

## Key messages to support changes in COVID-19 settings

August 2023

### General

- Every year, hospitals and the healthcare system see an increase in admissions for respiratory infections and other illnesses associated with seasonal changes.
- Protect yourself, your whānau, and your community by getting immunised.
- Please don't visit pēpi or elderly people if you are sick. Many illnesses are very infectious, and they can get very sick, very easily.
- Washing your hands, covering coughs and sneezes, wearing a mask if you're indoors in crowded areas and staying home if you are sick also help to reduce the spread of illness.
- Develop a plan for your whānau, so family members know what to do if people become unwell, whether it's COVID-19, the flu or another illness. Also understand what is expected of you by your employer if you do become sick.
- Aotearoa New Zealand has good access to antiviral medicines for people who are most at risk of a serious health outcome or hospitalisation from COVID-19. There is good evidence that antivirals can make a difference for these eligible people. Talk to your GP, pharmacist or Hauora provider if you, or a member of your whānau, come under this category.

### Recommendations if you become unwell with COVID-19 symptoms

- Stay at home if you are feeling unwell - if you, or someone in your household develops one or more of the following symptoms for COVID-19: a runny nose, sore throat, cough, fever, vomiting, diarrhoea, headache, loss of smell or taste, shortness of breath, you should take a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT).
- Remember to register your RAT result at <https://mycovidrecord.health.nz/> (or call the RAT helpline at 0800 222 478 and choose option 1), so you can be connected with any help and support you might need.

### During your recommended isolation period

- If you have tested positive for COVID-19, it is recommended you isolate for 5 days even if you only have mild symptoms, starting at Day 0, which is the day your symptoms started or when you tested positive, whichever came first. This means you should not go to work or school.
- If you do need to leave your home during your 5 day isolation period, it is very important you take precautions to prevent spreading COVID-19 to others:
  - You should wear a mask whenever you leave the house.
  - You should not visit a healthcare facility (except to access medical care), or an aged residential care facility, or have contact with anyone at risk of getting seriously unwell with COVID-19.
- If you need to seek in-person medical care while you have COVID-19, please call ahead before visiting, and follow their instructions. It is recommended that you wear a mask.

- If your COVID-19 symptoms get worse, or you are concerned about someone you care for, you can call Healthline on 0800 611 116 anytime for free health advice and information. If it's an emergency, call 111. For further advice please visit the [COVID-19 Health Hub \(https://covid19.health.nz/advice/\)](https://covid19.health.nz/advice/) or call the COVID-19 Healthline on 0800 358 5453.

### After completing 5 days isolation

- If your symptoms have resolved and you feel well, you can return to your normal activities.
- You should discuss your return to work with your employer or your child's return to school with their school principal, as your employer or your school may require additional precautions.
- If you are in isolation at the time of the setting change announcement, we recommend you continue isolating until you have completed 5 days. If you have already been isolating for 6 or 7 days, and are well, you can return to your normal activities.
- You do not need to do another RAT after testing positive. However, if you are concerned that you may still be infectious after isolating for 5 days, testing negative with a RAT provides a good indication that you are unlikely to be infectious. You may still wish to wear a mask if you have contact with someone at risk of serious illness.
- As some people remain infectious for up to 10 days, we recommend you wear a mask **up until 10 days after** your symptoms started or you tested positive if:
  - You need to visit a healthcare facility or an aged residential care facility
  - You have contact with anyone at risk of getting seriously unwell with COVID-19.
- If you still feel unwell, we recommend you stay home until you have recovered. If you do need to leave the house, we recommend you wear a mask and do not visit a healthcare facility (other than to seek medical attention), or an aged residential care facility, or have contact with anyone at risk of getting seriously unwell with COVID-19.

### Medicines to treat COVID-19 (antivirals)

- Most people who get COVID-19 experience a mild to moderate illness. They can safely recover at home. Some people, like older people and kaumātua, and those with other health conditions, are at a higher risk of becoming seriously unwell with COVID-19 and needing hospital level care.
- Antivirals are used to treat COVID-19. A 5 day course of tablets can be taken. These tablets reduce the amount of COVID-19 virus in your body, so you do not get as sick, and you are less likely to go to hospital.
- They can be provided by your doctor, Hauora provider, or a pharmacist without a prescription from your doctor. They must be started within 5 days of a person first becoming unwell with COVID-19.
- Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or Hauora provider if you think that you, or a member of your whānau, may be eligible for antiviral medicines. Find out more about this at [covid19.govt.nz](https://covid19.govt.nz)
- People eligible for free antiviral medicines include:
  - Māori or Pacific people aged 50 or over
  - everyone aged 65 or over
  - anyone aged 50 or over with fewer than 2 COVID-19 vaccinations
  - anyone with a severely weakened immune system

- anyone with Down syndrome
- anyone with sickle cell disease
- anyone who has previously been in critical high dependency hospital care from COVID-19
- anyone with 3 or more high-risk medical conditions.

## Access to RATs

- It's important to ensure you have enough RATs at home in case anyone in the household becomes unwell and need to test.
- People will want to ensure they have sufficient RATs in case of need.
- RATs will remain free for everyone throughout 2023. You can find participating pick-up points for RATs and masks at [COVID-19 Testing • Healthpoint \(www.healthpoint.co.nz/covid-19\)](https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/covid-19) or by calling the RAT helpline on 0800 222 478 and choosing option 1.
- Check the expiry date of any RATs you may already have to ensure they are valid to be used if someone in your household gets sick.
- If you live rurally, have a disability, are immunocompromised or experience challenges collecting the RATs yourself, call the RAT helpline on 0800 222 478, as you might be eligible for a RAT delivery service.
- RATs are an easy way to test for COVID-19 quickly. General practice and urgent care clinics can still do PCR testing, if required.

## Other actions you can take to help reduce the spread of illness

- Regularly wash your hands with soap or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- Cover coughs and sneezes – sneeze and cough into your elbow or a tissue. Throw tissues away in a bin after each use and make sure you wash and dry or sanitise your hands afterwards.
- If an in-person appointment is required with your GP, follow their processes which may include everyone who can practically and safely wear a mask wear one.
- If you are severely unwell, call 111 for urgent medical attention.
- It is recommended you wear a mask if you need to visit any healthcare facility or aged residential care facility, or you have contact with anyone at risk of getting seriously unwell with COVID-19 for at least 10 days after testing positive or experiencing COVID-19-like symptoms
- When someone at home is sick - follow these steps to help other household members stay healthy:
  - Isolate the unwell person to an area or room within your home if you can.
  - Wear a mask to care for them and, if possible, get them to wear a mask too.
  - Ventilate your home and any rooms the unwell person has been in several times a day by opening windows to increase fresh air flow into each room. Keep doors closed (such as bedrooms) to reduce contaminated air spreading between rooms.
  - Clean high touch surfaces regularly using general cleaning products.
  - If someone in your household needs to see a doctor or nurse, call ahead, and follow their instructions. We recommend that the unwell person and anyone accompanying them wear a mask for the appointment, so that you can protect others from getting sick, especially people within a healthcare service or other people wanting to see a doctor or nurse.
- If you become increasingly unwell, have underlying health conditions, or you are concerned about your health, call your GP or call Healthline on 0800 611 116 anytime for free health advice and information. If it's an emergency, call 111.

- If you have a sick child with breathing difficulties, seek medical care from your doctor immediately. You can call Healthline on 0800 611 116 anytime for free health advice and information. If it's an emergency, call 111.
- The Healthline team can arrange to talk to you in your language. When your call is answered, say you'd like an interpreter and the language you'd like to speak in. Callers to Healthline can also choose to speak with a Māori clinician if they are calling between 8am and 8pm.
- The dedicated Disability Helpline has been supporting members of the disability community with testing, face mask exemptions and managing COVID-19 at home. The disability helpline team can also help with any general health concerns such as if a support worker/carer is unavailable or hasn't arrived, or they can connect you with information and support you need. You can contact them via phone 0800 11 12 13 or text 8988.
- If you need communication assistance, you can access using the NZ Relay Service [www.nzrelay.co.nz](http://www.nzrelay.co.nz). A person with experience or knowledge of disability will answer your call from 8am – 8pm. After 8pm, calls are answered by a trained member of the Healthline team.
- Be prepared if you have an ongoing or underlying chronic health condition:
  - Check the supply of your regular medications and arrange your next prescription before they run out.
  - Discuss with your whānau and nurse what your action plan is if you become unwell.
  - Wear a mask when on public transport, in taxis, in indoor settings like shops and supermarkets, in spaces without good ventilation/air flow, or when it is hard to physically distance from other people.
  - If you are feeling unwell, stay at home and take a RAT.
  - Make sure you have a supply of RATs at home
  - Ask for help if you don't know how to take a RAT or how to log your result by calling the RAT helpline on 0800 222 478.

## Visitor mask wearing in healthcare facilities

- Every year, there is a rise in seasonal colds, flu and other respiratory illnesses circulating within our communities, healthcare facilities and in-patients, clients and visitors entering these premises.
- Mask wearing remains an important way we can prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19, in health and disability care settings.
- Free masks are available for you to pick up along with free RATs from participating collection sites. Find a collection centre near you on <https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/covid-19/>
- It is recommended that you wear a face mask when visiting healthcare services. Please respect the healthcare facility/hospital's policy on mask wearing when visiting, you may be asked to wear a mask in particular situations or locations within a healthcare facility to help protect those at higher risk.
- Facility policies may require mask wearing to comply with Health and Safety requirements.
- Healthcare services include:
  - hospitals (including outpatient services)
  - hospices
  - residential care facilities for older people and people with disabilities
  - doctors' clinics
  - community and iwi health providers

- pharmacies — excluding pharmacies inside supermarkets
- urgent care services, such as after-hours clinics
- ambulance services
- disability support services
- diagnostic services such as blood testing or radiology services
- dentists and oral health services
- other allied health services such as optometrists, physiotherapists, or chiropractors.
- When visiting psychotherapy, counselling, mental health and addiction services, please follow the facility's policy on mask wearing.
- It is especially important to wear a face mask when visiting people who are at higher risk of becoming seriously unwell, like older people and kaumātua, babies, people living in aged residential care facilities, patients in hospital and those with other health conditions.
- If you are infectious and need to see a healthcare provider, a well-fitting face mask can stop infectious particles from spreading to others, protecting those around you and help to reduce their risk of being infected.
- A well-fitting face mask may help prevent you from inhaling infectious particles from others too.
- It is recommended that you avoid visiting patients or residents of a healthcare setting if you:
  - have acute symptoms of COVID-19 or other infectious conditions
  - have tested positive for COVID-19 in the last 5 days, or are a household contact and are still within your recommended 5-day testing period
- There may be compassionate situations where visiting needs to occur and this should be arranged with the healthcare facility.
- Visitors to COVID-19 positive patients need to be aware of the risk to themselves and wear appropriate personal protective equipment as directed/or requested by the healthcare facility.
- Children aged 5 or under are generally not recommended to wear a mask
- Children between 6-11 years of age are encouraged to wear a mask at the discretion and supervision of their caregiver.
- People who have a physical or mental condition or disability that makes wearing a mask unsuitable are generally not recommended to wear a mask.
- After leaving isolation, we recommend you wear a mask if you need to visit a healthcare facility or an aged residential care facility, or you have contact with anyone at risk of getting seriously unwell with COVID-19 **up until 10 days after** your symptoms started or you tested positive. This is because some people are infectious for up to 10 days. Note that facilities may continue to require all staff or visitors to wear masks regardless of whether they have recently been cases.

## COVID-19 reinfection

- Reinfection is when you get COVID-19 again more than 28 days after a previous infection. It is unclear how common reinfection with COVID-19 is.
- For most people reinfection with COVID-19 is not likely to be more severe than previous infections. However, you can experience different symptoms.
- Every time you get COVID-19, there is a risk of getting long COVID-19 and other medical issues.
- If you get COVID-19 again, you will have access to the same advice, help and support you would receive for a new COVID-19 infection.

### **28 days or fewer since a previous infection**

- If you get COVID-19 symptoms again and it has been 28 days or fewer since your previous infection:
  - There is no need to take a RAT
  - You should stay home and recover until 24 hours after you no longer have symptoms.
- If you have an underlying health condition or your symptoms are getting worse, you should get advice from a health practitioner or by calling the COVID Healthline on 0800 358 5453.

### **29 days or more since a previous infection**

- If you have COVID-19 symptoms again and it has been 29 days or more since a previous infection, you should take a RAT.
- If it is positive, you should stay at home and follow the same advice as for your first infection.
- If your test is negative:
  - Your symptoms could be another illness, such as cold or flu
  - If your symptoms continue, you should repeat a RAT 48 hours later
  - If your result is still negative, stay at home at least 24 hours after your symptoms resolve.

### **Support Services**

- If you need help with urgent costs, or have to take unpaid leave, you may be eligible for support from Work and Income. Check [workandincome.govt.nz](https://www.workandincome.govt.nz) or call 0800 559 009.