

29/5/2020

Chief Nursing Officer letter to Nurses across Aotearoa

Talofa lava,

This pānui comes at the end of a week of no new COVID-19 cases in New Zealand. This reflects the success of New Zealand's strategy to go hard and early, and is also a reflection of the hard work and sacrifices made by our health sector workforce and by all of New Zealand.

Yesterday marked two weeks at Level 2, with the Prime Minister announcing on Monday that the maximum numbers permitted at gatherings would increase from 10 to 100 today, Friday 29 May. Cabinet will review the Alert Level settings on Monday 8 June, and the Government is working hard on the detail of what Alert Level 1 will look like so that New Zealand can move there as soon as it is safe to do so.

This week is also Vaiaso o le Gagana Sāmoa - Samoan Language Week. This year's theme is 'Tapena sou ōso mo lau malaga', meaning 'Prepare yourself a gift for your travels'. It encourages us all to prepare for our journey ahead, and highlights the importance of honouring, respecting and sharing the gifts of life's journey. More information and resources can be found on the [Ministry for Pacific Peoples' website](#).

Āwhina app

The Ministry released a new mobile app, Āwhina, on 27 May. This app will help health workers access the information they need about COVID-19 on their mobile devices.

Āwhina means health workers will be able to gain quick access to the latest information, such as case definitions, clinical care pathways and Personal Protective Equipment guidance. App users can quickly filter content so they can find what is relevant to them and can also save content in the app to give them quick access to it again later.

The Ministry developed the new app with feedback from people working in the health sector, and by learning from approaches taken in other countries to get information about COVID-19 to health workers. I have downloaded the app already and am finding this really useful in getting timely updates and information, it might make my weekly letter redundant, but lets hope not!

Vaccine strategy

The development of a safe and effective vaccine is a crucial tool in the control of COVID-19 worldwide. New Zealand's COVID-19 vaccine strategy aims to secure a vaccine that is safe and effective, at the earliest possible time.

This will ensure New Zealand goes all out to advance discovery, development, testing and supply of a vaccine. It will enable our scientists to contribute to global research efforts and ensure New Zealand has detailed knowledge of international developments.

More information on the COVID-19 vaccine strategy announced today can be found on the [MBIE website](#).

Case definition update

Last week the case definition of COVID-19 infection was updated with a change to the “probable case” definition (the updated definition can be found [here](#)). Because we have now moved down alert levels, and in anticipation of an increase in respiratory illnesses as winter approaches, the “suspect case” definition is also under review.

Other changes to advice for health professionals include:

- New advice on self-isolation for household contacts of cases under investigation
- Information for managing relapsing cases of COVID-19
- Health care workers who are confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases should have two negative PCR tests at least 24 hours apart prior to return to work. Note this is only a requirement for return to work, not for release from isolation. The standard guidance outlined in the Advice for Health Professionals applies for release from isolation.
- Health care workers who are close contacts of a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19 should be tested for COVID-19 before release from quarantine (e.g. Day 12 or 13), even if they have no symptoms, with a negative test required for return to work.

These changes are part of our overall control efforts and are particularly designed to protect health care workers, their families and patients/aged residential care residents. We are reviewing the impact of these changes by following the experience of the current cohort of health care worker cases and close contacts.

We will be asking DHBs and PHUs to record the number of health care workers impacted by these changes, frequency of testing and number of tests required, any additional support required by health care workers, and any other feedback that may be helpful.

Examination dates

The Nursing Council and education providers have been working on strategies to lessen the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student progression, particularly for students in their final year of study.

One of the strategies is adding extra dates for students to sit the State Final Examination, which is offered in March, July and November each year. To allow students extra time to meet the clinical hours requirement, there will be additional exams in September 2020 and January 2021. This recognises that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students may have been affected by delays to clinical placements.

COVID-19 Health and Wellbeing survey findings

At the beginning of April, the Ministry started a daily survey to collect information about the health and wellbeing of New Zealanders, how they are doing, and how they are being impacted by COVID-19.

The Ministry is using this data along with other sources of information, such as call volumes to helplines, feedback from services and specialist mental health and addiction service data as ongoing monitoring of how people are doing.

In the most recent week of surveying, 99% of people told us they are getting along with other members of their household, 99% can support the wellbeing of their children and 95% are able to pay basic living costs. Most people report being happy with life as it is.

Thirty-one per cent of people experienced feelings of loneliness or isolation at times, and 8% reported depressive or anxiety related symptoms, however, it hasn't been possible to estimate how much of this is related to the COVID-19 restrictions.

More information and a link to the results is available [here](#).

If you haven't already, I encourage you to download the NZ COVID Tracer app that was launched last week.

I wish you all a safe and happy long weekend.

Nāku noa,

Margareth Broodkoorn
Chief Nursing Officer
Ministry of Health