

# COVID-19 FAQs

26 October 2021

## Alert Levels and General Information

This contains the most up-to-date and approved messaging on key COVID-19 matters.

Information that changes or is added between grids will be highlighted. Please ensure you are using the most up to date version.

This document answers frequently asked questions about what **Alert Level 3 and Alert Level 2** means for New Zealand.

This information applies from **5.00pm, 26 October 2021.**

Information can be used for any government, agency, local government or relevant sector and business communications.

This is a living document that will be updated frequently. Information that changes or is added between versions will be highlighted. New sections and changes to messages are in **yellow.**

Please ensure you are using the most up to date version.

## Contents

<u>Alert Level status across New Zealand .....</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>New COVID-19 Protection Framework .....</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Business .....</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Support for low income households .....</u>	<u>5</u>

<u>Māori communities COVID-19 fund</u> .....	5
<u>Education</u> .....	8
<u>Auckland Alert Level 3, Step 1</u> .....	10
<u>Domestic travel</u> .....	11
<u>Additional information</u> .....	11

## Alert Level status across New Zealand

Based on the latest public health assessment, parts of Waikato are in Alert Level 3, this will continue till 11.59pm on Wednesday 27 October.

Auckland remains at Alert Level 3, with no changes to the current restrictions. This will be reviewed on Monday 1 November.

Northland moved to Alert Level 2 at 11.59pm on Tuesday 19 October.

Travel boundaries between Auckland and parts of the Waikato exist despite both being at Alert level 3, and boundaries between these Alert Level 3 areas and the rest of New Zealand remain in place.

## New COVID-19 Protection Framework

### **Q. What is the new COVID-19 Protection Framework?**

The new COVID-19 Protection Framework (CPF) will replace the current Alert Level system. New Zealand will transition to the framework as it becomes safe to do so and once the milestone 90% vaccination rate in each DHB milestone has been reached.

Like our current Alert Level systems there will be three settings Green, Orange and Red. The framework uses COVID-19 Vaccination Certificates (CVCs) to minimise disruptions to people’s lives and protect people from COVID-19.

### **Q. Why are we introducing a new framework?**

Using Alert Levels to stamp out COVID-19 helped keep us safe from the worst impacts of COVID-19 that we have seen overseas. It’s something we’re incredibly proud of.

While Delta, and its high transmissibility, has changed our ability to control COVID-19, the vaccine has enabled us to change the way we manage the virus.

High vaccination rates mean we can introduce a new system to support us to move to a new chapter, where COVID-19 is managed in a different way, minimising the impacts it has on our day-to-day lives.

**Q. Where can I find out more information about the COVID-19 Protection Framework?**

The DPMC has provided a COVID-19 Protection Framework FAQ document alongside this FAQ. More information is available on the Unite Against COVID-19 [website](#).

**Q. When will more information about CPF be made available?**

More detail on how the Framework will be implemented will be available by the end of November, after further decisions are made by Ministers.

High vaccination rates mean we will soon be able to take a new approach to managing COVID-19 with fewer restrictions and less reliance on lockdowns to stop the spread of the virus. Work is now underway to develop guidance and detail to underpin the new COVID-19 Protection Framework, and we will only transition when it is safe to do so. We'll be talking with a wide range of people as this work progresses including community and business groups, education, faith-based and sport sectors, and other key stakeholders.

## Business

**Q. What changes have been announced on mandatory vaccinations in business?**

Cabinet decided (26 October 2021) that vaccinations will be mandated for everyone who works in any workplace where a vaccine certificate is required for entry. In the new COVID-19 Protection Framework, this includes hospitality, events, gyms and close proximity businesses such as hairdressers and barbers. Any business which chooses to require vaccine certificates into the future will be covered by this decision.

**Q. Will an employee be required to inform their employer of their vaccination status?**

Workers can choose whether they want to tell their employer if they are vaccinated. However, if they do not share this information, and they are doing work that requires vaccination, this could have employment consequences. This is because their employer can then treat them as unvaccinated. In these situations, employers must inform workers of this assumption, and what it would mean for a worker's employment.

**Q. What happens if an employee is unvaccinated, but is doing work that will require vaccination?**

Employers must consider options like redeployment before giving an employee notice of termination. However, there may be instances when there are no options for redeployment, and other options like taking leave or working from home are not realistic.

In these situations, Government is introducing a requirement for unvaccinated employees to be given four weeks' paid notice. Employers must give employees a reasonable chance to be vaccinated before the end of this notice period.

## **Q. Who will enforce this?**

Agencies such as WorkSafe enforce Government mandates.

In recognition of the additional COVID-19 enforcement duties WorkSafe is taking on, Cabinet has increased WorkSafe's funding by \$4.4 million for the next year.

For vaccination requirements imposed by employers, each employer will need to check whether their workers are vaccinated. MBIE's early resolution service and mediation service are available to assist with any issues that may arise in workplaces.

For more information go to their [website](#).

## **Q. Where can we go for advice on vaccination requirements for employees now?**

WorkSafe has published guidance on COVID-19 health and safety risk assessments and some businesses have done a risk assessment to require some or all of their workers to be vaccinated.

The additional funding of \$4.4 million for WorkSafe will enable them to extend their current COVID-19 activity and undertake more proactive work using a mix of education, engagement and enforcement interventions.

Visit their [website](#) for more information.

## **Q. What was the Enhanced Business Support Package Government announced today?**

The business support package announced today includes;

- Resurgence Support Payment rate doubled and paid fortnightly, up to \$43,000 per business
- Wage subsidy will continue through the transition period
- \$60 million package for Regional Business Partner Programme and mental health support

## **Q. What are the changes to Resurgence Support Payments (RSPs) announced today?**

After the next scheduled payment on the 29th of October RSPs will move to fortnightly payments at double the current rate. The enhanced support will first be paid on 12 November and fortnightly thereafter until Auckland moves to Red status in the new framework.

Currently the RSP is paid at a base rate of \$1500 per eligible business and \$400 for each full-time employee up to a total of \$21,500.

For the payments starting on 12 November this will be \$3000 per business and \$800 per FTE (Full Time Employees) up to 50 FTEs. This will make the maximum fortnightly payment \$43,000

## **Q. Are there any changes to the wage subsidy payments?**

The Wage Subsidy will continue to be available on the current criteria while areas of the country are still in Alert Level 3.

**Q. Is there any specific support for Auckland business owners?**

Yes, today the Government announced \$60 million package for business advice and mental health support will be made available to help Auckland businesses.

Businesses will be able to apply for up to \$3000 worth of advice and planning support, and then receive up to \$4,000 to implement that advice through the established Regional Business Partners programme.

As part of the package, \$10 million is available for mental health and wellbeing support through a programme to be designed with the EMA (Employers & Manufacturers Association) and Auckland Business Chamber of Commerce.

## Support for low income households

**Q. COVID-19 restrictions are adversely affecting low income households, how will Government help?**

Income limits for Hardship Support through the Ministry of Social Development have been temporarily lifted so more people can receive assistance.

Currently a single person working 30 hours per week on the minimum wage is not eligible for hardship assistance from Work and Income. Minister Sepuloni announced that from the 1st of November income limits for assistance lifts to 40 hours at the minimum wage, or \$800 per week and \$1600 per week for a couple with or without children.

The temporary income eligibility criteria will come into force from 1 November for four months. 28 February 2022 will be the last day the increased limits will apply.

**Q. Are there any further plans to support low income households?**

Ministers are also considering further supports for individuals and families experiencing hardship as a result of the Delta outbreak. Cabinet will review these in the next few weeks.

The Government has bolstered support for those affected by the Delta outbreak with more than \$38 million allocated to support community organisations responding to needs in the community.

## Māori communities COVID-19 fund

**Q. What's the fund for and when does it open?**

The fund will provide direct financial support to iwi and Māori organisations, to accelerate vaccination uptake over the next two months. Access to the funding for phase 1 activities will begin from 25 October through to the end of the year. Rapid vaccination uptake is the priority.

## **Q. Who can apply and what are the eligibility criteria?**

The fund targets Māori and iwi community organisations. It is anticipated that groups already engaged in vaccination mobilisation and outreach activities through Te Puni Kōkiri, the Ministry of Health and Te Arawhiti will be interested in accessing further funding to maintain and build momentum and will work with them in the first instance. Other groups with funding proposals will be considered.

## **Q. What are the funding priorities?**

Areas where Māori vaccination rates are low – currently Counties Manukau, Lakes District, Taranaki, Northland, Bay of Plenty and Tairāwhiti DHB areas, but these may change over time. There will also be a focus on other priority groups including rangatahi, whānau without permanent housing, tangata whaikaha, whānau who are not well-connected to health services and Māori with mental health and addiction conditions and whānau in rural and remote communities.

## **Q. What can the funding be used for?**

Iwi and Māori community designed and implemented initiatives that complement the vaccination roll-out led by the Ministry of Health and local DHBs. The funding should help connect vaccinators with whānau and whānau with vaccinators. This includes funding for mobile services, communications, incentives, sites, workforce, events, IT etc.

## **Q. What is the decision-making process for approvals?**

A Ministerial Oversight Group will oversee the Māori Communities Covid-19 Fund, made up of the Minister of Finance, the Minister for Māori Crown Relations – Te Arawhiti, the Associate Minister of Health (Māori Health) / te Minita mō Whānau Ora, and te Minita Whanaketanga Māori. This group will sign off proposals.

# Vaccination information

## **Q. What certainty is there for employers navigating a vaccinated versus unvaccinated workforce?**

Cabinet has decided that vaccinations will be mandated for everyone who works in any workplace where a vaccine certificate is required for entry. In the new COVID-19 Protection Framework, this includes hospitality, events, gyms and close proximity businesses such as hairdressers and barbers. But any business which chooses to require vaccine certificates into the future – will be covered by this decision.

This requirement means staff and customers are treated equally and it will play a big part in helping to minimise the spread of the virus in the highest risk venues by reducing the potential for COVID-19 to enter the business in the first place, and further supports our businesses in our economic recovery. Government expects to have these changes in place in December.

## **Q. When will mandatory vaccinations for workplaces come into being?**

The timing of this coming into force will depend on when New Zealand moves to the COVID-19 Protection Framework. Government will continue to work through the detail with businesses and unions to ensure we get the balance right.

**Q. What advice is available to businesses, employers and workers now to guide decisions on what roles need workers to be vaccinated?**

WorkSafe has published guidance on COVID-19 health and safety risk assessments and some businesses have done a risk assessment to require some or all of their workers to be vaccinated.

Visit their [website](#) for more information.

**Q. Will we require employers to provide paid time off for workers to get vaccinated?**

Yes, most employers have already been doing this, and are taking steps to support employees, for example, by providing transportation to vaccination centres. This change will ensure all employees can get vaccinated during work hours.

It will help any employees for whom time off is a barrier to getting vaccinated, and benefits employers by helping raise vaccination coverage in their workplaces.

**Q. Has the date changed for all health and disability sector workers to be vaccinated?**

Yes, all workers will need to have received their first vaccine dose by 15 November 2021 rather than 30 October as was originally advised. The extended COVID-19 Public Health Response (Vaccinations) Amendment Order 2021 came into effect at 11.59pm on 25 October, requiring workers who face a high risk of exposure to COVID-19 and who work in the health and disability sectors or in prisons to be fully vaccinated.

General Practitioners, pharmacists, community health nurses, midwives, paramedics, and healthcare and disability workers in facilities where vulnerable patients are treated (including ICU), are amongst those included. It also covers many workers doing non-regulated healthcare work, for example providers in aged residential care and workers who enter homes to provide community support services.

This Order also includes Corrections workers.

**Q. What level of vaccination do we need to move to the new protection framework and greater freedoms?**

Every District Health Board needs to reach 90% of their eligible population having received both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine before a change to the new framework. 90% is a milestone not an end point. The more eligible New Zealanders who get vaccinated the safer everyone is.

Auckland will be able to move sooner. This plan provides a clear path for Auckland to move out of lockdown as soon as 90 percent fully vaccinated is reached in each of the city's three DHBs.

# Education

## **Q. Do border COVID-19 testing requirements apply to teachers crossing boundaries to school?**

Yes, testing requirements will apply to staff who are permitted to travel across the Auckland boundary (eg, evidence of having had a COVID-19 test no more than seven days before their journey, for those travelling back and forth across the Auckland boundary on a regular basis).

## **Q. Can a child living in a Level 2 area commute daily from L2 to L3 and back to attend high school in Auckland?**

Yes, for students in years 11-13 and (some students in years 9 or 10 where a parent is an essential worker).

## **Q. Are day students crossing Alert Level boundaries to go to school required to be tested?**

No, day students who are travelling back and forth across the Auckland Alert level boundary are not required to undertake regular testing.

## **Q. Will school bus services be travelling across Alert Level boundaries?**

School transport services that cross alert level boundaries will resume full service from Tuesday 26 October 2021 but may be discontinued until further notice if they are not used.

## **Q. Does opening schools in Alert Level 3, for students in years 11-13 include boarding schools?**

Yes, residential and specialist schools will reopen for students in years 11-13 on 26 October. If parents have questions or concerns about their child's return, they can contact the school or the Ministry of Education for more information.

## **Q. Are exams going ahead for all New Zealand students this year?**

Yes, exams will go ahead at the end of the year for senior secondary students across the whole country. Students in both Alert Level 2 and 3 will be able to sit their NCEA and Scholarship exams.

## **Q. Are there any plans to further support students with their NCEA exams?**

With Auckland, Waikato and Northland experiencing COVID-19 disruption in Term 4, NZQA has confirmed these students will be eligible for an Unexpected Event Grade, recognising the work they have done.

While students will be expected to attend exams where possible, this long-established 'Unexpected Event Grade' process will reflect what happens in any year when a student's attendance or performance in exams is affected by an illness or injury.

This grade is worked out based on their work throughout the school year.



# MIQ

## **Q. What report was released about MIQ absconders on 21 October?**

An investigation report into the absconding incident at the Novotel & Ibis Ellerslie MIQ facility on 2 September 2021 was released on 21 October.

The MIQ system is something that continually evolves and changes – which reflects the changing nature of the COVID-19 virus. As part of a commitment to continuous improvement, incidents are reviewed to ensure any lessons are captured and necessary changes are made.

## **Q. What were the recommendations from the report?**

The report includes several recommendations for improvements, all are either complete or underway, including:

Developing an MIQ Community Case Management framework so that information relating to community cases can be more effectively shared between agencies to ensure safety, wellbeing and risk factors are understood;

Introducing a wellbeing and risk profile assessment for community cases;

Updating and improving site security plans and settings, including a review of CCTV controls, improving training for security staff and ensuring there is a shift supervisor for the security team.

Joint Head of MIQ, Brigadier Rose King highlighted that of the more than 180,000 people who have been through MIQ since March 2020, MIQ has had 13 incidents involving 18 absconders. Every event is extremely disappointing, and they are all taken very seriously. But people in MIQ are not prisoners, or under arrest. We expect community cases and returnees from overseas to follow the rules and the overwhelming majority to do their part to keep New Zealand safe.

## **Q. Is the Chief Ombudsman investigating the MIQ booking system?**

Chief Ombudsman Peter Boshier announced the launch of an investigation into the MIQ booking system on 20 October, after receiving several complaints.

In a statement, Boshier said the complaints received broadly fit into four categories; claiming the allocation system is unlawful, unfit for purpose, unfair and poorly managed. Leading to a decision to do an independent investigation into them all.

Substantive findings will be reported to Parliament next year.

# Parts of the Waikato remain in Alert Level 3

## **Q. How can people in Alert level 3 help?**

To move out of Alert Level 3 public health officials urge people in the Waikato to get vaccinated. It's the best way to protect ourselves and our loved ones. At 11.59pm on 25 October in the Waikato 85% of the eligible population have had one dose and 68% are fully vaccinated.

## **Q. While anyone with COVID-19 symptoms should get tested are there any locations of interest?**

People in the Te Awamutu area should get tested if they or anyone in their household has symptoms, or if they have travelled out of Te Awamutu over the past week for work or other activities, regardless of whether they have symptoms.

## **Q. Can people in Waikato travel across regions also in Alert Level 3?**

No, in Alert Level 3 people are advised to stay at home and not travel. The boundaries with Auckland to the north and Alert Level 2 areas to the south exist to prevent the spread of the Delta variant beyond the region.

# Auckland Alert Level 3, Step 1

## **Q. What are the golden rules in Auckland for Alert Level 3?**

The golden rules for Auckland's Alert Level 3 are:

- Continue to work or study from home if you can
- Wear a face covering and keep your distance from people while out and about
- Two households can meet up outdoors with a maximum of 10 people.
- More outdoor exercise such as yoga and group exercise classes. Up to 10 people can take part while maintaining physical distancing of 2 metres.
- Children can return to early childhood centres with 10 children in each bubble. Please keep all older children at home.
- Businesses that require close physical contact cannot operate. Gyms remain closed.
- Keep scanning QR codes and record keeping everywhere you go.
- Travel between regions is still restricted.

## **Q. Are there any changes to the Auckland boundary area and travel across it?**

No. Air and land boundaries between Auckland and the rest of the New Zealand remain heavily restricted, and most people will not be permitted to travel across it without specified permission or exemptions. This is to provide confidence that COVID-19 will not be transmitted across the boundary. Checkpoints are in place to prevent illegal travel over Auckland's boundaries.

Most people who are permitted to cross the boundary for business or personal reasons will require a COVID-19 test, with people travelling for permitted personal reasons requiring evidence of a negative result taken within 72 hours of travelling.

Information about permitted travel is available on the [Unite Against COVID website](#).

# Domestic travel

## **Q. What changes have been made to domestic travel restrictions?**

If announcement is made to move an area to a higher alert level, people living in that area are no longer permitted to travel to an alternative place of residence outside the area once the announcement has been made, i.e there is no grace period between the time an announcement to a higher alert level is made and when it comes into effect.

The exception to this is any travel permitted under the rules of the increased alert level.

# Additional information

## **Q. Do you have any advice on celebrating Halloween this year?**

Advice if you are living in an area under Alert Level 3 over Halloween:

At Alert Level 3, tamariki (children) will not be able to go trick-or-treating.

While we can't celebrate in the usual way, there are alternative options you can do at home in your bubble.

Try a Halloween themed scavenger hunt in your backyard. You can meet up with 1 other household, up to a maximum of 10 people — you need to celebrate outside.


Have a Halloween movie night with your bubble.

Decorate your house.

Have a virtual costume party with friends and whānau online.

Remember if you are in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland or in parts of the Waikato that are at Alert Level 3, indoor gatherings are not allowed.

Advice if you are living in an area under Alert Level 2:



Check the [Unite Against COVID-19 website](#) for advice on how to stay COVID-19 safe while trick or treating, and information for those households who want to take part sharing candy with visitors.