

# **Environmental Health Officers and Health Protection Officers New Zealand**

## **COVID-19 Pandemic Report**

Presented by

New Zealand Institute of Environmental Health

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## 1.0 Government Strategy to Covid-19 in New Zealand

1. The Government's overall public health strategy in respect of the COVID-19 pandemic affecting New Zealand is **elimination**. That is, to apply a range of control measures in order to stop the transmission of COVID-19 in New Zealand.
2. Elimination does not mean eradicating the virus permanently from New Zealand; rather it is being confident we have eliminated chains of transmission in our community for at least 28 days and can effectively contain any future imported cases from overseas.
3. It is accepted that this approach will be needed in the long term ie, for many months or longer, depending on the emerging epidemiology and evidence around the disease and its management and progress with developing safe and effective treatments and/or vaccines.
4. **Border controls** are a key tool for stopping the introduction and spread of new cases from overseas. All people entering New Zealand are currently isolated in a government-controlled facility for at least 14 days on arrival, ensuring no new COVID-19 infections are introduced into the wider population. We anticipate border controls being progressively relaxed as it becomes safe to do so, for example, if we are confident certain countries eg, Australia, have low levels of community transmission. Further work will be needed to determine criteria for this.
5. **Robust case detection and surveillance** allows us to identify new cases quickly and take appropriate action. The surveillance plan for COVID-19 currently includes testing of anyone with respiratory symptoms, and sentinel testing in the wider population as part of broader surveillance measures to provide assurance that we are not missing cases. The latter will emphasise testing for Māori and Pacific populations, as they are likely to be disproportionately affected by a widespread outbreak. Access to testing must be easy and equity focussed. Targeted population-based testing will also be employed especially in institutional settings along with seroprevalence surveys in the future. A range of intelligence sources will assist in the early identification of emerging clusters.
6. **Effective contact tracing and quarantine** is an essential part of controlling transmission of the virus. Successful contact tracing means 80 percent of contacts of a person who has a positive COVID-19 test are traced and quarantined within four days of exposure to the case, to prevent onward transmission. Public health units, which regularly follow-up cases and identify contacts and clusters, have been funded to enhance their ability to do so. A National Close Contact Service and National Contact Tracing Technology Solution have been developed within the Ministry of Health to support contract tracing nationally. Additional technology platforms are also in development to

further enhance contact tracing.

7. **Strong community support of control measures.** The most important measures to restrict the spread will remain physical distancing, good hygiene, staying home if sick and effective use of PPE when required. These "voluntary" measures are fundamental to the overall response and a high level of compliance is needed to avoid having to go back up alert levels in the future. Survey data shows continuing very high public support for the government's strategy and there have been only a relatively small number of incidents of non-compliance to date. Ensuring ongoing public support for these measures is essential through clear communication and community building initiatives across a range of different age, ethnic and social groups. Confidence in the workplace and especially healthcare settings is enhanced by the appropriate use of PPE.
8. The aim of the elimination strategy is to stop community transmission of COVID-19 in New Zealand. This includes preventing onward transmission from cases that might arrive in New Zealand from overseas. Until we have effective treatments or a vaccine to support this strategy, we will rely on the pillars above and adjust our approach as more information on the disease becomes available.
9. The Ministry is working with other agencies to ensure New Zealand has access to an effective vaccine as soon as possible (likely to be at least 12-18 months). A vaccine strategy will likely be built on engagement with key researchers and exploring manufacturing capability as well as successful engagement with global supply chains. A successful mass immunisation programme will be required before relevant controls can be relaxed.

## 2.0 Environmental Health Officers and Health Protection Officers

### Roles

In New Zealand many Environmental Health staff worked from home during Alert Levels 4 and 3 and some during 2 – mainly completing all pending works such as alcohol licensing reports, verification reports, rescheduling verification etc. They were also on stand by and awaiting call out by Civil Defence if required.

Environmental Health Officer's(EHO's) at some of the Local Authorities throughout the Country, were involved with contact tracing, disease investigation or supervision of disinfection, while others have been helping at the Border with incoming passenger surveillance. This was mainly during the time that we started to get an influx of cases in New Zealand.

In addition some EHO's have been asked by District Health Boards (who are the service delivery agencies for COVID-19 in NZ) to be on standby and attend complaints relating to immediate risk to public health while New Zealand was at Level 4 alert (**total lockdown**) such as the following:

1. Food safety complaints
2. Foul smell or odour, on scale of 1 to 10 must be classed 9 or above in severity e.g. foul smell coming from dead animals
3. Sewage or wastewater overflow outside sewerage connections
4. Thick/ black smoke discharges from burning causing difficulty breathing within urban areas only but not attending any complaints relating to smoke coming in my house, affecting clothes, can see smoke in distance, smoke from chimneys, etc.
5. Fire exposing asbestos
6. Any other concerns relating to immediate risk to public health

There doesn't appear to be a nationally consistent approach though with regards to the utilization of all Environmental Health staff – was location dependent.

Please note that District Health Boards and the Ministry of Health in New Zealand employ Health Protection Officers and they have been actively involved in disease contact tracing, border surveillance and disease management from the beginning and still ongoing.

At our current Alert level 1, not many EHO's are now involved directly with the ongoing management of Covid-19. However, as verifiers of food business operators they are required to follow any guidance issued by New Food safety – Ministry for Primary Industries regarding updated information pertaining to the food sector.

New Zealand's official Covid19 page is: <https://covid19.govt.nz/>

Our classification of Essential Businesses is also useful - it can be found here:  
<https://covid19.govt.nz/government-actions/covid-19-alert-level/essential-businesses/>

The Ministry of Health Pandemic Plan can be found here:  
<https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/new-zealand-influenza-pandemic-plan-framework-action>

Our Civil Defence Pandemic Planning Guide can be found here:  
<https://www.civildefence.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/publications/is-07-06-pandemic-planning-guide.pdf>,

### 3.0 Current Situation in New Zealand

First case in New Zealand was 28 February 2020.

Currently at Alert Level 1.

<b>AS AT 9AM 28 JUNE 2020:</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Change in last 24 hours</b>
Number of confirmed cases in New Zealand	1176	4
Number of probable cases	350	0
Number of confirmed and probable cases	1526	4
Number of recovered cases	1484	0
Number of deaths	22	0
Number of active cases	20	4
Number of cases currently in hospital	1	1

#### **Managed Isolation:**

Cases that are in managed isolation and quarantine:

- Confirmed cases identified at the border (total) = 53
- Active cases in managed isolation and quarantine facilities = 20

#### **Lab testing Capacity:**

As at 9am 28 June 2020:

	<b>Tests</b>	<b>Date</b>
Total tested - day	5321	27 June 2020
7 day rolling average	7337	21 to 27 June 2020
Total tested to date	392,756	22 to 27 June 2020