

COVID-19

Kia ora koutou

New Zealand has reached another milestone this week, with the return of the Auckland area to Alert Level 1. While most people are enjoying a relatively normal lifestyle again, we do need to remain vigilant to prevent any further spread of COVID-19 outbreaks.

As trusted members of communities around the country, health and disability workers are doing a great job sharing public health messages which keep New Zealanders safe. I appreciate your ongoing support with this, and if you have the opportunity, these are the key messages we need New Zealanders to be reminded of:

- If you are unwell, stay at home and do not travel.
- If you become unwell while on holiday, call Healthline, your GP or nurse practitioner, who can advise whether you should be tested. If you are advised to get a test, please do – don't wait until you get home to get tested.
- Keep signing in to places using the NZ COVID Tracer app or keep a record of where you've been.
- Maintain good hygiene practices, including washing and drying your hands, or use hand sanitiser if you can't, and consider wearing a mask on public transport and flights.

Thanks for your ongoing help with this.



Director-General of Health,
Dr Ashley Bloomfield

Surge Workforce

Since March 2020, we have deployed 84 people to support the COVID-19 response across a range of settings, including in hospitals, aged residential care facilities, managed isolation facilities and public health units. We have also provided support to schools and social service organisations.

The roles that have been filled have been varied, and include nurses, an ophthalmologist, an anaesthetist, a healthcare assistant and a pharmacist. The locations have been across the country, from Northland through to Gisborne and down to Christchurch.

There has been a fantastic response to our request for people to register for the surge workforce. We have over 10,500 people on the database, with 3,700 registered as available to

work. The fact that we have not had to deploy the vast majority of you is testament to the work that the team of 5 million has done to eliminate the virus and protect our health system.

Thank you to those of you who put yourself forward to assist with New Zealand's COVID-19 response. We appreciate you making yourselves available and the willingness with which you've engaged with us as we respond to workforce needs.

Health workers embrace Āwhina

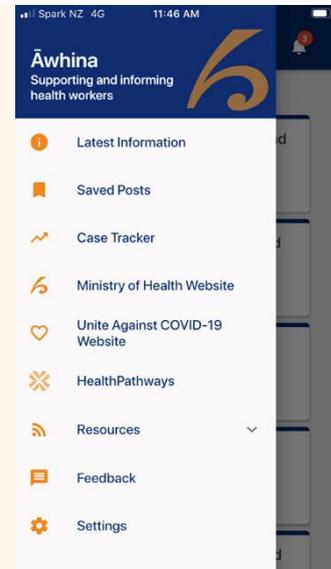
More health workers than ever have downloaded the Āwhina app – but even more encouraging is the sharp increase in how often people are using it.

In September, there were 17% more sessions overall, 64% more sessions per user, and 2% more article views. The COVID outbreak over the last couple of months appears to have driven more interest in the app, with three times the number of people using it in August than in July.

There are now more than 17,600 people who have Āwhina on their phones as a ready reference for reliable COVID-related health information, as well as general health information.

We updated the app again in September so that users can mark which articles were useful and provide feedback through the app on how we can improve these – so far 95% of those who responded said they found the content useful. Other new features include showing the most recent notifications first, and showing how many unread updates you have.

To download the app, go to [our website](#).



The Āwhina menu, and the new alert for unread updates.

Reminders about testing

Currently the Ministry of Health doesn't recommend pre-departure testing for people either entering or leaving New Zealand. The benefits of that would be limited, and it's difficult to implement effectively. This is also the position held by the World Health Organization.

As part of the COVID-19 Elimination Strategy, we're implementing a range of public health measures to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 spread in the community. The limitations of pre-departure testing mean it could only complement current measures to combat COVID-19.

Testing for COVID-19 is still free in New Zealand, whether patients are showing symptoms or not, and irrespective of citizenship, immigration status, nationality or level of medical insurance coverage. People still need to pay the usual fees for any other health care.

Guidance for testing symptomatic and asymptomatic people [is here](#), and the strategy for 5 – 18 October [is here](#).

Don't forget the "Golden Rules"!

John Junior Panatahi Firmin is back, and he's got something to say. There are two new videos to enjoy and share – this time about contact tracing and physical distancing.

Check out his technique for using the COVID Tracer app with his eyes closed, and how he practices distancing with the farm animals.

The combined videos have been seen more than 10 million times, which shows what an effective resource they are. The videos can all be found here:

- [Contact tracing](#)
- [Physical distancing](#)
- [Hand hygiene](#)
- [Coughing and sneezing](#)



John Junior Panatahi Firmin demonstrates safe physical distancing.

Ngā mihi nui

Dr Ashley Bloomfield
Director-General of Health