



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

Updated 9 April 2020

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** (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 Thursday 26 March 2020 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](#) 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 Wednesday 25 March 2020 for a minimum of four weeks. During this time a range of measures are being applied locally or nationally including:

- People are instructed to stay at home
- Education facilities and businesses closed except for essential services and lifeline utilities.

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

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. This can also apply to some specific supply chain staff and contractors where the service or product provided is essential to the safe continuation of your service or business, examples of this are food supplies, cleaning and essential maintenance services.

As providers of essential services, it is important you continue providing your services, while also keeping staff and the people you support safe. **The Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is seeking clarification around compelling staff to work during Alert Level 4 and will provide this guidance once obtained.**

The [COVID-19](#) 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 levels.¹

Many iwi, hapū, whānau and Marae have implemented changes to tikanga when meeting and greeting. The use of hongi, hariru and kihi have been discouraged and whānau have been asked to practice virtual or contactless greetings such as “the east coasts wave”² or the long-distance hongi “hā mamao”³.

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.

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 Ministry of Health (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. The MoH is currently developing Guidance and Resources for Shared Accommodation Providers.

Transporting whānau

If you need to transport whānau to their new accommodation, to the supermarket or to a medical appointment and they **DO NOT** have symptoms of, or a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19, then the [COVID 19 website states](#) that the use of private vehicles is allowed, with physical distancing being practiced.

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

² <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/major-steps-taken-protect-new-zealanders-covid-19>

³ <https://twitter.com/formerlydaniels/status/1240051706697666562>



This allows the transportation of a single passenger at a time, utilising your services private company vehicles, with the passenger being transported in the opposite back passenger seat to the driver. Regular cleaning of these vehicles would also be recommended.

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

In addition to general hygiene guidance, there are some specific requirements while travelling in a taxi or ride-share. Please also follow any requests from the driver.

- **Personal hygiene:** Where possible, use hand sanitiser before and after you enter or exit a vehicle. When you get home you should also wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with water and soap and dry them thoroughly.
- **Physical distancing:** Physical distancing between the driver and passengers is important, even in smaller vehicles. Passengers must sit in the rear passenger seats only – you must not sit in the front passenger seat next to the driver. Sit as far as possible from the driver. If you are the sole passenger, sit in the rear left-hand side passenger seat, diagonally opposite the driver. The maximum number of passengers is the number of passenger seats in the back of the vehicle (in most cars there are typically 3 rear passenger seats).
- **Who you can travel with:** Apart from the driver, you must only travel in the same vehicle as people from the same isolation group (household unit or ‘bubble’).
- **Contact tracing:** Please follow any requests for providing contact tracing information (if not already provided, for example electronically through an app or booking system).

Where individuals or whānau DO have SYMPTOMS of or a CONFIRMED DIAGNOSIS of COVID 19, services should call Healthline for guidance before deciding whether it is appropriate to use private vehicles to transport that whānau (0800 358 5453).

Whānau who could be at high risk

Identify whānau who could be at high risk for complications from COVID-19 and make proactive contact with them to identify any additional support they may need. 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 (eg, 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 many reporting 60 years of age).

Taking care of your staff

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.
- Minimize the number of staff members who have face-to-face interactions with clients.

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.

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 (eg, a catheter, tracheostomy, ileostomy, feeding tube)
- people with surgical or large wounds
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Staff welfare support

There is a welfare package in place for staff who are unable to work as a result of COVID-19. MoH Information for home and community support service workers states that staff cannot come to work if they:

- Have cold or flu symptoms. Workers should be symptom-free for 48 hours before returning to work
- Have been overseas in any country in the previous 14 days
- 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.

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 the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (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 provider in instances where this is a result of COVID-19 circumstances. Where a breach is significant please ensure that you make contact with 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

We will be actively monitoring our emails, and centrally responding where appropriate through guidance and FAQ's.

HUD are working very closely with Te Matapihi and Community Housing Aotearoa as sector peak bodies to both gather and disseminate information and quickly and efficiently as possible. Please continue to contact these bodies if you have any questions or concerns.

We would like to acknowledge the contributions of both Te Matapihi and Community Housing Aotearoa in the development of this document.

Other New Zealand resources

The Ministry of Health 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. Our website will be updated with information with links back to a trusted source where possible.

- [COVID-19 - Managing your mental wellbeing | Ministry of Health NZ](#)
- [Looking after your Mental Health and Wellbeing during COVID-19 | Mental Health Foundation](#)
- [Community Housing Aotearoa – Best Practice Guide Information](#)
- [Te Matapihi – COVID-19: Information for Māori Providers](#)



International Resources

HUD, MSD, Te Matapihi and CHA are currently working together to develop further New Zealand specific guidance and resources for Housing and Homelessness Services. In the meantime, the following international resources provide useful guidance and information:

USA:

- CDC - Interim guidance for homeless service providers to plan and respond to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)
- CDC - Interim Guidance for Responding to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) among People Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness

EUROPE:

- Housing First Europe Hub – Resources for Homelessness and Housing First

UK:

- Homeless Link – COVID 19 and Homelessness, Practice Resources
- Gov.uk - Guidance for Hostel or Day Centre Providers of Services for People Experiencing Rough Sleeping
- Groundswell – Guidance and resources developed working with people who have slept rough and those residing in hostels and temporary accommodation

CANADA:

- Homeless Hubb – Preparing for the Potential Spread of COVID 19