

Alert Level 2 guidance for disability support service providers

12 MAY 2020

At Alert Level 2 the Government is confident there is no community transmission and that the disease is contained. However, the risk of new transmission will remain, and we all must do what we can to reduce it.

This information sheet provides guidance about what Alert Level 2 means for disability support service providers.

Balancing equity with safety

Whilst there are no 'bubbles' under Alert Level 2, the Government has continued to indicate a "play it safe" approach to any consideration of additional physical contact under Alert Level 2. As providers, the safety and well-being of your staff and the disabled people you support is paramount. Providers are managing a very complex situation in terms of balancing the need for disabled people to connect with family/whānau and friends and limiting risk of transmission for staff and disabled people.

The Ministry strongly acknowledges the challenge providers have in managing these dynamics and appreciates what you are doing to work through these issues. You may wish to develop further communications for disabled people and family members explaining how you are going to manage your service as we move to Alert Level 2.

For Alert Level 2, we want to make sure the same approach applies to disabled people and whānau as they do for everyone else. Everyone will be subject to Alert Level 2 safety rules, meaning they have the same right to go out for a walk, visit a café or shopping mall, and see/keep in contact with close family and friends so long as they do so safely. Some disabled people may have underlying health conditions that mean they are at high risk of becoming very unwell from COVID-19. In these cases, Government advice is for the person to take extra precautions to keep safe. This might mean that they continue to limit who they see, where they go, and follow strict physical distancing guidelines.

Overview of changes at Alert Level 2

All services can operate with Alert Level 2 safety rules in place

All disability support services can operate so long as they have Alert Level 2 public health control measures in place.

- Have COVID-19 risk screening in place. This means checking that staff, disabled people or visitors:
 - have not had contact with anyone who has been overseas within the last 14 days
 - have not had contact with anyone with confirmed, suspected or probable COVID-19 within the last 14 days
 - do not have acute respiratory symptoms (cough, fever, sore throat or running nose).
- Practice good hand hygiene and cough/sneeze etiquette.

- Maintain high cleaning standards, including disinfecting all frequently used surfaces such as doorknobs and handrails.
- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) in accordance with PPE guidelines.
- Keep a register of contacts (including writing down who staff support and when, who has visited the facility and when and which residents stay at your facility). This is to ensure contact tracing can be carried out if necessary.
- Follow the physical distancing rules:
 - 2 metres from strangers where contact tracing is not feasible (i.e. people that you pass on the street)
 - 1 metre in situations where good hygiene and record-keeping is in place (e.g. at work, at gatherings or in cafés or restaurants)
 - no physical distancing is required between close friends and family.
- Ensure staff and/or visitors with cold or flu like symptoms stay at home.
- Limit the movement of staff between facilities, and keep the same staff working with the same disabled people where possible (i.e. try to limit to the numbers of people that staff work with during this time).
- Use alternative ways of working where possible (such as virtually or by phone).
- Take extra precautions for those who are at high-risk of becoming very unwell from COVID-19.
- Ensure gatherings are limited to no more than 10 people.

Alert Level 2 allows for greater community participation and movement

Under Alert Level 2, disabled people can:

- move houses, for example, from a family home back to their community residential home or vice versa
- begin to access the community again (e.g. sports, recreational and leisure activities), as long as this can be done so safely. This means that everyone must follow physical distancing rules, practice good hygiene, keep detailed records for contact tracing purposes, and limit the numbers of people at gatherings.

Contact tracing records

At Alert Level 2, it's important that everyone helps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by putting good hygiene practices into place and by keeping records to support contact tracing if required.

Record-keeping is not compulsory if businesses can keep everyone 2-metres apart, but it is encouraged where practical. For further information about who this applies to see **Alert Level 2 guidelines**.

What information do you need to collect when recording contacts?

At a minimum, you should collect the following information:

- date of contact (and time if practicable).
- full name
- contact telephone number
- physical address.

This information needs to be collected for all people, support workers, disabled people and visitors.

For more information see: <https://worksafe.govt.nz/managing-health-and-safety/novel-coronavirus-covid/our-expectations-about-contact-tracing/>

People who are more at risk need to take extra precautions

Some people, such as those with underlying health conditions, are more at risk of becoming very unwell from COVID-19. Under all alert levels they need to take extra precautions to protect themselves from COVID-19. There is more information about those at risk on the COVID19 website at:

<https://covid19.govt.nz/individuals-and-households/health-and-wellbeing/at-risk-people/>

Those who are more at risk will be thinking about being safe and taking extra precautions during this time.

- Discussing with their doctor about what they think they should do in their situation.
- Continuing to limit who they see and where they go, especially for the two weeks after the move to Alert Level 2. This is because if COVID-19 continues to spread we might see an increase in cases again after 14 days.
- Maintaining 2 metres of physical distancing with people outside of their Alert Level 3 bubble, or from most people where they can.
- Continuing to use appropriate PPE in accordance with PPE guidelines.
- Making changes to how their support is provided. They will talk to you about this, and it may involve making changes to someone's employment.
- Considering getting a flu vaccine to protect themselves during the winter and flu season.

Specific guidance by service type for Alert Level 2

The following information is specific Alert level 2 guidance for:

1. Community residential services
2. High and Complex Framework
3. Respite
4. Day services
5. Supported Living and Home and Community Support Services
6. Choice in Community Living
7. NASC services
8. Other services

1. Community residential services

Community residential services continue to operate under all alert levels following the relevant guidance. Under Alert Level 2 residential services should operate with some extra safeguards in place.

Alert Level 2 allows for greater participation in the community. Residents should be supported to access meaningful activities in the community in a safe way following Alert Level 2 rules.

How can we ensure visits are safe?

Under Alert Level 2, residents can visit with their family members and friends.

All visitors to a facility must follow Alert Level 2 precautions:

- all visitors following good hand hygiene, and cough/sneeze etiquette
- maintaining a physical distance of 1 metre with those who are not family members or close friends.

Guidance for providers to support safe visits.

- Communicate with families and close friends that they must contact the home before visiting, so that you can manage the amount of people visiting at any one time.
- Log visits and contact details clearly so that contact tracing can occur if necessary.
- You could choose to designate a separate area for visitors to use in the home if possible, i.e. one room of the home, or meeting in an open public space such as a park or garden.
- Do not allow groups larger than 10 people.
- Maintain physical distancing of 1 metre between groups.
- Do not allow visitors into the home who are sick, who have been sick recently, who have COVID-19 symptoms, or have been in contact with someone with COVID-19.
- Limit unnecessary contact between visitors and other residents and staff.
- You might want to have a maximum number of visits per day based on the principle of keeping numbers small.
- Complete infection control and disinfection once visitors have left.

Providers must communicate this policy clearly with residents, staff and any visitors before/when they arrive.

Following the transition to Alert Level 2, it may take a little time for providers to put in place policies and procedures around visits.

Considerations about additional vulnerabilities (including underlying health conditions which put them at a higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19) must be factored into decision-making for visits. For at-risk people: agree with disabled people, residents, family and providers on who visits and how they can keep safe.

Deciding who can visit

Providers will need to support residents and their whānau to agree who will visit, and what everyone needs to do to keep themselves and everyone in the home safe. This includes residents and their support staff.

Decisions about who residents would like to have as visitors must be led by the resident and their families. Providers should not make these decisions, but instead support residents and their families to make these decisions. To do this, you must always communicate what is happening with residents in a way they understand.

You will want to encourage residents and their whānau to think about the following considerations.

- If they are at high-risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (<https://covid19.govt.nz/individuals-and-households/health-and-wellbeing/vulnerable-people/>), providers will need to support individuals to decide what extra safety precautions may be put in place to manage visits safely.
- If someone else in the home is at high-risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (<https://covid19.govt.nz/individuals-and-households/health-and-wellbeing/vulnerable-people/>), people should be supported to decide what extra safety precautions may need to be put in place.
- Choosing to put extra precautions in place around visits from people who are in a high-risk profession such as those who are meeting with lots of other people (i.e. who works in a hospital or supermarket).

Where there are differences of opinion within the home, it is for the provider to facilitate a way forward.

You may want to encourage everyone to think about:

- is there anyone in the home who will be particularly confused, distressed, anxious about not seeing family/friends etc, or will be particularly distressed/confused if they do?
- is there anyone in the home whose social connections have been completely cut off or significantly reduced i.e. is there anyone who doesn't have a phone, internet connection to talk to their family/close friends? They could be prioritised to have a visitor.

Other things to consider

- Staff movement between residential houses should be minimised as much as possible so that staff are in physical contact with a minimum number of people to prevent infection spreading. However, we recognise that to maintain continuity of care this may not be possible where staff are working across several homes where people require essential support, or where there is a need to substitute staff when others are not available.
- Residents can now move homes. Moves should be supported with contact tracing, physical distancing and hygiene practices in place. People who are considered at risk may need additional considerations to limit transmission risk. Additional guidance regarding moves provided under Alert Level 3 guidance still applies.
- It is important that residents' mental health and wellbeing is maintained by reducing their social isolation as much as possible. Alert Level 2 provides a much greater opportunity for safe social contact. You can also find information and mental health resources for disability support service providers at www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-resources-health-professionals/covid-19-disability-aged-care-and-hospice-providers
- Support workers who have close physical contact should follow guidance on appropriate PPE use. For up to date guidance on appropriate use of PPE see www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-information-specific-audiences/covid-19-advice-workers-including-personal-protective-equipment/personal-protective-equipment-use-health-care
- Providers must continue to report when restrictive practices have been used and critical incidents occur.

2. People under the High and Complex Framework

For people living in residential or hospital level services under Intellectual Disability (Compulsory Care & Rehabilitation) Act 2003, the guidance will be the same as for mainstream residential services in relation to Alert Level 2 requirements for managing transmission risk. However, as individuals in High and Complex Framework services, assessment of any risks will also be required in relation to visitors and leave provisions at any time.

For people who are subject to the Intellectual Disability (Compulsory Care & Rehabilitation) Act 2003, leave will be required for visits into the community including visits with family as part of allowed social contact. For care recipients, leave will be approved by Care Managers. For Special Care Recipients leave approvals need to come through the Ministry as per usual process.

3. Respite facilities

We know that Alert Level 4 and 3 have been difficult and exhausting for families who rely on respite facilities to take a break from caring responsibilities.

We also know that this will have been particularly difficult for those families with children and young people who have complex needs, especially for those with health issues that make the impact of COVID-19 potentially much more serious.

This time has been extremely hard for providers as well who have had to manage the complexity of risk and safety versus wanting to support people in the best way they can.

It is therefore important now that we can resume respite care in a safe way, as far as is practically possible. This is to be able to give families a much-needed break but also to ensure that this happens safely so that providers can feel a level of confidence in opening.

Alert level 2 means that respite facilities can open in a limited way

All respite facilities can now open if they can follow Alert Level 2 safety rules. This means:

- not having groups larger than 10 people
- thorough and frequent cleaning of the facilities (including all frequently used surfaces such as doorknobs, handrails and shared facilities)
- keeping a register for contact tracing purposes, including detailed records of staff work times and residents' use of the respite facility
- maintaining physical distancing of 1 metre between residents and staff, as far as practically possible (see section below).

Providers may also want to think about:

- limiting the movement of staff between facilities and between different residents where you can, this will help to reduce the numbers of people that residents and staff come into contact with unnecessarily
- prioritising spaces for people in need of emergency respite
- restricting the number of people in a respite facility at any given time to ensure physical distancing
- providing adequate staffing so that physical distancing can be maintained, but support will be available
- trying to have the same residents staying at the respite facility at the same time during Alert Level 2
- ensuring that PPE is available in accordance with PPE guidelines.
- doing risk assessment checks beforehand (such as checking whether anyone has had COVID-19 symptoms)
- having a plan around respite for those people who may have extra vulnerability, such as health conditions, so that they can access respite facilities where possible.

Physical distancing

Respite facilities, which will have good hygiene and record-keeping for contact tracing, should follow the 1 metre physical distancing rule where possible. This is because it is easy to trace who has used the facility. However, we know that COVID-19 can spread easily in care facilities so we need to ensure that we operate with caution where possible.

You might want to think about the Governments 3 S's:

1. Seated – try to keep residents to an area/rooms where possible for example, try to ensure that a resident always uses the same bedroom, sits at the same seat at the table, or uses the same bathroom (if there are multiple options)
2. Separated – try to maintain the 1 metre distance between residents where possible
3. Single server (staff) – try to have the same staff working with the same people each time.

We know that this is not always possible, but these are some things to think about when you are planning how physical distancing might work at your facility.

Where personal care support is required, and it is not possible to follow the 1 metre distancing rule, appropriate PPE should be used. You can find the latest advice on PPE at: www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-information-specific-audiences/covid-19-advice-workers-including-personal-protective-equipment/personal-protective-equipment-use-health-care

Those at-risk of severe symptoms of COVID-19

Those at high-risk of severe symptoms from COVID-19 have been advised to take extra precautions during Alert Level 2. This may include considering delaying visits where it is felt that risks cannot be safely managed.

We are aware that providers are likely to receive requests for those who are at-risk to return to respite facilities, particularly due to carer burnout during the lockdown period. You should talk to families about what is possible during this time to keep everyone safe. You might want to think about how you could offer respite support flexibly. For example, you could consider having support workers who could provide respite care within the family home (even for a few hours).

If it is not possible for those at high-risk to access your respite-facility, you should encourage the family to contact their local NASC. NASCs can talk to them about potential flexible respite options.

Where support cannot be provided physically, you should also think about how you can support disabled children, young people and families and whānau in different ways such as getting in contact over the phone or internet. These virtual services need to be accessible for disabled people.

We understand that these are complex issues to work through and that you will have already done lots of thinking about these yourself. Please feel free to talk to your Ministry of Health portfolio manager should you have any questions or concerns.

There may be new referrals to respite

NASCs will be able to complete assessments under Alert Level 2 meaning that there may be new disabled children, young people and families who are referred to your service. The NASC will discuss this with you to understand what is possible.

4. Day services

Day services can now open in a limited way following Alert Level 2 rules. This includes:

- not having groups larger than 10 people
- maintaining physical distancing of 1 metre between groups
- good hygiene and infection prevention control measures, and
- keeping a record of people working at or attending the service for contact tracing purposes if required.

To assist with physical distancing, you may decide to allow some people to attend the day service in the morning and others in the afternoon, or on alternate days. It is up to you as the provider to decide how you can operate safely. It may be that attendance is prioritised based on individual's family/whānau who have been identified as in urgent need of a break or that a person's inability to attend has had a significant negative impact on their wellbeing.

If day service attendees share transport with the same people to get to your day service, they do not need to keep 1 metre apart in the taxi or van. The taxi or van will, however, need to follow good cleaning and hygiene practices and drivers should keep a good record of who has been in the vehicle for contact tracing purposes.

Staff and day service attendees will need to stay at home if they are sick.

If disabled people still do not feel safe to return to day service, you should continue to support them in different ways, such as via video chat.

5. Supported Living providers and Home and Community Support Services

- All community services that provide personal care to people (e.g. toileting, washing and feeding) can operate as normal with Alert Level 2 rules in place.
- Infection prevention control measures must be adhered to for personal care services that require close physical contact, including use of PPE in accordance with PPE guidelines.
- For providers of personal care services, it is recommended that movement between homes be minimised. However, we recognise that to maintain continuity of care this may not be possible where staff are working across several homes where people require essential support, or where there is a need to substitute staff when others are not available.
- Where a disabled person is more at risk of severe symptoms from COVID-19, there should be agreement between them, their family and whānau, and the provider on who should support them and how their health will be protected.
- Service visits, where possible, should be limited to those that can be undertaken safely: maintain physical distancing of 1 metre; good hygiene and infection prevention control practices; and good record-keeping to support contact tracing.
- If household management has been reduced, this should resume where it can be undertaken safely: maintain physical distancing of 1 metre; good hygiene and infection prevention control practices; and good record-keeping to support contact tracing.
- Where Supported Living Services are primarily focused on facilitating social connections, providers should continue to use alternative forms of communication to connect with people they support if the support cannot occur safely: maintain physical distancing of 1 metre; good hygiene and infection prevention control practices; and good record-keeping to support contact tracing.
- Community participation (e.g. sports, recreation and leisure activities) can begin again but should be limited to those activities that can be undertaken safely: follow physical distancing rules; maintain good hand hygiene and cough/sneeze etiquette; good record-keeping to support contact tracing; and not having groups larger than 10 people.

6. Choice in Community Living providers

- All services that provide personal care to people (e.g. toileting, washing and feeding) can operate as normal with Alert Level 2 safety rules in place (see above).
- Infection prevention control measures must be adhered to for care services that require close physical contact, including the use of PPE in accordance with PPE guidelines.
- For providers of personal care services, it is recommended that movement between homes be minimised. However, we recognise that to maintain continuity of care this may not be possible where staff are working across several homes where people require essential support, or where there is a need to substitute staff when others are not available.
- Where a disabled person is chronically unwell or older, there should be an agreement between them, their family and whānau and the provider on who should visit them and how their health will be protected.
- Service visits, where possible, should be limited to those that can be undertaken safely: maintain physical distancing of 1 metre; good hygiene and infection prevention control practices; and good record-keeping to support contact tracing.

- If household management has been reduced, this should resume where it can be undertaken safely: maintain physical distancing of 1 metre; good hygiene and infection prevention control practices; and good record-keeping to support contact tracing.
- Where Choice in Community Living providers are focused on facilitating social connections, at Alert Level 2 providers should continue to use alternative forms of communication to connect with people they support if the support cannot occur safely (that is maintain physical distancing, good hygiene and infection control practices, and support contact tracing).
- Community participation (e.g. sports, recreation and leisure activities), can begin again but should be limited to those activities that can be undertaken safely: follow physical distancing rules; maintain good hand hygiene and cough/sneeze etiquette; good record-keeping to support contact tracing; and not having groups larger than 10 people.

7. NASC services

- There may be new referrals as residential moves become more regular under Alert Level 2.
- There may also be referrals for respite as respite facilities begin to open under Alert Level 2.
- NASCs will be able to continue to complete phone assessments as they have been. They will also be able to complete in person assessments with Alert Level 2 restrictions in place. It is advisable to ensure people are well beforehand.
- NASCs will need to consider having good infection prevention control practices in place such as hand hygiene, cough/sneeze etiquette and thorough cleaning of frequently used surfaces.
- Keep a register of contacts (including writing down who staff have had contact with). This is to ensure contact tracing can be carried out if necessary.
- Follow the physical distancing rules:
 - 2-metres from strangers where contact tracing is not feasible (i.e. people that you pass on the street)
 - 1- metre in situations where good hygiene and record-keeping is in place (e.g. at work, at gatherings or in cafés or restaurants).
- Ensure staff and/or visitors with cold or flu like symptoms stay at home.
- Limit the movement of staff between facilities, and keep the same staff working with the same disabled people where possible.
- Use alternative ways of working where possible (such as virtually or by phone).
- Take extra precautions for those who are at high-risk of becoming very unwell from COVID-19.
- Not allow groups larger than 10 people.

8. Other services that are available at Alert Level 2

- All equipment, housing and vehicle modifications can now go ahead if they can be done so safely (physical distancing of 1 metre, good hand hygiene and cough/sneeze etiquette, good record-keeping to support contact tracing).
- Hearing and vision services (including NZ Sign Language interpreters), rehabilitation therapies and child development services can also return to work if they can do so safely (physical distancing of 1 metre, good hand hygiene and cough/sneeze etiquette, good record-keeping to support contact tracing).

- Behaviour support services can now provide at-home visits and residential provider visits, if they can do so safely (physical distancing of 1 metre, good hand hygiene and cough/sneeze etiquette, good record-keeping to support contact tracing). Disability and Information Advisory Services operate as normal with Alert Level 2 precautions (physical distancing of 1 metre, good hand hygiene and cough/sneeze etiquette, good record-keeping to support contact tracing).
- Explore Behavioural Specialist will also continue to provide phone support from 8am – 8pm Monday to Friday on **0800 000 421**. You can find more information at: **www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-information-specific-audiences/covid-19-information-disabled-people-and-their-family-and-whanau/covid-19-getting-disability-support#explore**

Advice and guidance on PPE

The Ministry is continually reviewing their advice and guidance on PPE as local issues emerge and as our understanding from international experience grows. For up to date information on PPE please see:

www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-information-specific-audiences/covid-19-advice-workers-including-personal-protective-equipment/personal-protective-equipment-use-health-care

It is important to discuss the use of PPE with the disabled person.

More information

We hope this information has been useful. Please get in touch with your Ministry of Health portfolio manager if you have any further questions.

Useful resources

For information and advice specifically for disabled people, family and whānau see:

www.health.govt.nz/COVID19-disability

For information and advice in other formats for people with particular accessibility needs (including Easy Read, NZSL, Large Print and Audio options) see: **<https://covid19.govt.nz/communities/accessible-information/>**

For information and mental health resources to for disability support service providers see:

www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-resources-health-professionals/covid-19-disability-aged-care-and-hospice-providers

For up to date information on PPE please see: **www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-information-specific-audiences/covid-19-advice-workers-including-personal-protective-equipment/personal-protective-equipment-use-health-care**

For general cleaning information following a suspected, probable or confirmed case of COVID-19 see: **www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-information-specific-audiences/general-cleaning-information-following-suspected-probable-or-confirmed-case-covid-19**