

FINAL 18 FEBRUARY 2022
UPDATE #4

Allied Health sector update re the Omicron Strategy

Kia ora koutou,

Responding to Omicron: we are at Phase 2

- Situation: case numbers are increasing significantly, growing pressure of health system (but manageable)
- Objectives: minimise and slow further spread and focus on protecting the most vulnerable.

This fourth sector update provides you with information related to the shift to Phase 2 of the Omicron Response. On Tuesday 15th February, Dr Ashley Bloomfield hosted a webinar outlining the key operational changes for the health sector. You can watch it [here](#), and download the **Shift to Phase 2 of the Omicron Response Plan webinar slides** (pptx, 812 KB) presented.

Additionally, the following is a useful general questions and answers document



Q+A - Omicron
Phase 2-150222.pdf

Thank you for those you attended the webinar on Thursday 17th February, hosted by Dr Martin Chadwick to walk through what key changes mean for Allied Health. A summary of the information discussed, and key questions asked in the chat is summarised below:

Topic	Response
Phase Two Overview	
<p>Why are we moving to Phase 2?</p> <p>Link to relevant webpage: Omicron in the community: what this means for you Ministry of Health NZ</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The growing number of COVID-19 cases means that we need to shift our approach to ensure our communities, health system and social settings target support where it is most needed to give our health system and supply chains, a sustainable position of managing COVID-19. • The comprehensive approach to case investigation and contact tracing is only sustainable with low case numbers. The effectiveness of comprehensive contact tracing reduces as case numbers reach a certain point, so we have now transitioned to Phase Two. • Phase Two has a focus on minimising and slowing further spread, utilising digital pathways as the preferred tool, to enable a more timely contact tracing process. Phase Two allows for improved targeting of resources to ensure that those who most need support are prioritised.

<p>What are the key operational changes?</p> <p>Link to relevant webpage: Omicron in the community: what this means for you Ministry of Health NZ</p>	<p>1. Testing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapid antigen testing (RAT) may be used in addition to PCR testing for symptomatic people and close contacts • Critical worker Close Contact Exemption Scheme begins: asymptomatic healthcare and critical workforce who are close contacts test daily using RATs. • PCR testing to confirm diagnosis if positive RAT. <p>2. Case investigation and contact tracing Digital technology is utilised more as cases grow – text via mobile phone and information via email. Support for those not digitally enabled.</p> <p>Cases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified via positive PCR test • Notified by text and directed to complete COVID-19 Contact Tracing form online Self-investigation tool increasingly targeting high-risk exposures (events or locations) • Phone based interviews where required • Household contacts identified, test required • Cases are required to advise contacts and employers of positive status. <p>Contacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular communication with household contacts • Close contacts notified via text, directed to website, test on day 5 (non-household contacts self-manage) • Push notifications (QR scanning), Bluetooth and Locations of Interest used to identify contacts • Close Contact Exemption Scheme using RATs for critical infrastructure workers if needed. <p>3. Isolation and quarantine</p> <p>Cases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolate for 10 days <p>Household contacts of a Case:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolate until Case completes 10 days. Test Day 3 and Day 8, or if symptomatic <p>Close contacts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolate for 7 days. Test Day 5 or if symptomatic • Extra support in place for health and critical workforces. <p>4. Health and social support – care in the community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cases using self-service where possible, ensure those with greatest need are being met • Support by local care coordination hub for those with a need for ongoing clinical care. • Other people with lower clinical risks, may contact external providers.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for most positive cases to isolate in their usual place of residence. Alternative accommodation options across the regions are still available.
Rapid antigen testing for Critical Workers	
<p>What is the Close Contact Exemption Scheme? Link to relevant web page: Close Contact Exemption Scheme – Business.govt.nz</p> <p>-</p>	<p>The Scheme, which comes into effect in Phase 2 of the Omicron Response Plan, will allow vaccinated people working for critical businesses to be exempted from health orders requiring them to isolate due to being close contacts if they follow certain public health rules and meet criteria.</p> <p>The exemption is only for attendance at the workplace. By being registered, critical businesses’ workers will be able to access free RATs from Government supplies once we are in Phase 2</p> <p>There are currently three models for accessing RATs by critical worker depending on your employer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model one: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers who are centralising the distribution to their critical workers including some healthcare and emergency service workforces including those who work in district health boards, GPs, pharmacies, aged residential care facilities, Police, Corrections, FENZ and MIQ facilities • Model two: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established for all other critical workers who are employed in critical services. • Most allied health services fall within this model, including private providers • Model three: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports work sites which may have a large number of contacts as a result of a case. The local DHB and Public Health Unit will work with the site to supply a quantity of RATs directly to the site.
<p>How does model two work to access RATs? Link to relevant webpage: Rapid antigen testing Ministry of Health NZ</p>	<p>Allied Health providers will need to be registered as a critical health service by registering for the Close Contact Exemption Scheme through MBIE’s Business Connect Website.</p> <p>Then you can make a declaration by registering on the Close Contact Exemption Scheme Critical Services Register.</p> <p>You may also choose to use your own private supplies of RATs you’re your workforce for Health and Safety purposes, but this is <i>separate</i> to the public health response.</p>

What is the process to access RATs?

Rapid Antigen Test Order Form: [Home \(force.com\)](#)

List of designated collection sites: [COVID-19 Testing • Healthpoint](#)

This depends on which model your workplace sits in, but almost all allied health community providers would sit within Model 2.

In model 2, when a worker at a critical service is notified that they are a close contact of a COVID-19 case, they will need to contact the workplace they work at to let them know.

So the process is:

1. *IF* one of your critical workers is notified that they have been a close contact in Phases 2 and 3, then go to the online RATs ordering portal, [\(Home \(force.com\)\)](#) and order the RATs.
2. The worker then collects the RATs at the designated collection point with some personal details and letters to verify their status as a critical worker:
 - Critical Services Register Letter
 - Critical Worker Authorisation Letter - From the employer
 - Workplace ID (if applicable)
 - Personal ID (e.g. Vaccine Pass)
 - Text message confirming they are a close contact
 - The specific RATs order number- from the portal.

Remember if the worker starts feeling unwell they must immediately isolate and get a PCR test from your GP or community health provider.

Exposure events

<p>Will I need to close the clinic if we happen to see a COVID-19 positive patient?</p> <p>Link to relevant Webpage: Guidance for critical health services during an Omicron outbreak Ministry of Health NZ</p>	<p>The guidance for managing COVID-19 healthcare staff exposures at work is below. This covers the risk assessment and categorisation of healthcare worker contacts from an exposure event at work, factors to consider in risk assessment, and actions for those categorised as contacts.</p> <p>Management of COVID-19 staff exposures at work</p> <p>Importantly, with appropriate screening and PPE measures in place, most allied health practices would be categorised as a low or moderate risk exposure and therefore will not need to stand down</p>
<p>What should a worker at a critical service do once they are notified that they are a close contact?</p> <p>Link to relevant Webpage: Guidance for critical health services during an Omicron outbreak Ministry of Health NZ</p>	<p>The “Risk Assessment and Categorisation Guidance” on the Website should be used to understand whether staff need to be stood down if there is an exposure event.</p> <p>Guidance for situations where healthcare workers are COVID-19 cases or contacts during an Omicron outbreak</p> <p>Importantly, with appropriate screening and PPE measures in place, most allied health practices would be categorised as a low or moderate risk exposure and therefore will not need to stand down.</p>
<p>Masks</p>	
<p>What mask should I be wearing?</p> <p>COVID-19: Infection prevention and control recommendation s for health and disability care</p>	<p>At all phases of the Omicron response, critical workers should wear certified well-fitting medical masks.</p> <p>First conduct a risk assessment</p> <p>See the grid below to understand the type of mask recommended at different risk settings:</p>

[workers | Ministry of Health NZ](#)

Complete a risk assessment before **every** interaction with the patient/client/resident to select appropriate PPE. All health and disability care workers¹ must be fully vaccinated.

COVID-19 Protection Framework setting	Sporadic cases	Increasing cases	Widespread cases
PATIENT/CLIENT/RESIDENT Their risk of having COVID-19	HEALTH AND DISABILITY CARE WORKER (HCW) ¹ Recommended PPE		
LOWER RISK of COVID-19 infection • No COVID-19 related symptoms ² and not a close contact of a confirmed case	Medical mask encouraged	Medical mask in clinical or care area	Medical mask at all times
MODERATE RISK of COVID-19 infection • COVID-19 related symptoms ^{2,3} but not a close contact of a confirmed case ³ OR • No COVID-19 related symptoms but a close contact OR required to self-isolate ⁴	Medical mask ⁵ and eye protection Wear a gown ⁷ or apron and gloves if exposure to blood or body fluids is likely		Medical mask ^{5,6} and eye protection Wear a gown ⁷ or apron and gloves if exposure to blood or body fluids is likely
HIGHER RISK of COVID-19 infection • COVID-19 related symptoms ² and identified by the contact tracing service as a close contact until test results are available (if clear then care as moderate risk) ³ • Confirmed COVID-19 case during infectious period ³	P2/N95 particulate respirator ⁸ and eye protection. Gown ⁷ and gloves for close contact clinical or home support care		

Mandatory Vaccine Boosters

When do I need to have my mandatory booster by?

[COVID-19: Mandatory vaccinations | Ministry of Health NZ](#)

Health and disability care workers have an extended time to receive their booster vaccination under the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Vaccinations) Order.

The current mandated date for health and disability workers to receive their booster vaccinations, if eligible, **has been extended by 10 days to 11:59pm Thursday 24 February 2022.**

This new date will also apply to any workers covered by the health mandated dates because of the work they undertake in Corrections, FENZ, Defence, Education and Police.

We will keep everyone informed as much as possible, and hear what is top of mind for you:

- Our office has held two webinars and two drop-in sessions to provide information
 - If there are any significant changes (or common issues coming through), we will schedule future sessions.
- You can expect regular weekly updates during the initial Omicron response
- Please feel free to email our office at Sophie.Oliff@health.govt.nz or Caitlin.Yeoman@health.govt.nz

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