

COVID-19 Elimination Strategy for Aotearoa New Zealand

Summary

Our elimination strategy is a sustained approach to keep it out, find it and stamp it out. We do this through: controlling entry at the border; disease surveillance; physical distancing and hygiene measures; testing for and tracing all potential cases; isolating cases and their close contacts; and broader public health controls depending on the alert level we are in.

1. The Government's overall public health strategy in respect of the COVID-19 pandemic affecting New Zealand is **elimination**. That is, to apply a range of control measures in order to stop the transmission of COVID-19 in Aotearoa New Zealand.
2. Elimination does not mean eradicating the virus permanently from New Zealand; rather it is being confident we have eliminated chains of transmission in our community for at least 28 days and can effectively contain any future imported cases from overseas.
3. It is accepted that this approach will be needed in the long term ie, for many months or longer, depending on the emerging epidemiology and evidence around the disease and its management and progress with developing safe and effective treatments and/or vaccines.

Pillars of the strategy

4. **Border controls** are a key tool for stopping the introduction and spread of new cases from overseas. All people entering New Zealand are currently isolated in a government-controlled facility for at least 14 days on arrival, ensuring no new COVID-19 infections are introduced into the wider population. We anticipate border controls being progressively relaxed as it becomes safe to do so, for example, if we are confident certain countries eg, Australia, have low levels of community transmission. Further work will be needed to determine criteria for this.
5. **Robust case detection and surveillance** allows us to identify new cases quickly and take appropriate action. The surveillance plan for COVID-19 currently includes testing of anyone with respiratory symptoms, and sentinel testing in the wider population as part of broader surveillance measures to provide assurance that we are not missing cases. The latter will emphasise testing for Māori and Pacific populations, as they are likely to be disproportionately affected by a widespread outbreak. Access to testing must be easy and equity focussed. Targeted population-based testing will also be employed especially in institutional settings along with seroprevalence surveys in the future. A range of intelligence sources will assist in the early identification of emerging clusters.
6. **Effective contact tracing and quarantine** is an essential part of controlling transmission of the virus. Successful contact tracing means 80 percent of contacts of a person who has a positive COVID-19 test are traced and quarantined within four days of exposure to the case, to prevent onward transmission. Public health units, which regularly follow-up cases and identify contacts and clusters, have been funded to enhance their ability to do so. A National Close Contact Service and National Contact Tracing Technology Solution have been developed within the Ministry of Health to support contract tracing nationally. Additional technology platforms are also in development to further enhance contact tracing.

7. **Strong community support of control measures.** The most important measures to restrict the spread will remain physical distancing, good hygiene, staying home if sick and effective use of PPE when required. These “voluntary” measures are fundamental to the overall response and a high level of compliance is needed to avoid having to go back up alert levels in the future. Survey data shows continuing very high public support for the government’s strategy and there have been only a relatively small number of incidents of non-compliance to date. Ensuring ongoing public support for these measures is essential through clear communication and community building initiatives across a range of different age, ethnic and social groups. Confidence in the workplace and especially healthcare settings is enhanced by the appropriate use of PPE.

End game

8. The aim of the elimination strategy is to stop community transmission of COVID-19 in New Zealand. This includes preventing onward transmission from cases that might arrive in New Zealand from overseas. Until we have effective treatments or a vaccine to support this strategy, we will rely on the pillars above and adjust our approach as more information on the disease becomes available.
9. The Ministry is working with other agencies to ensure New Zealand has access to an effective vaccine as soon as possible (likely to be at least 12-18 months). A vaccine strategy will likely be built on engagement with key researchers and exploring manufacturing capability as well as successful engagement with global supply chains. A successful mass immunisation programme will be required before relevant controls can be relaxed.



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