

## Coronavirus Update

### 6 March

With four confirmed cases having links to schools we know there is some anxiety being expressed in your communities.

We therefore wanted to use this Bulletin to bring together some key information to support you with your continued engagement with your students, staff and wider community.

We want to acknowledge and thank you for the great work that we have seen occurring in schools across the country through welcoming back students and staff who have had a stay away period, revising and updating pandemic plans and sending out strong and reassuring messaging to your communities.

### COVID-19 – the facts

Because COVID-19 is a new virus, it was always going to take time to understand how it is transmitted and who might be most impacted. While the scientists and health authorities have been quickly gathering and sharing the information they do have, there has been very unhelpful and inaccurate information shared about COVID-19, particularly through social media.

This misinformation has supported unreasonable levels of fear and worry in some parts of our communities, evidenced recently in New Zealand by some panic-buying of toilet paper, hand sanitiser and bottled water.

Scientists are working collectively and globally to quickly understand COVID-19. There has also been some significant research published recently by the [World Health Organisation-China Joint Mission](#). So what we now know about COVID-19 is:

- At this time the vast majority of people in New Zealand have no risk of exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19
- Children and young people under 18 account for only 2.4% of all reported cases of COVID-19 – this means we are unlikely to see widespread cases in schools and early learning services
- New Zealand currently has very few cases of COVID-19 and no evidence of sustained person-to-person transmission in our communities
- Although asymptomatic infection (people with no symptoms) has been reported, there is emerging evidence that this is rare and not a major driver in spreading the infection
- Spread happens through coughing and sneezing by someone confirmed with COVID-19 – similar to the way that influenza spreads
- *“COVID-19 does not transmit as efficiently as influenza, from the data we have so far. With influenza, people who are infected but not yet sick are major drivers of transmission which does not appear to be the case for COVID-19”* - Director General of World Health Organisation (WHO)

If someone is confirmed with COVID-19 infection:

- 80% of confirmed cases of all ages have mild to moderate symptoms
- 6.1% of all cases are treated as critical – most of these people have other health conditions
- If a child or young person does get confirmed with the case, 97.5% will get mild to moderate symptoms only (0.2% critical)
- Recovery time (median) from onset to recovery in mild cases is 2 weeks. For severe and critical cases it is 3-6 weeks
- COVID-19 isn't easily transmitted – and in China research shows it is largely occurring in families (75% - 85% of clusters occur within families), not in the community
- Again in China, early studies suggest that less than 10% of family members of confirmed cases, have been infected with COVID-19
- The people most affected are those over 60 years of age, and those with underlying conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease and cancer
- As with other illnesses such as flu, the highest mortality rate is in those over the age of 80

## Reminder that Health has a plan

If we continue to get new cases of COVID-19 in New Zealand, the Ministry of Health is well-prepared through their pandemic plan.

- The Ministry of Health is leading New Zealand's response to COVID-19. They are providing regular updates about COVID-19 through their website
- If there is a potential impact on a school or early learning service, the Ministry of Education regional teams will work closely with Health to support the school or early learning service (see further below for the protocol that has been put in place)
- For the vast majority of New Zealand and for all schools and early learning services we are still in a preventative stage
- For three households and their close connections, Health is focused on supporting them to prevent further spread
- Health is well prepared to move through the phases of their pandemic plan and there is strong and collective work happening across all government and sector agencies
- Health advise that with continued vigilance, the chance of widespread community outbreak is expected to remain low.

We have also been implementing our own plans including working closely with Health both regionally and nationally, to support schools and early learning services.

As part of this we have put in place a protocol agreed with health authorities when it comes to supporting schools and early learning services if there is a case with a connection to them:

- The local Medical Officer of Health will advise the local Director of Education
- If a case is confirmed and your school is impacted Health and Education will talk to you about that and a plan to address the issues will be developed with you, this will include factual messages to parents and caregivers
- The local Medical Officer of Health will determine the specific public health actions required
- Public health is the primary consideration and communications will be co-ordinated and timed to ensure the right messages get to the right people at the right time. You can expect that your school will be named as part of the communications. This is to reduce the level of anxiety for parents beyond your school
- Following announcements, education and health officials will meet with you regularly
- Health and Education will continue to manage media and reporting requirements to Government.

## What you and your community can do

**Be informed** - keep checking the information on the [Health website](#) and [our website](#) for education-specific information

**Plan** for what could happen in the future (through your Pandemic Plan) – our [website](#) has useful information to assist with this

**Respond** to what is currently happening in your school, early learning service or community – at the time of writing we have no cases of COVID-19 in schools or early learning services

**Regularly communicate** with your staff, students, children and community – they will be reassured that you have a plan in place if you do have a case confirmed in your school or early learning service. You may wish to include in your messaging encouragement to get information from reliable sources – the Ministry of Health being the prime source for New Zealand. See below for a suggested letter you could tailor to send to your community. We have also added to the [wellbeing information](#) on our website, including support for your community.

A reminder that there is a range of translated information for travellers and about self-isolation on the [Ministry of Health website](#) for NZ Sign Language, Simplified Chinese, Farsi, Italian, Japanese, Korean and Thai.

**Get in touch** if you have any questions – Healthline 0800 3585453, your [local district health board](#) contact and your local Ministry contact are all good contact points

**Focus on prevention** - the best preventative steps for any communicable disease include simple but important measures to practice as part of your daily routine, but especially during flu season:

- wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and dry thoroughly
- avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- avoid sharing anything that has come in contact with saliva, whether in your living or social environments

- stay home when you are sick and seek medical attention
- cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the rubbish
- get adequate sleep and eat well-balanced meals to ensure a healthy immune system.

## If someone is sick

Encourage them to seek medical attention. If anyone has symptoms and has recently been to a [country or area of concern](#), or have been in close contact with someone confirmed with COVID-19, please contact Healthline (for free) on [0800 358 5453](#) (or [+64 9 358 5453](#) for international SIMs) or your doctor immediately.

The regional health authorities will work quickly and closely with the person confirmed with COVID-19 to identify anyone who could be a close contact (generally this means being within a metre of the person when they are showing symptoms of COVID-19 and for longer than 15 minutes). Close contacts will then be asked to go into a period of self-isolation for 14 days (from when they had close contact with the person confirmed with COVID-19).

For someone who has had contact with a 'close contact', they are not at risk of infection and there is no need to self-isolate.

---

**Please note** that as COVID-19 is a notifiable infectious disease, treatment for people who have, or who are suspected of having, COVID-19 is publicly funded under the infectious disease exception (to manage risks to other persons). **This includes treatment for international students.** More information is available on the [Ministry of Health's website](#).

---

## Stopping stigma and discrimination

Some people are getting very worried about the disease. This fear and anxiety can lead to social stigma towards in particular, Chinese or other Asian New Zealand people. Stigma hurts everyone by creating more fear or anger towards ordinary people instead of the disease that is causing the problem. Stigma can:

- Drive people to hide the illness to avoid discrimination
- Prevent people from seeking health care immediately
- Discourage them from adopting healthy behaviours

None of these outcomes are desirable and can put all of those in New Zealand at risk. Abuse of people who are a victim of COVID-19 is unacceptable. It is vital we all help people to feel safe to seek medical attention

Viruses do not target people from specific populations, ethnicities, or racial backgrounds.

People from affected countries that live in New Zealand may be worried or anxious about friends and relatives who are living in the regions affected. Facing stigma can make fear and anxiety worsen. Social support during this outbreak can help them cope. And as promoted by the Human Rights Commission:

**Two step guide  
to COVID-19:**

- 1. Wash your hands**
- 2. Don't be racist  
and xenophobic**

**Give  
nothing  
to racism**



If you have any concerns about behaviours or messaging occurring in your community, please refer to information on our [website to support wellbeing in your community](#), including information about race-based online abuse.

If you know someone who has experienced racial discrimination related to COVID-19, the Human Rights Commission offers a free and confidential enquiries and complaints service. This kind of behaviour is absolutely unacceptable, and we encourage anyone experiencing discrimination to make a complaint:

[New Zealand Human Rights Commission website](#)

0800 496877 (if calling from NZ)

0064 93090874 (if calling from overseas)

Email [infoline@hrc.co.nz](mailto:infoline@hrc.co.nz)

Ministry of Education New Zealand

33 Bowen ST · Ministry of Education · Wellington, Wellington 6011 New Zealand