

IF YOU ARE UNWELL PLEASE STAY AT HOME

What is COVID-19?

Coronaviruses are a large and diverse family of viruses that cause illnesses such as the common cold. In January 2020 a new coronavirus was identified, now called COVID-19.

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

The symptoms are similar to the flu – fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, sneezing and running nose and a temporary loss of smell. If you have these symptoms, please contact your DHB’s staff testing facility or your GP (please call ahead). You can also call Healthline for more information on 0800 358 5453.

How serious is coronavirus?

Most people have a mild to moderate illness with flu-like symptoms. People of all ages are being infected, but older people and those with medical conditions seem most likely to get seriously ill.

Where can I get further information about COVID-19?

Click the following link for up to date information which is available on the New Zealand all of government COVID-19 website www.covid19.govt.nz.

COVID-19 ALERT LEVEL 1

About my Health and Wellbeing

How do I keep well?

Keep well through appropriate rest, eating and actions to boost your immune system. It is important to focus on what keeps you well, focusing on all aspects of your wellbeing and giving attention to what keeps you in balance and boosts your wellbeing, this can be slightly different for everyone. When it comes to connecting with others, make sure you are following the COVID-19 guidelines to protect and promote the wellbeing of your whānau/community and yourselves, you may need to adapt ways of connecting with others and nurturing all aspects of your whare.

DHBs are asking all employees, contractors, students and volunteers to do the following:

1. Practice according to approved infection control procedures, being hand washing, social distancing, and cough etiquette.
2. Wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). More information about PPE can be found on the Ministry of Health's website [here](#).
3. Follow all clinical protocols outlined for your area when providing care for people with suspected and confirmed COVID-19. Patients are placed inside rooms and negative pressure rooms where they are suspected to have symptoms that fit the COVID-19 case definition. If in doubt call the Infection Prevention and Control team. NOTE: all of the team providing care will know that the patient has suspected COVID-19 symptoms and the team will be working together to follow approved procedures.
4. When not at work, please follow all the alert level requirements – this will help us get clear of COVID-19 quicker and with less impact.

Māori model Te whare tapa whā

Using Te whare tapa whā – As a guiding principle framework for Māori and others

https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/maori_health_model_tewhare.pdf

Finding balance – Te whare tapa whā plan for individuals

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Working-Well/WS-finding-balance-individual.pdf> and

teams <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Working-Well/WS-finding-balance-workplace.pdf>

Fonofale Pacific Model for wellbeing

Using the Fonofale model focus on what enhances your wellbeing

<https://whanauoraresearch.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/formidable/FonofalemodelExplanation1-Copy.pdf>

General

Employee Assistance Programme facilitated sessions are available, one on one or group sessions. Group sessions can to be booked by your manager. One on one sessions can be booked directly with EAP. If needed, EAP can accommodate group and individual sessions by zoom. Check with your manager or your DHB intranet for contact details.

A guide for maintain health and wellbeing - <https://www.healthandsafety.govt.nz/reports/booklets-and-brochures/a-guide-for-maintaining-health-and-wellbeing/> (includes rest, eating, actions etc)

A mental health guide for New Zealand Leaders

https://www.healthandsafety.govt.nz/assets/Documents/A_Mental_Health_Guide_for_New_Zealand_Leaders.pdf (this has sections on diet and sleep etc)

COVID-19 ALERT LEVEL 1

A Personal Wellbeing plan, Five ways to wellbeing

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Working-Well/FINAL-Personal-wellbeing-plan-WW.pdf>

Refuelling the tank for individuals <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Working-Well/WS-refuelling-individual.pdf> Teams <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Working-Well/WS-refuelling-workplace.pdf>

64 ways to take care of yourself

https://www.eapworks.co.nz/uploads/6/8/8/3/6883838/6_4_ways_to_take_care_of_yourself.pdf

A few minutes of self-care

https://www.eapworks.co.nz/uploads/6/8/8/3/6883838/using_a_few_minutes_for_self-care.pdf

What should I do if I am unwell?

If you are unwell you should not be at work regardless of whether you think it is likely or unlikely that you have been exposed to COVID-19.

If you are experiencing the symptoms of a flu-like illness (a new or worsening cough, fever (at least 38°C), shortness of breath, a sore throat, sneezing and runny nose, temporary loss of smell) you should stay at home until you have been tested for COVID-19 and have returned a negative test result.

The time you spend away from work will be Sick Leave under the provisions of the relevant MECA/SECA/IEA.

If you return a negative test result and would otherwise return to work, you should do so. If you would otherwise not return to work because your illness continues you should remain at home on Sick Leave. If you return a positive test result you should call your manager & advise Occupational Health to determine what next steps you need to take and follow the directions of your local public health authority

I am concerned that I am at risk because I either have a pre-existing condition, I am or am planning to get pregnant or I am immunocompromised – what do I do?

At Alert Level 1 there is little risk of community transmission and DHBs have no COVID-19 positive patients at the current time, therefore life and work are returning to a “new” normal in most circumstances.

If you are a new employee and have not completed an assessment with Occupational Health or if your health circumstance has changed since your assessment and are concerned about how to best protect yourself if you have an existing health issue, we encourage you to contact your Occupational Health and Safety team to complete an occupational health self-assessment. Once you have returned your self-assessment, Occupational Health will assess and advise you and your manager of their recommendations. Outcomes may include remaining at your usual work place, redeployment, work from home, or paid special leave.

Remember to always follow approved public health advice and Infection Control procedures as these are international best practice standards. The same guidance applies to family members.

COVID-19 ALERT LEVEL 1

I am scared that I will infect my family when I return home. While I am fit for work one of my family member's health is severely compromised and I am concerned that I will potentially infect them. What can I do?

At Alert Level 1 there is little risk of community transmission and DHBs have no COVID-19 positive patients at the current time therefore life and work are returning to a “new” normal. We encourage you to follow the below points if the current prevalence of COVID-19 or Alert Levels change:

Coming to Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bring only what you need to work; ▪ Wear your own clothes and shoes to work.
At work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Store your bag in staff area with lunch, drink bottle; ▪ Personal phone – keep in own bag in staff only area ▪ Work phone – keep in ziplock bag; ▪ Frequently wipe clean surfaces and equipment; ▪ Change into work clothes/uniform/scrubs and work shoes; ▪ Follow approved PPE and handwashing protocol; ▪ Observe physical distancing wherever possible.
Going Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leave pen at work; ▪ At end of shift change into own clothes. Place work clothes/uniform/scrubs in plastic bag to take home, or leave at work for laundering ▪ Wipe shoes or leave at work; ▪ Thoroughly wash hands and arms; ▪ Shower if in high risk area; ▪ Collect belongings from staff area.
At Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maintain physical distancing initially; ▪ Put work clothes/uniform directly into washing machine; ▪ Clothes/uniform should be washed using detergent; ▪ Dry clothes as normal; ▪ Have a shower if you have not already had one at work; ▪ Hug your family

About my Leave

What are the leave payment arrangements in Level 1?

In Alert Level 1, normal work expectations and requirements regarding leave will apply. Shown in Table 1 below are possible scenarios that may arise as a result of COVID-19. Please note if you work from home you will be paid as normal working time.

COVID-19 ALERT LEVEL 1

Table 1 - Leave Type Scenarios		
Scenario	Employee Asymptomatic ¹	Employee Symptomatic ²
Employee is symptomatic and may have been exposed to COVID-19 in a work or non-work setting.	N/A	Sick Leave Refer to relevant MECA/SECA/IEA
Employee required to self-isolate for potential work or non-work exposure to COVID-19. Note: Isolation requirements will be clinically informed and changed as the situation and MOH advice evolves.	Working from Home or Special Leave Special Leave to be paid for the first 14 days self-isolation period Staff member may work from home if these arrangements are suitable.	Sick Leave Refer to relevant MECA/SECA/IEA
Children or dependant are required to isolate Discussion by Manager with Employee to seek agreement on working from home if suitable.	Working from home or Special Leave Special Leave to be paid for the first 14 days self-isolation period. Staff member may work from home if these arrangements are suitable. <i>Employee expected to continue looking for alternative childcare options and return to work as soon as feasible</i>	Sick Leave if either Employee or Dependent becomes symptomatic and requires care. Refer to relevant MECA/SECA/IEA
Employee requested by DHB to self-isolate for incubation period after personal, non-work-related travel	Working from home/remotely or Annual Leave or Unpaid Leave	Sick Leave Refer to relevant MECA/SECA/IEA
Employee identified as vulnerable through occupational health assessment	Consideration given for redeployment to suitable patient care activities/location/work from home and would be on their Ordinary Pay (if they remain at work in line with the definition of special leave) or, where appropriate mitigations cannot be put in place, consideration will be given for Special Leave	Sick Leave Refer to relevant MECA/SECA/IEA
Employee wishes to stay away from normal duties due to concern about a vulnerable household member	Consideration given for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • redeployment to suitable role; • working from home; or • accommodation support Or Annual Leave or Unpaid Leave	Sick Leave Refer to relevant MECA/SECA/IEA
Employee decides to stay at home to look after child(ren)	Working from Home or Annual Leave or Unpaid Leave	Sick Leave if either Employee or Dependent becomes symptomatic and requires care. Refer to relevant MECA/SECA/IEA
Employee prevented from returning to the country through border controls.	Please contact your manager to discuss your leave options <i>Leave provisions in employment agreement apply e.g. Annual Leave, STIL or Leave Without Pay.</i>	Sick Leave

¹ No symptoms

² Employee should be appropriately assessed to confirm CoV-19 as per MoH advice

COVID-19 ALERT LEVEL 1

I am wary of coming to work because of COVID-19. If I refuse to work (including redeployment), will I still get paid leave?

Alert Level 1 reflects essentially a lifting of most current Government rules and restrictions as there is little risk of community transmission and DHBs have no COVID-19 positive patients.

All DHB staff are essential workers and are required to work during a pandemic. **You will not get paid if you refuse to come to work and are not on approved paid leave.** We understand that this is a stressful time for everyone working in healthcare, but we all have a role to play in our response to COVID-19.

What do I do if I am unwell and I have run out of paid sick leave entitlement?

Situations should be looked at on a case-by-case basis, with managers working with HR to determine whether any additional entitlements exist under your employment agreement and what other leave entitlements may be utilised. Forms of leave should ideally be explored and exhausted in the following order for COVID-19:

- Entitled Sick Leave including discretionary Sick Leave in line with employment agreement entitlements, where applicable.
- Lieu days
- Shift Leave
- On-call leave
- Accrued Annual Leave entitlement (By agreement).
- Annual Leave in advance (By agreement. Note that if you leave your employment before accrual becomes available you will be expected to repay this leave)
- Leave Without Pay
- “Non-Employment Agreement” Discretionary Sick Leave* DHB discretion

If you are unwell but have no paid sick leave left, please discuss this with your manager. Managers should seek advice from HR or contact Occupational Health and Safety about support for an individual or to assess if sick leave is required. Managers should use their existing delegated authority policies to approve additional paid sick leave.

About my Business and Personal Travel

What are the current travel restrictions in place at Alert Level 1?

Individuals are allowed to travel for either personal or business reasons providing they do so in a safe way.

Travel for business purposes must still be approved by your DHB. Before you book any business travel you should ensure you follow your individual DHBs standard business travel approval processes.

Given the continued risk associated with international travel, the DHBs will not be approving any business-related international travel. While personal international travel is not restricted by the government, the DHB's discourage personal international travel.

COVID-19 ALERT LEVEL 1

If you are planning on travelling internationally for personal reasons you should keep up to date with the latest MFAT international travel guidance. You should also have a discussion with your manager as to what leave you have available when you self-isolate on your return.

What are the current isolation requirements for people entering New Zealand?

All travellers entering New Zealand from 10 April 2020 are required to either go into 14 days quarantine in a government-provided managed isolation facility (hotel), or if symptomatic to go into quarantine facility (separate hotel).

A very small number of people may be eligible for an exemption from managed isolation, such as those with serious medical conditions that cannot be managed in the accommodation provided.

As a general rule those granted an exceptional circumstance release must still complete seven days in managed isolation, have a negative COVID-19 test on or around day 3 and a full health assessment before they can leave. This is because of the increased public health risks that are present in the early stages of isolation. If you are already in managed isolation and want to apply for an exemption, due to a serious and unmanageable medical condition, you must discuss this with the facility management team at your hotel.

To seek a border exemption, please visit <https://www.miq.govt.nz/being-in-managed-isolation/exemptions-from-isolation/>

Who has to pay for managed isolation?

If you leave New Zealand after the regulations come into force, you will have to pay for your managed isolation unless you qualify for a waiver or are otherwise exempt.

New Zealanders who are currently overseas (that is, who left before 12.01am on 11 August 2020) will have to pay if they visit New Zealand for fewer than 90 days. New Zealanders are defined as New Zealand citizens (including those in the Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau) and residence class visa holders, and Australian citizens and permanent residents who are ordinarily resident in New Zealand.

Temporary visa holders will have to pay, unless they left New Zealand on or before 19 March 2020, and were ordinarily resident in New Zealand as of 19 March 2020.

Everyone who is entering on a border exception as a critical worker will have to pay. We encourage you to discuss these costs with your employing DHB.

What are the charges for managed isolation?

\$3,100 for the first or only person in the room (whether that is an adult or a child) with \$950 for each additional adult and \$475 for each additional child (3-17 years old, inclusive) sharing that room, all GST inclusive. There will be no charge for children under the age of 3 if they are staying in a room with another person.

COVID-19 ALERT LEVEL 1

What happens to CME or Professional Development funds that are expiring?

We acknowledge that there has been significant disruption to the ability of and opportunity for DHB staff to access CME or Professional development activities such as national, Australasian and international courses or conferences as a result of COVID-19.

Where you have an individual contractual entitlement to professional development funds that will expire during the period where travel restrictions were in place, then the DHBs will agree to carry these over.

This carry over will not be forever. Once travel restrictions are relaxed and professionally relevant national and Australasian course or conference opportunities are resuming you will be expected to plan and agree how to utilize the carried over funds within an appropriate timeframe.

Can I still travel overseas for work-related and education activity?

The government's travel advice remains the same at Alert Level 1 and New Zealanders are advised not to travel overseas at this time, regardless of the destination.

As a responsible employer and provider of essential community health services, the DHBs will not be approving any business-related international travel, including to Australia. Non-essential travel includes all travel for the purposes of training, education, conference, seminar or meeting attendance.

About Reimbursements

Will DHBs be reimbursing any of my costs associated with working from home?

DHBs will not pay for costs such as heating, lighting, electricity, gas, water, rent or wear and tear at the remote work site. If a work mobile is not provided the Line Manager and employee will need to agree the most effective way of handling calls whether that is the use of zoom or reimbursement for calls.

If you remain concerned that these arrangements are not sufficient, you should discuss this with your manager to identify what arrangements your DHB might be able to support.

I don't have IT equipment to join online/contactless training. Will the DHB reimburse me from my Continuing Professional Development (CPD) entitlements if I purchase this equipment myself?

DHBs support staff accessing contactless and internet-based solutions where face-to-face training opportunities are not available. If you believe you require specific IT equipment for work-related purposes, you should discuss this with your manager.

Your employment agreement and your DHB's policy on CPD expenditure will outline the appropriate reimbursable items covered under professional development arrangements.

COVID-19 ALERT LEVEL 1

About Casual Workers

What are the arrangements for casual workers?

Under level 1 we expect there will be an increased need and opportunities for casual workers. Accordingly, we expect normal DHB process around casual engagements will operate.

This means that casual workers will have their usual flexibility to accept and decline any shifts that are offered to them.

If you are available for casual work, you should ensure the DHB is aware this.

About Occupational Health

What does Alert Level 1 mean for my Occupational Health Assessment?

At Alert Level 1 life should be returning to the new normal. This includes returning to work if you have been on annual leave, or returning to previous ways of working, if your ways of working have changed.

Should the Alert Level change you should pay attention to announcements from your DHB.

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COVID-19 ALERT LEVEL 1

Definitions

Special Leave: Paid leave granted during exceptional situations including the COVID-19 outbreak where the employee is not sick or injured and is not charged against leave entitlement. Where there is an agreement that employees will receive paid special leave, the payment will be based on their normal rostered duty they were due to work during the period of paid leave.

Discretionary Leave:

“Employment Agreement” Discretionary Sick Leave: Some MECAs specifically allowing the application and granting of additional paid sick leave where an employee has exhausted their accrued paid sick leave entitlements. All MECAs prescribe the exact amount that may be granted, and some allow for the deduction of any leave given to be deducted from future entitlements. Please check the employee’s relevant agreement to see the parameters around granting this.

“Non-Employment Agreement” Discretionary Sick Leave: Paid sick leave granted in additional to any contractual entitlements granted in exceptional circumstances in response to all relevant context including the exhaustion of the other leave types and where extreme hardship would be experienced by the employee if not granted.

IEA – Individual Employment Agreement

MECA – Multi Employer Collective Agreement

SECA – Single Employer Collective Agreement