

Stamp it out: Our plan to respond to new COVID-19 cases in the community

July 2020

- COVID-19 is exploding outside our borders with the number of cases growing every day.
- Other countries that had the virus under control are now seeing further community outbreaks.
- Our border facilities and testing regime have served us well so far but there is limited room for error.
- Even with the best precautions possible the chances of new cases in the community are high.
- We need to prepare now for that eventuality and have a plan ready. No-one wants to go backwards but the reality is our fight against the virus is not over and we must have a plan at the ready to protect our current position if it comes back.

Our approach to reducing the chance of a new outbreak is based on four pillars

1 Border controls

- We have strong restrictions on who can enter New Zealand - mostly only New Zealand citizens, permanent residents and their families.
- There is mandatory 14-day managed isolation or quarantine - along with health screening and testing - for all arrivals.
- We continue to ensure our frontline workers at the border are safe by wearing appropriate PPE and getting regularly tested.
- Our systems for managing returnees continue to be robust and limit the risk of spread.

2 Surveillance and testing

- We have a testing and surveillance strategy to maximise our chances of quickly detecting any COVID-19 in the community.
- The focus for testing is to test those who have symptoms, are close contacts of cases, or work at the border; and to monitor trends and test asymptomatic people as part of a wider surveillance strategy

3 Contact tracing

- If new cases are discovered through testing, contact tracing is critical to identifying contacts of a person with COVID-19 to prevent further transmission
- The use of the COVID tracer app and any other means of recording your movements are vital.
- Everyone should be able to answer this question - "If I come into contact with COVID today, how will I know, and how will others know?"

4 Hygiene measures

- People continue to be advised to wash and dry their hands, cough into their elbow, stay home if they are sick and report flu-like symptoms.

Any response to new cases of COVID-19 beyond the border will be underpinned by a set of objectives and principles

1 Objective:

Minimise the number of people infected with and potentially exposed to COVID-19

2 Objective:

Minimise the negative health outcomes for those infected with COVID-19

3 Objective:

Minimise the economic and social impacts of any control measures

We have developed three possible scenarios involving new cases

1

Scenario: Contained cluster within a community - Example: Aged residential care facility

A case visits a relative in an aged residential care facility who goes on to infect a nurse, a carer and eight residents. Over two weeks this triggers a small, localised cluster of 10 cases.

2

Scenario: Large cluster within a region - Example: Cafe

A case goes to a social event at a local cafe and subsequently infects several attendees. Over three weeks this triggers 20 to 30 cases across two or three towns within a region.

3

Scenario: Multiple clusters, spread nationally - Example: large sporting event and concert

Two cases emerge at a similar time, with both attending large events with visitors from across the country (such as a sporting event and a concert). Each case infects a large number of people, who subsequently return home across New Zealand. Over two weeks this triggers outbreaks across the country, with several locations reporting confirmed community transmission.

- New Zealand will likely remain in Alert Level 1. The response will be local with national support
- The Prime Minister and Cabinet will provide national oversight and strategic decision-making
- Government agencies will implement Ministerial orders under the Health Act and/or the COVID-19 Public Health Response Act, if necessary, and also provide operational support and guidance to iwi, business, schools, communities and the public to support the local response

- New Zealand will likely remain in Alert Level 1, unless there is evidence of risk of spread outside the region
- National decision-making and the scalable response will be similar to in Scenario 1, but there may well be more controls implemented at the regional level, including potential regional or local Alert Levels of 2 or 3

- In this scenario, an increase in Alert Level will be implemented, in line with the risk presented by the outbreaks
- The Prime Minister and Cabinet will provide national oversight and strategic decision-making, and depending on the risk level, take control of the response
- Government agencies will implement Ministerial orders under the Health Act and/or the COVID-19 Public Health Response Act, and also provide support and guidance to iwi, business, schools, communities and the public to support the response.

We will take a precautionary approach in the early stages when we don't know whether we have a contained outbreak or not, rather than run the risk of doing too little too late.

1

Principle:

Continue to pursue an elimination strategy for COVID-19.

2

Principle:

The core of our response will be personal hygiene, staying home when sick, testing, contact tracing and isolation

3

Principle:

Where this is insufficient we will seek to control COVID-19 with the least intrusive measures, including tailored local responses, that give us confidence that we will continue to deliver on our strategy of elimination

4

Principle:

We will seek to avoid going to Alert Levels 3 or 4 if possible, although we will do so if necessary

5

Principle:

There will be strong national oversight over any response, regardless of whether the response is local or national in scale.