

## **Updated advice on wearing masks as part of our Resurgence Plan for COVID-19 – SWC talking points for the Minister - 5 August 2020**

### *Key points*

- The Ministry of Health is planning to release advice about the use of masks in the community by the general public as part of our ongoing response to COVID-19.
- The Ministry recommends that all households prepare for a possible further outbreak of COVID-19 by securing at least four non-medical grade masks per household member (like we prepare for an earthquake now).
  - I understand that these could be either reusable (and washable), or single use.
- If we move to Alert Level 2, the general public will be encouraged to voluntarily wear non-medical grade masks in situations where physical distancing is not possible. For those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 a medical grade mask is recommended to help prevent infection.
- A further key recommendation will be that masks will become compulsory
  - At alert level 3, when physical distancing is not possible, and
  - In all public places at Alert Level 4, when outside a work or home 'bubble'.
- I propose these changes and associated enforcement measures be included in the next iteration of the COVID-19 Public Health Response Act 2020. Officials will develop a communication strategy to make the public aware of the new requirements, and the Ministry will support the All of Government team to work through supply and distribution options.

### *Masks can help in the ongoing fight against COVID-19*

- The early deployment of masks to the general population can help reduce further transmission of COVID-19 in the community. In particular, wearing a mask can reduce the risk of infected people spreading COVID-19. This is referred to as 'source control'.<sup>1</sup>
- Masks are particularly useful if there is known community transmission, and people are in close proximity to each other (e.g. on public transport, in shops or in other confined or crowded environments).
- There is also some evidence to suggest that promoting the appropriate use of masks by the general population, when required, can help reinforce other public health measures as well. For example, one recent Italian study found that the use of masks increased the likelihood of physical distancing in public as people were more likely to actively avoid those wearing masks, and masks serve as a reminder to those wearing them of the need to physically distance.
- In this context, the Ministry of Health recommends the use of masks by the general population under the circumstances set out below. This includes non-medical grade masks that are:
  - single use and disposable; or
  - washable and reusable.

---

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation, 2020. *Advice On The Use Of Masks In The Context Of COVID-19*. [online] Geneva: World Health Organisation. Available at: <[https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)-outbreak](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov)-outbreak)> [Accessed 4 August 2020].

- The use of medical grade masks is not recommended for the general public, as these should be reserved for health workers and others in high COVID-risk roles.

*Masks are only one part of our overall elimination strategy*

- New Zealand's main strategy for counteracting the spread of COVID-19 in the first wave of infection was going 'hard and fast' on our lockdown, which has broken the chain of transmission within our borders to date.
- However, if there are further outbreaks of COVID-19 masks will be an important component of our strategy for containing outbreaks of the virus, in part to avoid the need for further lockdowns.
- Masks complement the main public health measures of good hand hygiene, physical distancing, staying home when sick, self/managed isolation and quarantine, testing and contact tracing remain critical.

*The appropriate use of masks by the public varies by alert level*

- Masks will be most useful when (a) COVID-19 is present in the community and (b) people are mingling in close proximity with each other (whether in work or social situations).
- For example, at Alert Level 1, it is not necessary for the general public to wear masks because there is no evidence of COVID-19 community transmission.
- Conversely, at Alert Level 4, not many people will need to wear masks because only those delivering or accessing essential services will be allowed freedom of movement.
- This means that masks are particularly important and valuable when the risk of COVID-19 being present in a community is higher and people are still mingling with one another. In other words, it makes wearing masks more important at Alert Levels 2 and 3 and in certain situations (e.g. when people cannot maintain physical distancing, such as on public transport).
- The Ministry of Health's public health advice on when and where the public should wear masks is dependent on the level of risk at each alert level as outlined in Attachment 1.
- At all alert levels, if people are unwell in the community with COVID-19 symptoms they should stay at home, self-isolate and seek medical advice. If travel to see a health professional is required, a mask should be worn. For example, people with symptoms of COVID-19 who are asked to undertake a test should wear a mask during their travel to the appropriate testing facility.

*To be effective, masks need to be used correctly*

- Clear guidance and public messaging on the proper use of masks is needed for them to be effective in combatting the spread of COVID-19.
- In particular, the Ministry of Health has advice available, and can adapt further guidance for the public on how to wear and handle masks appropriately. For example, we need to promote public awareness of:
  - good hygiene when handling masks (e.g. washing hands before and after handling)
  - how to properly fit masks, and
  - appropriate disposal without causing further contamination.
- Officials will need to do further work to promote and socialise the use of masks among the general public.

*The AOG Group is considering how to ensure sufficient supply of masks is available for the public*

- The All of Government group is currently looking at options for the appropriate supply and distribution of masks for the public.
- The Ministry of Health is working with the All of Government group to provide advice on the need to ensure equitable access to masks for all New Zealanders, and to support them in supply and distribution efforts (e.g. for procurement using Health Partnerships New Zealand).
- s 9(2)(j)  
[Redacted]
- s 9(2)(f)(iv)  
[Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- s 9(2)(g)(i)  
[Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- For those that purchase masks from the retail sector, the price appears to have stabilised in recent weeks and there are >13M masks currently available in the retail sector. If there was a surge in mask purchasing, market supply is likely to balance demand after 30 days
- The Ministry will continue to ensure there is adequate supply and distribution of medical grade masks for the wider health sector.

Proactively released

**Attachment 1: Different mask usage recommended at different alert levels**

| <i>Level</i> | <i>Type of transmission</i>                      | <i>Proportion of population affected</i>   | <i>Mask use required or voluntary</i>  | <i>Recommendation</i>   |
|--------------|--|--|--|---|
| Level 1      | No known cases of local transmission of COVID-19 | All  | <b>Voluntary</b>   | The general public should be encouraged to source masks and be prepared for possible resurgence in the community.   |
| Level 2      | Isolated or contained clusters                   | Most (some vulnerable groups will self-isolate)  | <b>Voluntary, with public use encouraged, particularly for vulnerable groups</b> | The public should be encouraged to wear masks in public enclosed spaces where physical distancing is not possible (such as public transport, shops) or if working in an environment at higher risk of COVID-19 infection, such as working in ports.                                   |
| Level 3      | Suspected community transmission                 | Some (more people working from home and fewer public gatherings)                             | <b>Public required to wear masks in some public settings</b>                     | The public will be required to wear masks when interacting outside of their work or home 'bubbles' and when in public enclosed spaces where physical distancing is not possible. This will sit alongside broader public health messaging and guidance on staying home where possible. |
| Level 4      | Widespread community transmission                | Few (essential workers and people gathering essential supplies or accessing health services) | <b>Public required to wear masks in all public settings</b>                      | The public would be required to use masks outside of their home or work 'bubbles' regardless of whether physical distancing requirements can be met.  |