

COVID-19

Kia ora koutou,

A very happy New Year to you all. I hope wherever you were in New Zealand you managed to have a break and switch off with friends and whānau.

I want to firstly thank all our essential workers, including health workers, for their efforts in our MIQ facilities over the break. Your commitment to protecting New Zealand's borders enables our country to live without COVID-19 in our communities. Every day you go to work you keep the rest of us safe and I am so grateful.

Over the last week, it has been announced that all travellers, excluding those coming from Australia, Antarctica and some Pacific Islands, will undergo a Day zero test when they arrive into managed isolation and they must demonstrate they have had a negative COVID-19 test before they depart for New Zealand.

While we remain focused on stopping COVID-19 at our borders, significant work is also underway to roll out the vaccine this year. Vaccines enable us to create a 'living border' which is another way we will protect all New Zealanders from this virus and take us one step closer to returning life to our 'new normal'.

My team and I look forward to working with many of you over the coming year.

Ngā mihi nui,
Dr Ashley Bloomfield
Director-General of Health



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Strengthening our border

We've been monitoring overseas developments very closely, and, like many other countries, have heightened concerns about the new variants of the virus and their potential to spread more rapidly.

To add further levels of protection at our border, all passengers from any destination (excluding Australia, Antarctica and some Pacific Islands) will be required to undergo Day zero testing upon arrival into New Zealand. Routine Day 3 and Day 12 tests will continue.

In addition, New Zealand has introduced pre-departure testing and a negative COVID-19 test result will soon be required for all travellers (excluding those from Australia, Antarctica and some Pacific Islands) arriving in New Zealand.

For more information about Day 0 and pre-departure testing you can visit our [website](#).

Keeping summer unstoppable - tests available nationwide

I know people throughout New Zealand Aotearoa enjoyed a Christmas and New Year period free of community cases and we'd all like to enjoy the remaining weeks of this summer, uninterrupted by COVID-19. While we can't control the weather, we can control the virus by taking a few extra steps in our daily routines.

Please continue to remind people to stay home if they're unwell, and to get tested if they develop symptoms. Testing services will remain available nationwide throughout the summer, including the upcoming January and February public holidays.

As a reminder, our [current testing guidance](#) confirms anyone with symptoms should get a test, and they can do this anywhere in the country. People who are holidaying should not wait until they get home to be tested: they should visit [Healthpoint](#) as the main source of information for COVID-19 testing locations, as this website helps people find the testing location nearest to them, with full confidence that this information is accurate and up to date. Thanks again for your ongoing support in providing testing services.

For more information and the latest updates, visit the [Unite against COVID-19](#) website.



Vaccine

2021 brings preparations for New Zealand's COVID-19 vaccine front and centre, with media and public interest understandably high.

It's important to keep in mind that while New Zealand's vaccine rollout timeline will look different to that of other countries, it doesn't mean vaccination is any less of a priority for us. The success of our elimination strategy – and the strong community support for its control measures – means that New Zealand is not facing an emergency COVID-19 situation like

many other parts of the world. And, of course, a big focus for us all this year is keeping it that way.

The vaccine mahi will carefully balance efficacy and safety but also timeliness of our approval processes. This involves close collaboration between Medsafe and their offshore counterparts, in particular the Therapeutic Goods Administration in Australia, and they will continue to share vital information that benefits us all.

On home soil, our expectation is that we'll start to vaccinate our frontline health workers in the second quarter of 2021. Prioritising their immunisation reflects the fact they are among the groups at greatest risk of being exposed to COVID-19. Vaccinating the wider New Zealand public will follow in the second half of 2021.

As always, we thank everyone for their sustained commitment to our 'keep it out, find it and stamp it out' approach – every little bit counts and the enduring success of our elimination strategy depends on it.