
All District Health Boards

COVID-19 (Coronavirus): Employee related and general FAQs

Updated 17 March 2020

Introduction

The contribution of New Zealand's health workforce to supporting the wellbeing of our communities is highly valued by district health boards as employers and by the public in general.

As we manage the current COVID-19 situation, DHBs recognise the importance of staff having access to consistent national advice on key employment-related issues to assist their understanding and guide their actions.

This guidance has been developed by the DHBs in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and major unions to provide clarity for staff around issues such as travel and leave arrangements in the event self-isolation is required.

It also provides the certainty required for the DHB workforce to continue delivering high-quality services to New Zealanders while managing the challenges posed by COVID-19.

Please take a few minutes to read this document and understand the temporary changes to normal processes that the DHBs are introducing, in consultation with key unions, while we work through these challenges together.

This document will continue to be updated as developments require and will be recirculated to staff. The short-term measures put in place will be regularly reviewed and will be removed as soon as possible. If you have any queries, please reach out to the points of contact outlined in this document.

Thank you for your willingness to demonstrate a degree of short-term flexibility in the interests of continuing to provide best care to our patients.

General Principles

- The health sector continues to closely monitor the evolving COVID-19 situation. We are working in partnership with our unions to plan for and respond to COVID-19 and this guidance will be updated as required. The advice applies across all DHBs.
- Where possible, flexible working arrangements should be explored for staff who need to be away from work either due to infection control protocols (such as a need to self-isolate) or other matters such as the need to look after dependants.
- Medical certificates – where you are off work due to Public Health advice, the DHB will waive the requirement to produce a medical certificate after 3 days. However the DHB may require an alternative signed declaration from the staff member.

- Further advice or clarification on leave entitlements for staff can be obtained from your union, HR or line manager in line with these FAQs.

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About COVID-19

3. What is COVID-19?

Coronaviruses are a large and diverse family of viruses that cause illnesses such as the common cold. In January 2020 a new coronavirus was identified, now called COVID-19.

4. What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

The symptoms are similar to the flu – fever, cough and shortness of breath. If you have these symptoms and have recently travelled or have been in close contact with someone with a confirmed case of COVID-19 please contact the special Healthline number 0800 358 5453 or call your GP.

5. How serious is coronavirus?

Most people have a mild to moderate illness with flu-like symptoms. People of all ages are being infected, but older people and those with medical conditions seem most likely to get seriously ill.

Where can I get further information about COVID-19?

Click here for up to date information is available on the [Ministry of Health Website \(www.health.govt.nz\)](http://www.health.govt.nz).

About my health and wellbeing

If you are unwell please stay at home.

How do I keep well?

1. Keep well through appropriate rest, eating and actions to boost your immune system. It is important to focus on what keeps you well, focusing on all aspects of your wellbeing and giving attention to what keeps you in balance and boosts your wellbeing, this can be slightly different for everyone. When it comes to connecting with others, make sure we are following the Covid-19 guidelines to protect and promote the wellbeing of our whānau/community and ourselves, you may need to adapt ways of connecting with others and nurturing all aspects of your whare.

Māori model Te whare tapa whā

- Using Te whare tapa whā – As a guiding principle framework for Māori and others https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/maori_health_model_tewhare.pdf
- Finding balance – Te whare tapa whā plan for individuals <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Working-Well/WS-finding-balance-individual.pdf> and teams <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Working-Well/WS-finding-balance-workplace.pdf>

Fonofale Pacific Model for wellbeing

- Using the Fonofale model focus on what enhances your wellbeing <http://healthhb.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Fonofale-model.pdf>

General

- Employee Assistance Programme facilitated sessions should be made available, one on one or group sessions.
- A guide for maintain health and wellbeing - <https://www.healthandsafety.govt.nz/reports/booklets-and-brochures/a-guide-for-maintaining-health-and-wellbeing/> (includes rest, eating, actions etc)
- A mental health guide for New Zealand Leaders https://www.healthandsafety.govt.nz/assets/Documents/A_Mental_Health_Guide_for_New_Zealand_Leaders.pdf (this has sections on diet and sleep etc)
- A Personal Wellbeing plan, Five ways to wellbeing <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Working-Well/FINAL-Personal-wellbeing-plan-WW.pdf>
- Refuelling the tank for individuals <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Working-Well/WS-refuelling-individual.pdf> Teams <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Working-Well/WS-refuelling-workplace.pdf>
- 64 ways to take care of yourself https://www.eapworks.co.nz/uploads/6/8/8/3/6883838/6_4_ways_to_take_care_of_yourself.pdf
- A few minutes of self-care https://www.eapworks.co.nz/uploads/6/8/8/3/6883838/using_a_few_minutes_for_self-care.pdf

2. Practice according to approved Infection Control procedures – hand washing, social distancing, cough etiquette
3. Wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) **where this is clinically indicated** i.e. surgical masks, yellow gowns, gloves. Note PPE is being held centrally and is controlled for staff use so that it lasts through the winter
4. Follow all clinical protocols outlined for your area when providing care for people with suspected and confirmed COVID-19. Patients are placed in side rooms and negative pressure rooms where they are suspected to have symptoms that fit the COVID-19 case definition. If in doubt call the Infection Prevention and Control team. NOTE: all of the team providing care will know that the patient has suspected COVID-19 symptoms and the team will be working together to follow approved procedures.
5. Revise your travel plans –enjoy your own backyard!

I am concerned that I am at risk with a pre-existing condition, because I am or planning to get pregnant or have a family member who is vulnerable from a health perspective – what do I do?

If you are concerned about how to best protect yourself if you have an existing health issue, please contact your Occupational Health and Safety team to discuss. Remember to always follow approved Infection Control procedures as these are international best practice standards. The same guidance applies to family members.

Can I refuse to work with patients with COVID-19?

You are employed to use your professional skills to care for whomever presents for care. You are provided with knowledge, safe procedures and PPE to protect you from risk as much as possible.

If you have any concerns about your immediate safety, please contact your line manager who should raise this with the HR team.

Who should I talk to if I have concerns that I or a family member may have been exposed to COVID-19?

Employees or their managers can seek advice regarding anyone who has travelled overseas or has been exposed to a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19, by contacting:

1 Healthline 0800 358 5453

2. Your GP (please call ahead)

For staff who in the course of their work may be exposed to COVID-19 either through caring for patients or taking lab specimens – what guidance is there around the need to track and monitor those staff for illness?

We are providing staff with education about the appropriate infection prevention and control practices to follow when assessing a patient at risk of COVID-19. We have recommended that the Emergency Departments keep a log of the healthcare worker who saw the patient. Likewise a log of all staff providing care on the ward should be kept. This information should be sent on to Occupational Health and Safety to support contact tracing at a later date if required.

Staff should contact their supervisor or manager if they become unwell with respiratory symptoms; we are not putting in place processes to monitor staff who have cared for COVID-19 patients as we expect them to adhere to infection prevention and control best practice and this should minimise the risk of acquiring infection from these patients.

You should perform hand hygiene according to the '5 moments for hand hygiene', ensure that shared surfaces within the clinical areas are kept clean and stop sharing food in the ward office areas as good measures to reduce staff exposure regardless of whether you are caring for a patient with COVID-19 or not.

What are the implications for my team if I contract COVID-19

You should contact your manager and let them know that you have COVID-19 infection. It is a notifiable disease so the regional public health service will be in touch with you to learn more about the source of your illness. They will also manage any close contacts that you may have. They will provide these people with guidance about what they need to do.

I need some financial or welfare help

If you or a family member has been affected by coronavirus (excluding through your work) then please talk to your manager in the first instance. You may be able to get support from Work and Income even if you are not on a benefit.

WINZ can help with:

- Loss of livelihood (where you can't work or have lost your income)
- Food clothing and bedding (immediate needs to a maximum amount)
- Accommodation costs if you have to move.

You can also cash up your leave if provided for in your local DHB policy.

In addition to the information on the MoH website <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus> an **All of Government Welfare Number, 0800 779 997** is now up and running to provide welfare information and support for individuals in self-isolation, this is available 7 days a week.

Is it safe for me to be working in a hospital environment?

The health and safety of all patients, staff and visitors is a number one priority for all of our DHBs and we adhere to the very highest international infection control standards.

Any possible case of COVID-19 within a hospital environment is treated in accordance with these same standards in order to [help](#) keep everyone as safe as possible.

We can all help protect ourselves and each other by:

- washing our hands regularly with soap and water
- following the clinical guidelines for appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE).

About my leave

Can a staff member who is currently on annual leave be asked to be part of the on call roster because of a shortage of staff?

A staff member on annual leave can be asked but not required to stop or delay their leave to contribute to an on call roster. In the case of an emergency DHBs may put in place other contingency plans to call staff back to work.

My leave (except bereavement and sick leave) is booked, pending or planned – what do I do?

You are strongly advised not to travel overseas in accordance with Government travel advisories. Please discuss your leave with your manager – you should understand what the implications are in relation to travel and if your travel will extend your time away from work what your plans are for that. Special leave will not apply for any self-isolation if you chose to travel overseas.

From 16 March, before we grant any further leave, we have to assess leave already approved. This will occur from 16 March to 27 March. No annual leave is able to be granted while leave is being assessed.

What do I do if I have run out of paid sick leave entitlement?

Situations should be looked at on a case-by-case basis, with managers working with HR to determine whether any additional entitlements exist under a particular employee's MECA or individual employment agreement and what other leave entitlements may be utilised. Forms of leave should ideally be explored and exhausted in the following order for COVID-19:

- Entitled Sick Leave including discretionary Sick Leave in line with employment agreement entitlements, where applicable.
- Lieu days
- Shift Leave
- On-call leave
- Accrued Annual Leave (agreed with the employee to take).
- Annual Leave in advance (agreed with the employee to take. Note that if the employee leaves their employment before accrual becomes available they will be expected to repay this leave)
- Leave Without Pay
- "Non-Employment Agreement" Discretionary Sick Leave* DHB discretion

If you unwell but have no paid sick leave left please discuss this with your manager. Managers should seek advice from HR or contact Occupational Health and Safety about support for an individual or to assess if sick leave is required. Managers should use their existing delegated authority policies to approve additional paid sick leave.

What are the leave payment arrangements?

Shown below are examples of possible scenarios that may arise as a result of the coronavirus and how DHBs would determine what leave is available to employees.

Please note if you work from home you will be paid as normal working time

Leave Type		
Scenario	Employee Asymptomatic / No symptoms	Employee Symptomatic / Sick Employee should be appropriately assessed to confirm CoV-19 as per MoH Health Professional Advice.
Employee is symptomatic and may have been exposed to COVID-19.	N/A	Sick Leave
Employee requested to self-isolate. Note: Isolation requirements will be clinically informed and changed as the situation and MOH advice evolves.	Working from Home/Special Leave Special Leave to be paid for the first 14 days self-isolation period Staff member may work from home if these arrangements are suitable.	<i>Where the employee becomes symptomatic/sick while in self-isolation;</i> Special leave for the 14-day isolation period thereafter sick Leave Refer to relevant MECA/SECA/IEA
Employee requested by DHB to self-isolate for incubation period after not following advice e.g. not following MOH or MFAT travel advisory.	As special leave does not apply we will look at options relating to Working from Home/Annual Leave or Unpaid Leave	Sick Leave Refer to relevant MECA/SECA/IEA
Employee is potentially exposed to COVID-19 during the course of their work.	Special Leave may be available where the exposure can be directly linked to an employee's work.	Sick Leave/Special Leave Special Leave may be available where the exposure can be directly linked to an employee's work.
Children or dependant required to isolate <i>Discussion by Manager with Employee to seek agreement on working from home if suitable</i>	Working from home or Annual Leave	Sick Leave if either Employee or Dependent becomes symptomatic and requires care. Refer to relevant MECA/SECA/IEA

Leave Type		
Scenario	Employee Asymptomatic / No symptoms	Employee Symptomatic / Sick Employee should be appropriately assessed to confirm CoV-19 as per MoH Health Professional Advice.
Employee prevented from returning to the country through border controls.	<p>Please contact your manager to discuss your leave options</p> <p><i>Leave may be granted for up to 14 days after which we will review your situation with you and may request you to take other types of leave.</i></p>	Sick Leave

About Self-Isolation

I came back from overseas, before 0100 hours on 16 March - do I need to self-isolate before returning to work?

No, however you must be vigilant with their health and if you develop any symptoms within 14 days please **stay at home** and contact Healthline (0800 358 5453).

I came back from overseas, after 0100 hours on 16 March - do I need to self-isolate before returning to work?

If you have visited or transited through any country except those listed below*, you are requested to self-isolate for 14 days.

If you develop symptoms during the self-isolation period you should contact Healthline (0800 358 5453). Please avoid using public transport if possible. Please contact your manager.

Symptoms include:

- a cough
- a high temperature (at least 38°C)
- shortness of breath.

These symptoms do not necessarily mean you have COVID-19. The symptoms are similar to other illnesses that are much more common, such as cold and flu.

Shortness of breath is a sign of possible pneumonia and requires immediate medical attention

The Pacific* is excluded from this measure – if you have visited a Pacific Island you do not need to self-isolate on return but you should be vigilant with your health. If you develop any symptoms within 14 days please **stay at home** and contact Healthline (0800 358 5453).

**In this context The Pacific is defined as the Cook Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Wallis and Futuna.*

I have had close contact with someone who has travelled overseas and who is self-isolating – what do I do?

You do not need to take any action if you have had close contact with someone who has recently travelled overseas. However if you develop symptoms you should contact Healthline (0800 358 5453).

I have had close contact with someone with a confirmed case of COVID-19 infection in the last 14 days – what do I do?

You will be contacted by the Regional Public Health team and requested to follow their advice. If you develop symptoms you should contact Healthline (0800 358 5453).

What should you do if you develop symptoms during self-isolation or have completed the period of self-isolation and then develop symptoms?

Tell your manager and then call Healthline 0800 358 5453 for advice.

Can I self-isolate without any medical guidance or advice from Healthlines?

No, you must have received guidance to self-isolate before you isolate. Guidance can come from border control, your GP, Healthline or the Emergency Department.

What happens if someone comes to work after being asked to self-isolate?

The request to self-isolate for 14 days is clinically recommended and in the interests of public health.

If you have been asked to self-isolate and you refuse you will be requested to follow self-isolation requirements. If you refuse you will be suspended on pay and requested to follow self-isolation requirements.

If I am required to self-isolate can I work from home?

Every effort will be made to provide you with tasks to enable you to work from home – please discuss this with your manager should you need to self-isolate.

I cannot enter New Zealand because I have been stopped at the border in my country or New Zealand

In the first instance you should contact your manager and discuss your situation. We will provide you with guidance at this point.

Does the period of isolation apply to all staff or just those in a clinical setting?

It applies to everyone, whether they work in a clinical setting or not. This is to avoid unknowingly passing on the virus if you get it. You can find guidelines on what to do to isolate yourself on the [Ministry of Health website](#).

Are volunteers being screened for the need to self-isolate?

As with all our employees and contractors, volunteers who have returned from overseas (except from the Pacific) after 16 March or have been in close contact with someone suspected of COVID-19 are being asked to self-isolate for 14 days.

If we have new hires travelling from overseas and are required to self-isolate for 14 days, would they still be placed in a hotel/motel

Every case will be individually reviewed as an update to date assessment of risk and options is required. There are a number of public health controls in place to minimise the introduction of COVID-19 into New Zealand.

These include border restrictions on countries you cannot travel to and the requirement for travellers to self-isolate for 14 days after arrival from overseas except the Pacific.

For up to date information check on the [Ministry of Health website](#).

About my business and personal travel

We encourage the use of zoom/skype to conduct business rather than face-to-face meetings where possible

Can I still travel overseas for work-related and education activity?

As a responsible employer and provider of essential community health services, we are taking the decision to place restrictions on travel. These restrictions apply to all staff, because we are all important members of the teams that enable the care that we deliver.

- **Work-related travel:** All non-essential international business travel to 30 June is cancelled and any future bookings are deferred until further notice, including to Australia. Non-essential travel includes all travel for the purposes of training, education, conference, seminar or meeting attendance. Travel pre-booked for 1 July-30 Sept should be reviewed in mid-June.

If you are travelling to attend exams, education or sabbaticals that ensures you meet your professional certification or regulatory bodies' requirements, please discuss this within your DHB with the relevant approvers before you book your travel. Where staff are already on sabbatical please stay in touch to make sure they are supported if they have any concerns.

All work related travel will be approved by the CEO or delegate.

- **Personal travel:** Private international travel is not recommended after 15 March - please discuss this with your line manager before you travel. If you choose to travel and don't follow Government travel advisories, and self-isolation is required on return as a result, special leave will not apply unless there are exceptional circumstances by agreement with your manager. Other forms of leave and or alternative working arrangements, such as working from home, will be discussed with your line manager.

If you do need to travel follow safe travel advice on the [Safe Travel Website](#). Please note travel insurance will not cover COVID-19 claims.

What about work-related domestic travel?

All non-essential domestic travel should be reconsidered with a view to cancelling, until 30 June 2020 when this advice will be reviewed. Non-essential travel includes all travel for the purposes of training, education, conferences, seminar or meeting attendance.

Video conferencing is the preferred method of joining these events.

What is the criteria to support or otherwise for private overseas travel given the staffing impact of travel advisories?

Travel overseas should only be for essential purposes.

The assessment of annual leave requests should be done on the basis of whether we are able to accommodate the request given the forecasted demands on the service and whether we have the staff available to provide cover. Assessment of any request where someone is planning to travel overseas privately should include the period of leave requested plus a period of 14 days post their return. The service needs to be able to accommodate the full potential period of absence in order to grant the leave for those team members.

Does the DHB travel insurance cover COVID-19 – medical treatment, travel plans and time away from work?

Insurers may not cover medical expenses or loss of deposits, cancellations, travel disruption and time off work in connection with COVID-19. Please check with your travel co-ordinator.

The Employer's Liability policy will cover our employees for injury/disability/death provided there is no ACC cover

What happens to CME or Professional Development funds that are expiring?

We will carry-over any expiring CME or Professional Development funds that are at risk due to these travel restrictions.

What if I am currently booked to travel for work purposes and I incur non-refundable cancellation charges not covered by insurance?

Airlines, hotels and insurance companies are – in many instances – waiving cancellation charges or reimbursing them. Where there are costs for you as an employee arising from cancellations that are not covered by vendors or insurance, these will be met by the DHB.

The DHB does not cover insurance for personal travel.

About Students

All NZ elective students going overseas for this time have had their electives cancelled and are being sent home. Should we be doing the same as we are expecting a number of electives into the country very soon?

Yes, elective students heading to NZ should also be cancelled, whether current in NZ or not.

Please note this section will be updated with advice from the relevant tertiary Institutes.

About Contractors

We have a number of contract and locum doctors who may be exposed in the course of their work – what do we advise them?

Contractors and locums are expected to follow the Government travel advisories in relation to travel and self-isolation.

DEFINITIONS

Available Paid Leave: – this is by agreement between line manager and the staff member on what type of leave will be taken including:

- o Entitled Sick Leave
- o Lieu days
- o Shift Leave
- o On-call leave
- o Annual leave entitlement
- o Annual Leave in advance (agreed with the employee to take. Note that if the employee leaves their employment before accrual becomes available they will be expected to repay this leave)

Special Leave: Paid leave granted during exceptional situations including the Covid-19 outbreak where the employee is not sick or injured and is not charged against leave entitlement. Where there is an agreement that employees will receive paid special leave, the payment will be based on their normal rostered duty they were due to work during the period of paid leave.

Discretionary Leave

“Employment Agreement” Discretionary Sick Leave: Some MECAs specifically allowing the application and granting of additional paid sick leave where an employee has exhausted their accrued paid sick leave entitlements. All MECAs prescribe the exact amount that may be granted, and some allow for the deduction of any leave given to be deducted from future entitlements. Please check the employee’s relevant agreement to see the parameters around granting this.

“Non-Employment Agreement” Discretionary Sick Leave: Paid sick leave granted in addition to any contractual entitlements granted in exceptional circumstances in response to all relevant context including the exhaustion of the other leave types and where extreme hardship would be experienced by the employee if not granted.

IEA – Individual Employment Agreement

MECA – Multi Employer Collective Agreement

SECA – Single Employer Collective Agreement