



Operating at COVID-19 Alert Level 4: Guidance for housing and housing support service providers

Updated 20 August 2021

He kokonga whare e kitea; he kokonga ngakau e kore e kitea
(The corners of the house are visible; the corners of the heart are invisible)

This whakatauki reminds us that whilst we are attending to immediate, urgent, practical needs, it is also important to be compassionate and care for the most vulnerable.

Purpose

This document provides guidance to **housing and housing support service providers** contracted by HUD (includes providers of Housing First, Transitional Housing, Sustaining Tenancies, Community Housing and other accommodation and housing focussed support services) during the COVID-19 response period. **This guidance was correct as of 9am Friday 20 August 2021 and will be reviewed and updated as new information is released.**

What you need to know

What is COVID-19

COVID-19 is an illness that can affect your lungs and airways. It is caused by a type of coronavirus. There are simple steps that can be taken to protect you and your family/whānau. More information can be found on the [Ministry of Health](#) (MOH) website, the [Ministry of Social Development](#) (MSD) website and at [covid19.govt.nz](https://www.covid19.govt.nz).

General Information

New Zealand is at COVID-19 [Alert Level 4](#) from 11.59pm on Tuesday 17 August 2021. This guidance is relevant to all regions currently at COVID-19 alert level 4. During this time a range of measures are being applied locally or nationally including:

- People are instructed to stay at home, noting the exemption for essential workers undertaking their work.
- Education facilities and businesses are closed except for essential services and lifeline utilities.
- Mask wearing is now mandatory (for those 12 or over) when **providing or accessing any essential service**.

As organisations supporting people and whānau with a place to live, we confirm that housing providers and housing support services are [Essential Services](#).

Relevant organisations have been provided with a letter that staff of these essential service organisation can show to authorities as needed during Alert Level 4 and use as proof that they are providing essential services.



As providers of essential services, it is important you continue providing your services, while also keeping staff and the people you support safe. Staff should be staying home and providing services via text/phone where possible and any movement should be for essential purposes /emergencies only.

The [covid19.govt.nz](https://www.covid19.govt.nz) website provides a range of information and resources regarding the steps we can all take to unite against the virus.

Tikanga

Given the severe impact of the 1918-19 pandemic on Māori and the increased susceptibility of Māori to the influenza A (H1N1) 2009 pandemic, consideration of the specific needs of Māori, cultural sensitivity and the impact of a pandemic on traditional Māori protocols (tikanga) should be an integral aspect of pandemic preparedness planning at local and national levels¹.

Many iwi, hapū, whānau and marae implemented changes to tikanga when meeting and greeting. The use of hongī, harīru and kīhi have been discouraged and whānau have been asked to practice virtual or contactless greetings such as “the east coast wave” or the long-distance hongī “hā mamao”.

Te Rōpū Whakakaupapa Urutā (National Māori Pandemic Group) have provided more guidelines for whānau and iwi www.uruta.maori.nz.

Working with whānau

All housing and housing support service providers are encouraged to work closely together with Ministry of Social Development (MSD), HUD, each other and other essential support services to identify appropriate local solutions for people who don't have anywhere to self-isolate (i.e. rough sleepers).

Community based support work (e.g. Housing First, Sustaining Tenancies, Housing Placement) should be facilitated over the telephone or internet where possible. Where this is not possible (e.g. where whānau do not have access to a device or wifi), support should be provided from the doorstep, with the worker and whānau maintaining a minimum distance of 2 meters from each other at all times and wearing appropriate PPE including masks.

At this time, accommodation with shared bathroom, kitchen and social facilities such as night shelters, boarding houses, hostels and single site transitional housing do not need to close unless directed to do so by MSD, HUD or MOH.

However, increased cleaning programmes should be implemented for all shared spaces and if possible - identify spaces that can be used to accommodate individuals with mild respiratory symptoms and separate them from others.

Mask wearing is now mandatory (for those 12 years of age or over) when **providing or accessing any essential service**.

¹ <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/influenza-pandemic-plan-framework-action-2nd-edn-aug17.pdf>



Transporting whānau

At Alert Level 4, all types of transport and travel are restricted. Only travel for essential reasons, such as to get food or medicine, or to go to work if you are an essential services worker. If you need to transport whānau to their new accommodation, to the supermarket or to a medical appointment and they DO NOT have either symptoms of, or a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19, then the [covid19.govt.nz](https://www.covid19.govt.nz) states that the use of private vehicles is allowed, with physical distancing being practiced. Mask wearing is now mandatory (for those 12 years of age or over) when providing or accessing any essential service including transportation.

Alternatively, if you do not have COVID-19 related concerns you can use **taxis** and ride-sharing services, but only for essential purposes.

- Essential and emergency workers can continue to use taxis and ride-sharing services whilst carrying out essential services – such as transporting whānau to their motel accommodation.
- Everyone else can only use taxis and ride-sharing services for essential purposes.

Taxi and ride-sharing specific practices to prevent the spread of the virus

Information about travelling on public transport including taxis and ride-shares is available on [COVID-19 public transport](https://www.covid-19.govt.nz/public-transport) website.

Where individuals or whānau **HAVE SYMPTOMS** of COVID 19, services should call Healthline 0800 358 5453 for guidance before deciding if it is appropriate to use private vehicles to transport that whānau.

Whānau who could be at high risk

Identify whānau who could be a [high risk](#) for complications from COVID-19 and make proactive contact with them to identify any additional support they may need including registering for vaccination, if not vaccinated already. People at [high risk](#) of severe COVID-19 infection include:

- people who have conditions that compromise their immune systems or have compromised immune systems as a side effect of taking certain medications, such as chemotherapy.
- people who have chronic medical conditions such as liver disease, heart disease, kidney disease, diabetes mellitus, lung disease or other long-term conditions.
- people with a disability and co-existing long-term conditions.
- people who have medical devices that enter the body (e.g. a catheter, tracheotomy, ileostomy, feeding tube) people with surgical or large wounds.
- people older than 70 years of age (noting for Māori this would be lower with some suggesting 60 years of age).

Taking care of your staff

Mask staff wearing is now mandatory (for those 12 years of age or over) when **providing or accessing** any **essential service** including transportation.

The health and safety of your staff should not be compromised. Personal hygiene and education are paramount. Staff and whānau should be reminded to frequently [wash their hands](#) for 20 seconds and catch coughs and [sneezes in their elbow](#) and helped to understand the basic rules of [self-isolation](#).



You may have already changed the way you interact face-to-face by providing doorstep services – talking away from an open door and not entering premises. You may have already changed your service offering including removing face-to-face services by using technology to support clients during this time.

You may want to consider a staggered approach to your services including shift-based work, staggered breaks and continue physical distancing. You may also want to consider aspects around staff security at this time due to peoples heightened anxiety and stress.

Stop the spread of COVID-19

[Personal hygiene measures](#) are a highly effective method to stop the spread of the virus.

- If a member of staff becomes unwell, they should be sent home immediately.
- Minimise the number of staff members who have face-to-face interactions with clients.
- Mask wearing is now mandatory (for those 12 years of age or over) when **providing or accessing any essential service**.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Workplaces should have their own PPE protocols in place and training should include when to use PPE, what PPE is necessary, how to use effectively and how to properly dispose of PPE. The [World Health Organisation has developed guidance](#) and rational regarding the use of PPE and COVID-19.

Cleaning standards

Accommodation providers (e.g. Moteliers) are not required to complete regular cleaning of rooms during COVID-19 Alert Level 3 or 4. However, they should supply sufficient cleaning products so that occupants can undertake their own cleaning.

Accommodation providers should complete a thorough cleaning of each unit between occupancy of clients.

MOH have also developed [cleaning advice](#) following a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19.

High risk staff

Care should be taken to support staff and volunteers who are considered high risk individuals to reduce or eliminate them from exposure during this period. Staff and volunteers at [high risk](#) of severe COVID-19 infection include:

- people who have conditions that compromise their immune systems or have compromised immune systems as a side effect of taking certain medications, such as chemotherapy.
- people who have chronic medical conditions such as liver disease, heart disease, kidney disease, diabetes mellitus, lung disease or other long-term conditions.
- people with a disability and co-existing long-term conditions.
- people who have medical devices that enter the body (e.g. a catheter, tracheostomy, ileostomy, feeding tube).
- people with surgical or large wounds.



- people older than 70 years of age (noting for Māori this would be lower with some suggesting 60 years of age).

Staff welfare support

Staff cannot come to work if they:

- Have cold or flu symptoms or any other COVID-19 Symptoms. Workers should follow the advice of Healthline or their GP regarding when it is safe to return to work.
- Have been in close contact with a suspected, probable or confirmed case of COVID-19.
- This advice also applies to cleaning, maintenance and other essential Contractors.

If you or anyone in your household is a [Close Contact](#) and have, or later develop, any COVID-19 symptoms the people in your immediate household should stay at home until you receive a negative test result; public health officials will provide you with further advice.

The MOH and [COVID-19.govt.nz](https://www.covid-19.govt.nz) are the best sources of information around health and safety of people and essential services. The website will be updated with information with links back to trusted sources.

Self-isolating

The Ministry of Health has information about [self-isolating](#), including isolating with other people in the same property, or in shared accommodation, as well as [cleaning guidelines](#). Ministry of Health guidelines don't require people to move out of their housing, even if they live with others.

Business continuity

As part of your own Business Continuity Plan measures, we recommend as a minimum that you have:

- An up-to-date list of staff, key contacts and healthcare facilities and you are making regular contact with these people and places to check in work through any matters.
- You have contingency plans in place for the potential reduction in staffing due to illness (self or family members) or child-care responsibilities. For example, cross training current employees, extending part-time workers hours or hiring temporary employees.

Below is a list of assurances provided by Te Tūāpapa Kura Kāinga HUD:

- HUD will ensure that contracted funding will continue to be paid uninterrupted.
- Payment of Income Related Rent Subsidies (IRRS) to Community Housing Providers (CHPs) will continue to be paid on time.
- HUD recognise that there may be occasions where contractual breaches occur and there is no intention to penalise providers in instances where this is a result of COVID-19 circumstances. Where a breach is significant, please ensure that you contact your HUD Relationship Manager as soon as possible to discuss.



Community Housing Regulatory Authority

During this difficult time the Community Housing Regulatory Authority (CHRA) advises it will take a flexible approach to monitoring of registered CHPs. This may involve extending timeframes for annual monitoring returns and any additional information to be provided to CHRA and deferring work on certain issues to allow you to focus on the provision of housing services to your tenants.

Please be assured that your organisation will not lose its registered status as a result of disruptions beyond its control caused by COVID-19 or if you provide support to tenants that would not usually fall within the bounds of being a landlord. CHRA will be taking a pragmatic approach to regulation and expect you to do the same regarding tenant welfare. If you are not sure who the best contact is in the Authority, please email chra@hud.govt.nz. Like many, CHRA is working from home, and they will do their best to respond to you promptly.

Contact us

In the first instance please contact your HUD Business Development Manager to discuss your concerns further. You can also contact us at Provider.Enquiries@hud.govt.nz.

We will be actively monitoring our normal emails channels, and centrally responding where appropriate through Guidance and FAQs.

Other New Zealand resources

Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) Groups are available to provide support for people who have an urgent need for essential supplies, and they don't have the means or transport to get it themselves. People and whānau in need can contact their local CDEM Group for help when they don't have any other options available to them.

The links below provide additional resources and information:

- [Covid mental health and wellbeing advice](#)
- [Mental Health Foundation](#)
- [Community Housing Aotearoa – Best Practice Guide Information](#)
- [Te Matapihi – COVID-19: Information for Māori Providers](#)
- [The NZ Drug Foundation is available to answer your queries about drug use and drug-related harm.](#)
- [Looking after your Mental Health and Wellbeing during COVID-19 | Mental Health Foundation](#)