

Allied Health sector update re the Omicron Strategy

Kia ora koutou,

Responding to Omicron: we are now at Phase 3

- Situation: widespread community cases, need to change tack to manage pressure on health services
- Objectives: Preserve (protect vulnerable communities and critical services and infrastructure)

From 11.59pm 24th February, New Zealand moved to Phase 3. At Phase 3, the focus is on safely managing COVID-19 at home. This means we can keep our hospital beds free for people who are vulnerable and need medical treatment.

For allied health service delivery, the shift to phase 3 does not have significant operational impacts, but with higher case volumes the public health changes enables health services to be focusing on preserving critical health services and infrastructure.

This fifth sector update provides you with information related to the shift to Phase 3 of the Omicron Response. On Thursday 24th February, Dr Ashley Bloomfield hosted a webinar outlining the key operational changes for the health sector. You can watch it [here](#).



Topic	Response
Testing, Isolation & Close Contact changes	
Testing at Phase 3	<p>You should only get a COVID-19 test if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you have symptoms, or • you are a Household Contact <p>At Phase 3, PCR tests will be used for people who need it most, and rapid antigen tests (RATs) will become more widely available. When you go for a test, the testing centre will let you know which test — RATs or PCR is best for you. Positive RAT results do not need to be confirmed with a PCR test unless advised.</p> <p>Return to work scheme: Critical workers who are Household Contacts will still be able to use RATs tests to return to work, if they are fully vaccinated and do not have any COVID-19 symptoms. They will need to return a negative RAT before they go to work.</p> <p>When you should get a test</p>

	<p>More information about rapid antigen tests</p> <p>Find out if you are a Critical worker</p> <p>Close Contact exemption scheme business.govt.nz</p>
<p>If you test positive for COVID-19</p>	<p>If you test positive for COVID-19, you will need to isolate for 10 days. You will be sent a link to complete an online form, which will help identify locations you have visited and people you have come into close contact with.</p> <p>You can leave isolation after 10 days — you do not need a negative test.</p> <p>What to expect if you test positive for COVID-19</p> <p>If you test positive for COVID-19 Health Hub</p>
<p>Close Contacts</p>	<p>At Phase 3, Close Contacts no longer need to isolate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you get a notification from your workplace, school or through the NZ COVID Tracer app that you are a Close Contact, you should monitor your symptoms for 10 days. If you develop symptoms get a test, and you should isolate until you get your result. • If you live with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, you are considered a Household Contact and will need to isolate for 10 days. You must get a test on Day 3 and Day 10 of your isolation. If you develop symptoms you should get a test sooner. If you are a Household Contact and you test positive, you will need to isolate for 10 days. • From Friday 25 February, if you are currently a Close Contact and are part way through your isolation, you do not need to complete your 10 days isolation and you will be permitted to leave. You do not need to get a negative COVID-19 test. <p>Close Contacts</p> <p>If you are a household close contact Health Hub</p>
<p>P2/N95 use for community health care workers</p>	
<p>Changes to IPC Mask Advice</p>	<p>With the continuing spread of Omicron, the Ministry of Health has updated its Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) guidance for personal protective equipment (PPE) selection for community health care workers (HCWs).</p> <p>The update recommends the use of P2/N95 particulate respirators for community HCWs in certain circumstances during Phases 2 and 3 of the public health response to Omicron. The decision to recommend increased use of P2/N95 particulate respirators in Phase 2 supports the preparation for Phase 3.</p>

What is the change?

The guidance already recommended that in high-risk situations, or when undertaking specific procedures that would put HCWs at risk of COVID-19 infection, P2/N95 particulate respirators should be worn.

The updated guidance now recommends:

- All healthcare staff working in Urgent Care and General Practice should wear a P2/N95 particulate respirator for all interactions with patients presenting with undifferentiated diagnosis across all phases of the Omicron outbreak.
- HCWs wear P2/N95 particulate respirators in settings where there are increasing cases (Phase 2) or widespread cases (Phase 3) and both a moderate and higher risk of COVID-19 infection.

A **moderate risk** of COVID-19 infection includes a person with:

- COVID-19 related symptoms but not a close contact of a confirmed case OR
- No COVID-19 related symptoms but a close contact OR required to self-isolate.

A **higher risk** of COVID-19 infection includes a person with:

- COVID-19 related symptoms and identified by the contact tracing service as a close contact until test results are available (if clear then care as moderate risk)
- Confirmed COVID-19 case during infectious period.

When selecting PPE, the HCW should also consider the local and regional variation for case numbers which may reduce or increase the risk.

Ordering P2/N95 particulate respirators

The Ministry's PPE Portal has been updated to enable community organisations to order P2/N95 particulate respirators – this change should take effect within the next 24 hours. The Ministry will supply 9320D+ and 1870+ models of P2/N95 particulate respirators to community organisations. Both models are very similar in design, have a high fit test success rate and have at least Level 2 Fluid Resistance.

Please ensure that you place reasonable orders for the volumes you require and with consideration of current delays in the freight network. The Ministry has pre-loaded a range of organisations with P2/N95 particulate respirators. Due to the current volume of email traffic, please only follow up regarding your orders for P2/N95s and other PPE/RATs orders when they have not arrived within a reasonable timeframe, or if you have an identified emergency need such as a facility outbreak.

Fit testing and checking P2/N95 particulate respirators

With wider use of P2/N95 particulate respirators now recommended, it is critical HCWs are aware of how to wear them correctly.

To be most effective, P2/N95 particulate respirators need to have an effective seal to the user's face and should be fit tested for each user.

	<p>However, we understand that access to fit testing services may not always be possible. In the absence of fit testing, we recommend that fit checking/user seal checking should be done every time the user puts on a particulate respirator as described by the manufacturers' instructions. Further guidance here.</p> <p>Sessional use of P2/N95 particulate respirators Another important reminder for HCWs during this time is that P2/N95 particulate respirators (like medical masks) can be and should be used sessionally. This means HCWs can continue working without needing to remove and replace their respirators every time a new activity is undertaken or completed.</p> <p>P2/N95 particulate respirators can be worn for up to four hours at a time, providing they aren't soiled, wet or damaged. Find out more.</p> <p>The use of PPE should always be considered as one of a range of IPC measures that can reduce the risk of infection from COVID-19 when used correctly and in the appropriate context.</p> <p>If you have any questions, please contact ipc@health.govt.nz</p>
<p>Managing COVID positive healthcare workers</p>	<p>Guidance for situations where healthcare workers are COVID-19 cases or contacts during an Omicron outbreak</p>
<p>Managing COVID-19 workplace exposures</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>

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

- Subscribe to health key messages. You can do this on the [Ministry of Health website](#). You can also access previous editions.
- 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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