

Alert Level 3 guidance for disability support services

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For the most up to date rules on Alert Level 3, please see: <https://covid19.govt.nz/covid-19/restrictions/alert-level-3/>.

What are essential and 'safe' services under Alert Level 3?

Under Alert Level 3, services that can be delivered 'safely' can continue. These are services that can be delivered while maintaining:

- physical distancing of 2 metres (outdoors) and 1 metre (indoors) between people
- good hygiene and infection control standards.

Services that require close physical contact which are not essential to allow a person to keep living safely in their home and out of hospital, will not physically open at Alert Level 3. They may, however, be able to provide remote service via telephone, video chat, email and the web. This will be agreed with the people who are receiving the service.

Specific guidance by service type for Alert Level 3

The following information is specific Alert Level 3 guidance for:

1. Community residential services
2. High and Complex Framework
3. Respite
4. Day services
5. Supported Living, Home and Community Support Services and Choice in Community Living
6. For people who employ their own support workers
7. NASC services
8. Other services

1. Community residential services

Community residential services are essential services and must continue to operate throughout all COVID-19 alert levels

Community residential services are essential services and must continue to operate.

For residential homes:

- efforts should be made to maintain physical distancing of 1 metre between staff who are coming and going from a residential home and the people living there. Where distancing is not feasible Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) should be used. For the latest PPE guidance please see: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19->

information-specific-audiences/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-workers/personal-protective-equipment-use-health-and-disability-care-settings

- residents should not move to a new home unless it is essential (or an emergency). See below for further details
- staff movement between residential houses must be minimised so that staff are in physical contact with a minimum number of people to prevent infection spreading
- residents can have visitors (from outside of their bubble) to their residential home. Alternatively, they can meet visitors elsewhere while maintaining physical distancing rules. Good hygiene, infection control, physical distancing and contact information guidance must be followed. 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
- it is important that residents are also able to go out for a walk, visit the supermarket, and see/keep in contact with close family and friends in a safe way.
- it is important that residents' mental health and wellbeing is maintained by reducing their social isolation as much as possible. Alert Level 3 provides an opportunity for safe social contact
- providers must continue to report when restrictive practices have been used and critical incidents occur.

General guidance under Alert Level 3 is that you can extend your bubble to include other households if you can do so safely. We acknowledge that this is difficult for residential homes which may already have extended bubbles due to the numbers of residents and support workers. Therefore, it is particularly important that visitors are allowed only where safe.

Safe controlled visits to community residential services are allowed under Alert Level 3

Controlled, safe visits are allowed under Alert Level 3 in agreement with the resident and whānau. This is an important mechanism to ensure resident and staff wellbeing and safety.

How providers can ensure safe visits

All visitors must follow Alert Level 3 precautions:

- all visitors must follow good hand hygiene, physical distancing of 2 metres if outdoors and 1 metre if indoors, and use PPE if physical distancing cannot be maintained (such as for personal cares)
- all visitors to be recorded to aid with contact tracing
- there should be no non-essential visits of non-family or whānau members.

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 minimise the amount of people visiting at any one time, and that only one visitor (from the same household) should attend at a time
- register visitors with the house manager
- log visits and contact details clearly so that contact tracing can occur if necessary
- designate a separate area for visitors to use in the home if possible, i.e. one room of the home, talking through a closed window, or meeting in an open public space such as a park or garden
- 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
- minimise contact between visitors and other residents and staff

- ensure a maximum number of visits per day can be established on a case-by-case basis
- 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.

Deciding who can visit

Providers will need to take a lead around visits acknowledging the complex set of dynamics that need to be managed. 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. There may be instances where visits may not be possible during Alert Level 3 due to difficulties of managing some of the health risks posed to residents and staff.

Decisions about who residents would like to have as visitors must be led by the person and their families. Providers should not make these decisions, but instead support people 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 consider:

- if they are at high-risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (<https://covid19.govt.nz/individuals-and-households/health-and-wellbeing/vulnerable-people/>), whether they want to see anyone outside of their bubble or whether they want to be cautious and wait until we move to Alert Level 2
- 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/>), whether they want to see anyone outside of their bubble or whether they want to be cautious and wait until we move to Alert Level 2
- choosing to not see a visitor who is 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).

What happens if the household can't decide on who should visit?

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 whose social connections have been completely cut off or significantly reduced i.e. is there anyone who doesn't have a phone or internet connection to talk to their family/close friends? They could be prioritised to have a visitor
- 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?
- if it is not possible for someone to visit are there other ways of ensuring social contact i.e. can the person have access to a phone, video call, can a family member come and wave/talk through the window - i.e. maintaining a good distance.

What if someone needs to move residence?

Under Alert Level 3, people can only move when it is an emergency or essential. This is to manage the risk of infection. Some examples of when a move might be essential/an emergency include:

1. when a person is being discharged from hospital
2. managing a situation or risk to ensure the ongoing safety of a resident
3. a court ordered assessment for a person going through a criminal justice process who may require placement under the High and Complex Framework. This will only impact on Regional Intellectual

Disability Supported Accommodation Services (RIDSAS) that are required to maintain access to assessment beds. RIDSAS providers need to be prepared for possible referrals to assessment beds

4. where there are concerns that a resident has been abused, or is likely to be abused, a move may be required of the alleged perpetrator in order to keep the resident safe. Please contact your local NASC about this kind of situation to discuss
5. where a person has become deeply distressed by the disruption to their usual routine or support, and their behaviour challenges the ability of their family or carers to sustain the support they provide
6. people who have been staying with their family who wish to return back to their home. These situations would need to follow any isolation requirements.

It is important for providers, NASCs and the Ministry of Health to work together to ensure any proposed move is warranted and appropriate for the individual concerned.

2. High and Complex Framework

Services provided under the High and Complex Framework such as Regional Intellectual Disability Secure Services and Regional Intellectual Disability Supported Accommodation Services will continue to operate as essential services. Hospital level services under the High and Complex Framework will be guided by the wider rules of the hospital care system. For further information on essential services see: www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-current-situation/covid-19-essential-services-health-and-disability-system

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 3 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 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 limited 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

Facility-based respite

Facility-based respite services will be closed at Alert Level 3. People are encouraged to consider alternative ways to access respite (through virtual supports, or accessing alternative supports through flexible funding options).

Carer Support

You can use Carer Support more flexibly so that:

- relief care can be used when you are doing your other paid work (even if you are working from home)
- you can use your Carer Support funding to buy things that will provide you with respite, as long as you stay within your total budget. Examples are art and craft supplies, books or DVDs.

To claim your Carer Support, please send in your Carer Support forms as usual and, if possible, attach receipts for any goods you have purchased.

If you have not received any relief care, you do not need a signature from a relief carer on your Carer Support forms. Payments will continue to be made in half days or days as usual.

Other ways of getting a break during Alert Level 3

Some options to access respite during Alert Level 3 are:

- Consider asking someone within your bubble to help you have a break
- Consider extending your bubble to someone who can help you have a break
- Consider using your Carer Support more flexibly
- Specialist Behaviour Support is available over the phone. You can call 0800 000 421 to receive wellbeing and behaviour support advice and support from Explore Behaviour Specialists. You can call from 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday.
- Carers NZ also has some information about respite - <http://carers.net.nz/respite>.

If you are concerned about your wellbeing or the wellbeing of your family or whānau, and/or feel desperate for support you should talk to your NASC immediately. Emergency respite within a disability support service may be available. You should make your concerns clear when you talk to your NASC.

4. Day services

These services will remain closed at Alert Level 3. Services should provide support in alternative ways.

5. Supported Living providers, Home and Community Support Services and Choice in Community Living providers

All community services that provide essential personal care to people (e.g. help with toileting, showering etc) can continue with use of PPE.

For providers of essential personal care services, it is recommended that staff 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.

Service visits, where possible, should be limited to those that can be undertaken safely (that maintain physical distancing, good hygiene and infection control practices, and support contact tracing).

Household management is allowed where the disabled person's wellbeing is at risk without it. This can be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Where Supported Living Services are primarily focused on facilitating social connections, at Alert Level 3 providers are expected to continue to use alternative forms of communication to connect with people they support.

Those services that can work from home, without face-to face-visits, should continue to do so unless deemed essential.

6. For people who employ their own support workers

During COVID-19 changes have been made to how you can use your funding. These changes provide more flexibility and will be in place until 30 September 2020.

Buying things

You can continue to use your funding to buy things that you couldn't before COVID-19. For example:

- to pay for grocery delivery rather than pay a care or support worker to help you with shopping
- to buy things that will help you stay in touch with others during COVID-19 (for example, a tablet for video messaging), to improve your skills, do activities in your home, or support you family and whānau to continue to do their care and support role.

Talk to your IF Host or Coach, your Connector or Kaitūhono about what is reasonable for you to buy.

You can also find out more about what you can buy at:

www.health.govt.nz/publication/what-people-can-buy-disability-funding-ministry-health-purchasing-guidelines

If your support worker can't come to work

In Alert Level 3, your support workers must not come to work if they or someone they live with:

- could be sick with COVID-19
- have had close contact with someone with COVID-19
- are at higher risk of severe illness if they contract COVID-19, or
- if the worker is aged 70 years or older.

If any of these apply, you should discuss and agree with your support worker, and their employer if they have one, that they must not come to your home to work.

In Alert Level 3, you can apply to the Ministry of Social Development for funding for support workers who cannot work. This funding is called **COVID-19 Leave Support**. You can apply for this funding here:

<https://workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/covid-19-essential-workers-leave-support.html>

If you ask a support worker to not provide support during Alert Level 3

To keep your bubble safe, you may want to reduce the number of support workers who provide support to you during Alert Level 3. If this is the case, you will need to get your support workers' agreement. This may include agreeing to changes in hours or days worked within your allocated support hours. You must comply with the employment agreements you have in place, and provide any relevant notice period, prior to making the change.

You will also need to continue to talk to support workers you do not need to come to your home.

If you ask a support worker not to come to your home during Alert level 3, you will still have to pay the support worker for the period of time they are not required. Keep a record of the special leave that you have paid. This record will be used by the NASC who will need to review your funding if you have spent it early because of extra costs during Alert Level 4. Make sure you talk to your IF Coach or Host, Connector or Kaitūhono.

You can also find out more about making changes to your support worker hours at:

www.employment.govt.nz/leave-and-holidays/other-types-of-leave/coronavirus-workplace/changing-an-employees-work-arrangements/

If you want to continue to have a smaller number of support workers after Alert Level 3 is over, then you must go through a proper employment process with your support workers. Make sure you also talk to your IF Host or Coach, Connector or Kaitūhono.

You can find out more about terminating an employment agreement at:

www.employment.govt.nz/ending-employment/

If your funding runs out or expires

If your funding runs out because you've had to pay support workers who are on special leave during COVID-19, the Ministry may be able to start your next budget earlier. Please contact your NASC, Connector or Kaitūhono if you need to do this. You will need to keep a record of the extra costs you have had to pay to be able to do this.

Keeping you and your support workers safe

If your support worker also provides supports to other people, they should take precautions to work safely with you. Working safely means keeping two metres (while outdoors) or one metre (indoors) away from you, washing and drying their hands thoroughly, coughing or sneezing into a tissue or their elbow, and/or wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) like gloves and a mask if they can't maintain a safe physical distance from you. They must also not visit you if they, or you, are unwell, or have been in contact with someone who is unwell or has COVID-19 symptoms.

For guidance about when you should use PPE see:

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

If you do not have PPE but think you and your support worker need to use it, talk to your IF Host or Coach, Connector or Kaitūhono. They can help get PPE for you.

7. NASC services

NASCs should provide their services in alternative ways (e.g. virtually, remotely). Limited visits are allowed under Alert Level 3 if this can be done safely, ensuring physical distancing, good hygiene and infection control practices, and the ability to support contact tracing.

8. Other services

Equipment and Modification services

Equipment and modification services are essential. Under Alert Level 3, essential equipment can be provided that can be delivered to a person's home and safely set up by the people in that home.

Providing more complex equipment will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Urgent housing modifications that can be done safely can go ahead.

Vehicle modification requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Behaviour support services

Specialist Behaviour Support is available over the phone. Whānau and support workers can call 0800 000 421 to receive wellbeing and behaviour support advice and support from Explore Behaviour Specialists. You can call from 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday. You can find out more, and access some resources, here:

<https://www.healthcarenz.co.nz/explore-specialist-advice/>

Audiology services

Face to face assessments can only be provided for urgent care. Urgent care for community allied health professionals is defined as:

- a condition that is life or limb threatening or,
- treatment required to maintain the necessities of life or,
- treatment that cannot be delayed or carried out remotely without risk of significant harm or permanent and/or significant disability

AND

- that cannot be delivered by a service that is currently operating or by health professionals that are already in contact with the person.

Appropriate PPE and workplace practices need to be in place. Virtual appointments should be provided where possible.

Other disability services (including Disability Information Advisory Services, Child Development Services etc).

Non-essential support should be provided in alternative ways (e.g. virtually, remotely). Limited visits are allowed under Alert Level 3 if this can be done safely, ensuring physical distancing, good hygiene and infection control practices, and the ability to support contact tracing.

Disability services cannot offer services that involve close personal contact, unless it is an emergency or critical situation.

Further information

We will continue to share information as it becomes available. In the meantime, stay calm, care for yourselves and others, and keep doing the core healthy activities, including checking the main websites:

- <https://covid19.govt.nz/>
- <https://www.health.govt.nz/>

For COVID-19 health advice and information, contact the Healthline team (free) on 0800 358 5453.

The Disability Directorate will provide additional information and advice for the disability sector as needed. For queries about disability support services contact your local NASC or email Disability@health.govt.nz