

COVID-19

Kia ora koutou

Here at the Ministry, we are constantly reviewing what we've learned from each outbreak or cluster to help us prepare for any future incursions of the virus.

We have a huge work programme around COVID-19. This includes delivering a sustainable surveillance and testing strategy for New Zealand, working with DHBs to support a dedicated workforce for managed isolation and quarantine facilities, addressing psychosocial issues, rapid ongoing review of policy settings, and preparing to deliver a vaccine when a safe and effective option arrives.

I greatly appreciate the feedback we get about what's happening on the ground around the motu, including key issues and concerns, as well as new ideas and approaches. Please keep them coming!

Thank you for your insights, your mahi and support as we help New Zealand respond to COVID-19.

Ngā mihi nui

Dr Ashley Bloomfield
Director-General of Health



Director-General of Health,
Dr Ashley Bloomfield

New vaccine oversight group

New Zealand needs to be fully ready for when a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine is available.

The Immunisation Programme Governance Group for COVID-19 Vaccine met for the first time this week. The Group will act as an oversight and assurance body for this important work, and reports directly to the Minister of Health.

The nine-member Group will oversee progress on the purchasing, sequencing and delivery of any successful COVID-19 vaccines.

I am pleased that former Director-General of Health Dame Dr Karen Poutasi has agreed to be the Chair, as she brings a wealth of experience from across the education and health sectors. The other members are: John Whaanga, Steve Maharey, Bruce Plested, Carolyn Tremain, Murray Jack, Ngāhiwi Tomoana, Dr Fa'afetai Sopoaga, and myself.

Further information on progress with the vaccine work will be published on our website as it becomes available.

Covid tracing card trial announced

Yesterday the Government announced that the trial programme for the proposed contact tracing card is now moving into the final 'on the ground' and analysis phases in Ngongotahā near Rotorua.

The Ministry has worked closely in partnership with Te Arawa and the Universities of Waikato and Otago to co-design these phases of the programme. Te Arawa knows the Ngongotahā community better than anyone and has the skills and experience needed to support a successful community trial.

The programme will ask between 500 and 1,500 members of the Ngongotahā community to wear the cards as they go about their daily activities and attend community events. Registration will commence on 30 October, and the trial will end on 15 November.

The cards use Bluetooth to exchange 'digital handshakes' with each other to keep an anonymised record of participants' close contacts with each other.

The trial will help us understand how well the contact tracing cards perform in a real-world scenario, whether they successfully integrate with our contact tracing systems, and, most importantly, if people will accept and use them.

The results of the trial will help inform a decision by Government later this year on whether contact tracing cards should be rolled out more widely as part of our overall contact tracing system, which includes the NZ COVID Tracer app.



Kiwis using COVID Tracer app

This week, the NZ COVID Tracer app reached the significant milestone of 100 million scans, after an increase in use over Labour Day weekend. However, scan volumes are still below the 2 million a day we saw in early September.

With the current low level of usage, our contact tracers might not get a head-start on breaking the chain of transmission if there is a further outbreak of COVID-19. This could give the

virus more time to spread and make it harder to bring the outbreak under control.

It's important that everyone gets back into the habit of using the app wherever they go, so we can keep a step ahead of the virus.

I encourage you all to continue encouraging people to scan the QR codes whenever they are in the community. The more we all scan, the safer we'll all be.

Supporting our border and MIQ workers

Many of you will have heard unfortunate stories about critical workers at the border and in our MIQ facilities experiencing some kind of discrimination or stigmatisation when they go back into their communities.

People's fear of COVID-19 has occasionally caused them to react unreasonably or unfairly to the nurses, cleaners, security staff, and others who stand between us and the virus. Given the precautions that are taken to keep these staff safe, there is no reason for anyone to shun them or treat them differently to anyone else in the community.

A range of agencies, including the Ministry of Health, are developing a campaign to ensure frontline workers get the support and respect they deserve, both at work and in community.

If you happen to see it happen, please call it out and encourage others to be kind and supportive. It's not the people that are the problem - it's the virus. People are the solution.

Guidelines for businesses and services

Using what we've learned from the recent cases in the Auckland community cluster, we're encouraging employers to take an active role in supporting employees to keep themselves safe.

Businesses and health services adopting good public health practices will support our defence against the virus re-emerging. We recommend that you:

- ask workers to stay home if they are sick
- advise people with possible COVID-19 symptoms that they should not enter the workplace
- direct people to call Healthline (0800 358 5453) or contact their general practice if they are feeling unwell
- display the official NZ COVID Tracer QR codes and encourage people to use them.

More information for businesses and services is available on [our website](#).