

## Kia ora koutou

In the last week, the total number of confirmed and probable cases in New Zealand passed 2000. This is considerably lower than many other countries around the world, and we are committed to keeping it that way.

Every such milestone is a reminder that we must continue to be vigilant. We can stay on top of the virus if we all keep doing the right thing.

One of the strengths of our response has been collective action – in particular, activity in each other's interests – AKA kindness. This especially includes people who, through no fault of their own, end up being infected with the virus or affected by an outbreak. They need and deserve our support and kindness. Please spread the word and encourage others to do the same.

Ngā mihi nui

Dr Ashley Bloomfield

Director-General of Health



Director-General of Health,  
Dr Ashley Bloomfield

## Supply of PPE over the holiday period

We have a number of initiatives underway to ensure DHBs have PPE on hand over the Christmas and New Year period in case of any change in Alert Level.

DHBs need to place orders with the National PPE Supply Chain by 14 December to ensure each DHB has four weeks' supply available.

We also have people on-call for the Christmas and New Year closedown to ensure there is access to additional PPE if required. Please contact your DHB or email [COVID.HealthSupplyChain@health.govt.nz](mailto:COVID.HealthSupplyChain@health.govt.nz).

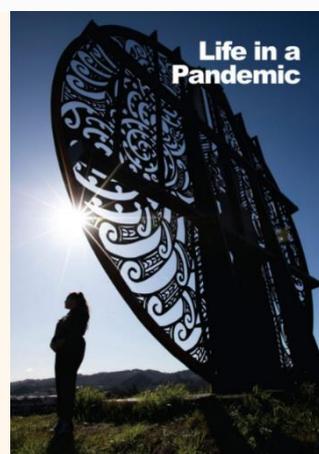
## Disability and resilience

I want to acknowledge and commend to you a recently-published book which captures a snapshot of Level 4 lockdown for people living with a disability and/or autism.

*Life in a Pandemic* was published by Life Unlimited Charitable Trust with support from the Ministry of Health.

The book is inspiring in the way it shows the resilience, strength and love of people with disabilities and their families/whanau. Stories are often told in the first person, by people all over the country.

There's a short video about the book [here](#), and more information on the [Life Unlimited website](#).



*Life in a Pandemic* tells stories from the disability community's experiences of Level 4 lockdown.

## NZ's approach to approving potential COVID-19 vaccines

There's been more international news in the last week about COVID-19 vaccine trials, and in New Zealand, we're preparing to roll out vaccines once they become available.

However, before any vaccines are used in New Zealand, they will need to go through Medsafe's full approval process. This will examine the data that companies provide and whether it meets internationally agreed criteria for safety and efficacy.

While Medsafe will be streamlining its assessment processes and prioritising the assessment of COVID-19 vaccines over other pharmaceuticals to approve a vaccine more quickly, we will not be compromising the integrity of the process or 'lowering the bar' on vaccine safety.

## Shortage of oral contraceptives

As you know, the availability of some medicines we import has been affected by COVID-19 this year. Existing pressures on global medicine manufacture and transport has been exacerbated by the economic effects of the pandemic.

Currently there are two oral contraceptives with supply issues in New Zealand:

- Brevinor 1/28 is out of stock and there are no equivalent alternative brands. Patients taking this will need to change to a different contraceptive.
- Norimin is out of stock, but three to four months' supply of Necon is available as an alternative until Norimin is available again, likely to be in early 2021.

I encourage all health professionals to be pro-active about identifying patients who may need to plan ahead for a change in medicine resulting from global shortages or supply chain disruption, to ensure their transition is as safe and comfortable as possible. Please also remind patients not stockpile their medicines.

The best reference for the most up to date information on all medicine supply issues is [PHARMAC's website](#).

## Exemptions for masks

The Ministry has created a face covering exemption card for people who have a disability or health condition and may not be able to wear a face covering safely or comfortably.

While users are not required to show the card, they may feel more comfortable showing something official saying they do not need to wear a face covering.

The exemption card can be printed in credit card size, A5 or A4, or simply downloaded onto your phone.

Those who believe they are exempt from wearing a face covering, should visit the website of their relevant disability provider or call Healthline to get a copy of the card.