

# COVID-19

## Kia ora koutou

Nau mai Te Wiki o te Reo Māori me ō wero, me ō āheitanga, me ō whakaaweawetanga ki te motu. Tēnā tātou katoa.

I welcome Māori language week with its many challenges, opportunities, and the inspiration it brings to our country. Greetings to you all.

There are more than 5,500 GPs in the country, and they and their practice teams have been the backbone of our testing programme and other aspects of our COVID-19 response. This is both in practices and helping to staff CBACs during the COVID-19 response.

This is over and above their critical role in delivering the usual wide range of health care to New Zealanders.

I appreciate the way you have adapted to new ways of working to keep yourselves and your patients safe. I know it hasn't been easy, but your efforts have contributed significantly to our successful response.



Director-General of  
Health, Dr Ashley  
Bloomfield



John Junior Panatahi Firmin is a new COVID-19 response star, winning hearts as these videos about staying safe go viral.

## The Golden Rule videos

We've launched a new series on Facebook as a part of our Māori COVID-19 social media campaign. This new series, featuring up-and-coming star John Junior Panatahi Firmin, aims to communicate our health 'golden rules' to families and whānau online.

So far, three videos have been released and the series has been seen more than 9 million times, both in New Zealand and overseas. And it's no surprise – Panatahi and his whānau are charming, relatable, and down to earth. Our team carefully picked the concept of the video to ensure it would resonate with whānau online, empowering them to keep themselves safe and protected against COVID-19.

Make sure to like and follow our [page](#) to keep up to date with our campaigns.

## Testing

I'd like to take this chance to remind everyone working in the health and disability sector that a COVID-19 test is free of charge, whether a patient is displaying symptoms of COVID-19 or not. We continue to encourage everyone who has symptoms to be tested, and patients do not have to be a New Zealand citizen or resident to be tested.

The test is still free, and people will not be charged for care if they test positive. The only time a patient may need to pay for a test is if it's for the purpose of entering another country — see [advice for travellers](#).

We are encouraging any patients who have been charged for tests to report these to their local DHB or PHO.

## COVID-19 Vaccine

Last week, AstraZeneca paused an overseas clinical trial of COVID-19 vaccine to investigate an unexplained illness in a participant. As you know, such pauses are routine in large clinical trials of new medicines and vaccines, but following a careful review, the trial has been recommenced.

New Zealand's vaccine strategy aims to ensure access to a safe and effective vaccine in order to implement our preferred immunisation programme at the earliest possible time. This work is being led by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment alongside the Ministry of Health, Medsafe, PHARMAC, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

We're proactively following and working collaboratively with the World Health Organization, Gavi, the Vaccines Alliance, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovation (CEPI) and others about development, testing and availability of vaccine.

The Ministry of Health is developing a bespoke [COVID-19 immunisation programme](#) for roll-out when a safe and effective vaccine becomes available. Any vaccine for COVID-19 will need to meet internationally-accepted criteria for quality, safety and efficacy before [Medsafe](#) will approve its use here. Medsafe has also been engaging with a number of pharmaceutical companies about their vaccines.

## COVID Tracer app update

Last week we issued a further update to the NZ COVID Tracer app to make scanning the QR codes faster and easier.

The app now opens directly to the scan screen if you're logged in. You can also now bypass the login screen to scan immediately if you don't have time to enter your password. You can then log in later to view or edit your digital diary.

The other change is that diary entries will now be stored on your phone for 60 days instead of 31 before they are deleted. This will make it easier for contact tracers to establish epidemiological links between cases of COVID-19.

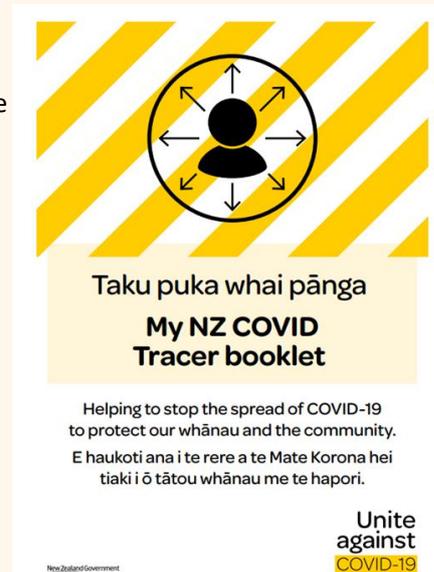
It's great to see so many New Zealanders getting into the habit of keeping track of their movements with the app. I encourage you to take the additional step of adding notes to your diary entries to record who you were with, either when you scan or by putting some time aside each evening.

## COVID Tracer booklet

Over 100,000 of the new contact tracing diary booklets have been ordered since 2 September. The booklets have been designed to help people who are unable to use the NZ COVID Tracer app to keep a written record of where they've been and who they've seen.

If you haven't already ordered enough booklets for the communities you serve, please place an order now by visiting <https://order.hpa.org.nz/collections/covid-19/products/covid-19-booklet>

Please note the booklet is currently being translated into 22 different languages. To request non-English versions of the booklet, or if you need enough booklets for more than 50 people, please request your booklets by email to [covid19response@dpmc.govt.nz](mailto:covid19response@dpmc.govt.nz).



## Āwhina app proving useful for health workers

We're continuing to receive positive feedback on the Āwhina app. The app was designed specifically for health professionals so we're glad you're finding it useful, and of course we encourage to download the app if you haven't already.

As of September almost 15,000 health workers have used the app and over 83,000 articles were viewed in August alone on COVID-19 and a range of health topics.

Āwhina puts the latest COVID-19 information in your hands. More information, including how to download the app, is on the [Ministry's website](#). You can also email [Awahina.info@health.govt.nz](mailto:Awahina.info@health.govt.nz) or call 0800 855 066 for more information.

## Border orders

Last week we further strengthened our management of COVID-19 at the border with four new Orders. The new Orders set out a routine testing regime at the border and MIQ facilities with the introduction of a required testing frequency of weekly or fortnightly for workers deemed higher risk.

Based on potential exposure to COVID-19 and taking a precautionary approach, the new Order means we can keep our port workers, airport, transport and MIQ workers safe. Routine testing for other border workers with a lower risk threshold is under development.

Additionally an Order that governs the legal requirements for people while they're in managed isolation and quarantine further clarifies that those coming back to New Zealand must be in an MIQ for at least 14 days and have a negative COVID-19 test before they can leave the facility. This now includes anyone who arrives by sea and has not been quarantined on board their vessel for 14 days.

A new Managed Isolation and Quarantine Order brings all the managed isolation and quarantine requirements into one place, whether people are new arrivals by air or sea, or are community cases.

To ensure we keep the risk of COVID-19 spreading as low as possible, we continue to do further work with our ports, Air New Zealand and other affected airlines and unions and will be announcing an update soon.

We need to play the long game with COVID-19, with all the reserves and stamina we have. We've already had some significant successes, and with all your continuing support, I know we will be able to continue to deliver a highly successful response to this challenging pandemic.

Please take care of your family, colleagues and yourselves.

Ngā mihi nui

Dr Ashley Bloomfield

Director-General of Health