

### COVID-19 message from the Director-General of Health - 2 June 2021

#### **Kia ora koutou,**

The current pause of quarantine-free travel with Victoria while our Australian colleagues work to detect and manage all subsequent cases, is one of the ways we continue to protect New Zealanders from COVID-19.

While these occasional pauses of travel can cause disruption, they are an important measure to prevent COVID-19 entering the New Zealand community. When they happen, the travel declaration we require visitors to complete is key for enabling us to contact travellers who have come to New Zealand from the affected area and advise them what to do. In this case, we have contacted 4626 people who flew from Melbourne to New Zealand between 20-25 May and provided instructions to get a test and self-isolate until they have a negative result. We know that the variant of COVID-19 being found in Melbourne is the B.1.617 variant first reported in India, which appears to be more infectious than earlier variants. The work continues to ensure every one of these visitors is contacted, tested and appropriately isolated.



Director-General of Health,  
Dr Ashley Bloomfield

Ensuring that communities nationwide have the best information possible about the COVID-19 vaccine is an important part of our rollout programme. The Ministry has been monitoring attitudes and public sentiment towards the vaccine since last year and these insights help inform our approach. It's been great to see the proportion of people intending to get vaccinated increase in the last research period to 77%, up from 69% in March. Among Māori, the proportion is now at 71%, up from 64% in March, while for Pasifika it has increased significantly to 79% from 59% in the same period. These insights [are published on our website](#).

We continue to see a high level of interest in COVID-19 vaccination, with people particularly interested in when they can be vaccinated. The Ministry has provided additional guidance on clinical criteria for Groups 2 and 3 (below).

While all DHBs have made a start on vaccinating Group 3, vaccine supply will play a significant role in the pace of vaccinating this group until July. We expect to have more certainty about upcoming supplies over the coming weeks. With more than 6,500 vaccinators now completing the COVID-19 Pfizer vaccination, preparations continue to enable us to scale up over the coming months. The national booking system is also being rolled out to DHBs during July.

Thank you for your ongoing efforts to ensure the COVID-19 vaccine is delivered to all priority groups as quickly and efficiently as possible, and for working together to ensure all New Zealanders understand the value and importance of getting vaccinated.

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



## Section 70 orders related to Victoria travel pause

To underscore the importance of individuals following the advice they have been given by the public health units or the national contact tracing team, a Section 70 of the Health Act 1956 can be issued.

A Section 70 order enables an authorised Medical Officer of Health to require those in the order to meet public health requirements to undergo testing and to isolate until they receive their result. Any time a person receives a direction from a medical officer of health they must comply with it. There are several Section 70 orders relating to recent travellers from Victoria, concerning locations of interest in Melbourne and pre-departure testing. These are published on the [Ministry's website](#).

## Guidance on clinical criteria for vaccinating Groups 2 and 3

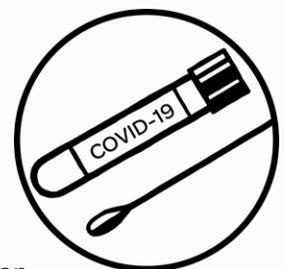
The Ministry has provided clarity on [underlying health conditions on our website](#). This means more people in Group 2 in the Counties Manukau DHB area, and more people in Group 3 can now get earlier access to the vaccine. The page also includes vaccination advice for disabled people.

As always, clinicians may use their discretion around whether additional patients should be included in Group 2 (if in the Counties Manukau DHB area) or Group 3 if they are at a higher risk of poor health outcomes from getting COVID-19. Equity is a primary concern. Proof of diagnosis or condition is not required.

## Expansion of saliva testing for frontline border workers

The Minister for COVID-19 Response announced that border workers who have to be tested for COVID-19 once a week because of their role will soon be able to have the less-invasive saliva test as part of their mandatory testing. The saliva test will complement regular nasopharyngeal swabbing, while reducing its frequency.

We've already held a workshop to work through rollout details with the sector and plan ongoing sector engagement. Following this initial roll-out we'll be carrying out an assessment to determine if and how saliva testing can best be rolled out to workers, who are currently subject to mandatory testing every 14 days.



## Latest IPC audits of managed isolation facilities released

The Ministry of Health conducts regular audits into infection prevention and control (IPC) at the managed isolation and quarantine (MIQ) facilities around New Zealand. MIQ facilities are an important part of our border measures to keep COVID-19 out of the community. It's critical to the health of the country that MIQ facilities are well-maintained, and any infection brought in by people entering New Zealand cannot spread into the community.

Two sets of audits were released in May 2021. These were for audits conducted from December 2020 to February 2021, and from February to April 2021. The majority of recommendations for improvement in both audits have been addressed. You can see the respective audit results and two reports to the Minister [here](#).





## Updated Testing Guidance available

We have now published the latest COVID-19 *Testing Guidance for the Health Sector* and you can find the [updated version of the Testing Guidance document](#) on the Ministry's website.

For the next six weeks the **primary focus** of the Testing Plan is testing at the border, particularly testing arrivals into New Zealand, international air and maritime crew, and border facing workers, including MIQ workers. The **secondary focus** of the Testing Plan is testing in the community to quickly test and identify any cases of COVID-19, should it be present.

Some of the key updates since the previous Guidance include:

- People should be tested if symptomatic, or they come under the Required Testing Order, regardless of their vaccination status
- Testing anyone who is symptomatic is particularly important as we head into winter
- Elderly people should be tested if symptomatic
- For children, the severity of illness should not drive the decision whether or not to test. Test if they meet Higher Index of Suspicion criteria, are a contact of a case, if otherwise clinically indicated, or by parental request.

## COVID-19 Vaccine

### COVID-19 Webinar 1 June 2021

Some of you may have attended Tuesday's Northern Region Health Coordination Centre (NRHCC) COVID-19 Vaccination Programme Update for Primary Care, which was recorded and the link to the recording is provided here: [Webinar recording - COVID-19 Vaccination Rollout in Auckland - update for primary care - 1 June 2021](#)  
This will also be made available on Auckland Region HealthPathways.

The slides from the presentations are attached (*see attachment (1), (2) and (3)*).

Many GPs and Practice Nurse submitted questions for the presentation and the NRHCC are working through these and will share a Q&A sheet via Medinz soon. Once complete this will also be added to Auckland Region HealthPathways.

For specific COVID-19 vaccination programme queries, please contact Carol at Auckland PHO – [carol@aucklandpho.co.nz](mailto:carol@aucklandpho.co.nz)

The next COVID-19 Vaccination Programme Update webinar will be held in July and a Medinz invitation will be sent along with registration details closer the time.

