



COVID-19 guidance for early learning services and kōhanga reo at Alert Level 3

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Introduction

This guidance is for licensed early learning services and kōhanga reo that operate during Alert Level 3. This is an iterative document that will be updated as we learn and understand more about COVID-19. We suggest you add these links to your favourites and check them regularly:

- <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>
- <https://covid19.govt.nz/alert-system/alert-level-3/#education>
- <http://www.education.govt.nz/covid-19/advice-for-early-learning-services/>
- <https://www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/how-the-ministry-works/early-learning-bulletin/>

This guidance does not include information on funding for licensed early learning services and kōhanga reo.

You will already have been thinking about how your service can safely operate under Alert Level 3 within the public health measures.

This guidance builds on the principles of your existing plans for dealing with emergencies and infectious illness and aligns to licensing standards and criteria wherever possible. Our aim is to help you plan and have procedures and policies in place to manage the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

You **must** follow Public Health requirements to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The safety and wellbeing of children, your staff and wider early learning community continues to be a priority at any alert level. Because of these public health requirements, it is very likely that throughout Alert Level 3 you will need to offer support for both distance learning and onsite learning.

Each service has an obligation to eliminate health and safety risks where possible. Where this is not possible you must provide the highest level control possible. To that end, there is an expectation that you look to maintain, or create new practices that meet or exceed the Ministry of Health guidelines.

We acknowledge this guidance does not reflect differences in philosophy and learning settings which exist across the sector, however, the public health measures **must** be met by all services that are open under Alert Level 3.

As this guidance applies to all licensed early learning settings our language for referring to teachers, educators, kaiako, or adults required to meet ratio requirements has been standardised to staff, adults or educators, so think about how the guidance applies to your setting. Early learning service or service means all licensed early learning settings including playcentres, kindergartens, kōhanga reo, education and care centres, and home-based services.

General principles for Alert Level 3 in early learning services and kōhanga reo

“Learn from home if you can”. If children can be safely cared for at home, then that is where they are encouraged to stay.

The preference is that bubbles are kept small, and people should limit travel and face-to-face interactions as much as possible. However, if parents or caregivers need to send their child to early learning, they can do so.

Children and staff who are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 are encouraged to stay home wherever possible.

It is important that people who are vulnerable to COVID-19 are supported to make the right choices for their situation.

Staff at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 should only return to work if they are fully vaccinated¹, or their safe return to work can be managed.

Staff at home can be undertaking planning or administrative tasks, as well as actively contributing to the service’s efforts to support children who are learning from home during this time.

Services that are open must still meet first aid qualification and ratio requirements, including supervision by a Person Responsible at all times children are attending.

Higher risk groups are outlined here: [People at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 | Unite against COVID-19 \(covid19.govt.nz\)](https://www.covid19.govt.nz/people-at-higher-risk-of-severe-illness-from-covid-19/)

Licensed early learning services and kōhanga reo, excluding Playcentres, may open, but with restrictions to meet public health measures.

Early learning services are able to open to provide education and care, for children whose parents or caregivers need them to attend.

If a child usually attends a combination of services (such as centre-based and home-based), parents/caregivers must select one option only for physical attendance during Alert Level 3.

Unless directed to open by the Secretary for Education, service providers may choose to remain closed if they do not have any families requiring care. Services that are not able to operate safely within the parameters set by the public health measures **must** not open.

Licensed home-based services can resume with multiple families’ children looked after in one location, provided the public health measures are also observed.

The general principle of keeping bubbles small still applies, as do the usual rules about the maximum number of children being cared for in a home at any one time.

During Alert Level 3, visiting teachers are expected to use electronic methods (Skype, Zoom, Facetime etc) to connect with educators, rather than physically visiting.

Regulated adult-to-child ratios in each home remain the same:

<http://www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2008/0204/latest/DLM1412637.html>

¹ Two weeks after the second dose of the vaccine was administered

Hospital-based services may open, with restricted access to playrooms

Services provided to children who are inpatients at hospitals may continue, with compliance to COVID-19 measures implemented by the controlling District Health Board to prevent infections.

Use of playrooms should be restricted to limit bubbles and sharing of resources. Surfaces and resources must be cleaned before the area is accessed by a different bubble.

Children will not be able to attend Playcentres and playgroups

These service types are not permitted to open at this time. This is because a high number of adults are required to be present which means lots of bubbles will intersect.

Physical distancing is not required within early learning bubbles

It is not possible to adequately care for infants and young children from a distance. There is no requirement for staff/educators and children within an early learning bubble (as outlined in the public health measures below) to physically distance, although it is recommended that separation is encouraged as much as possible through the placement of resources and activities in the service. Good hygiene practices are very important within bubbles.

Each bubble must remain separate from other bubbles within the service, and from other individuals in the community.

Physical distancing of 1 m **should** be observed between the staff working in different early learning bubbles within each service.

If there is a confirmed or probable case linked with your service, you will be advised of that by the Medical Officer of Health or your local public health authority.

Public health authorities will direct you of the next steps. If you become aware of a case associated with your early learning service and haven't received that notification from health authorities, please contact your local public health unit for information and support:

[Public health unit contacts](#)

General cleaning information following a suspected, probable or confirmed case

See this link for general cleaning principles:

<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-information-specific-audiences/general-cleaning-information-following-suspected-probable-or-confirmed-case-covid-19>

Requirements under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015

To meet your requirements under the Health and Safety Act 2015 during Alert Level 3 you must manage risks and protect staff and children. How you will do this needs to be detailed in a COVID-19 safety plan. You should review your plan from last year.

WorkSafe requires that before you reopen, persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) should self-assess their ability to operate safely at Alert Level 3. This includes thinking about how you are going to manage risks and protect staff, children, parents/caregivers and whānau under Alert Level 3. This includes working with staff to:

- address the risks associated with COVID-19, as well as risks that may arise due to a return to operations
- understand the practicalities of changing work arrangements
- be confident that new health and safety practices will enable them and their families to remain well.

PCBUs should also be thinking about how they're going to get their day-to-day operations up and running again safely, including what they might need to do:

- for their people, and ensuring they have considered health and wellness issues for them
- for their facilities and resources, and
- to amend their approach to work to allow for COVID-19 risks to be addressed, including separation distances between bubbles and good hygiene practices.

To ensure you are minimising the risk of COVID-19 appropriately, and that your business can continue to operate safely, you need to consider the following questions.

- Are there any risks arising from restarting your business that has been shut down during alert level 4, and how will you manage these?
- How will you ensure all workers know how and are able to keep themselves safe from exposure to COVID-19?
- How will you gather information on the wellness of your workers to ensure that they are safe and well to work?
- How will you operate your business in a way that keeps workers and others safe from exposure to COVID-19? For example how will you manage parent drop-off and pick is line with physical distancing requirements.
- How will you manage an exposure or suspected exposure to COVID-19?
- How will you evaluate, and continuously review, whether your work processes or risk controls are effective?
- How do any changes impact on the risks of the work you do, and on the safety and wellbeing of staff and the children in their care?

This guidance has been designed to support you in this process. WorkSafe has also developed guidance and a template that you could use to develop your plan. This template is a useful tool for things you should consider when updating your own plan.

[Our COVID-19 safety plan – what you need to think about | WorkSafe](#)

You need to involve staff in the development of the plan to help you assess risks and identify solutions, and to assist with the communication and supervision of the controls put in place as a result. Consultation with staff and their representatives should be an ongoing process, especially in establishing plans and controls and improving the processes as lessons are learned. Both managers and individual staff have a responsibility to actively manage to the controls you put in place.

All staff should be familiar with the plan before you open, and they should be clear what processes to follow should they continue to have safety concerns or feel unsafe to return to work at the service. You may want to share the plan with parents and whānau whose children will be attending under Alert Level 3.

For further information: [Novel coronavirus \(COVID-19\) | WorkSafe](#)

Public health measures for all licensed early learning services and kōhanga reo at Alert Level 3

Some measures are absolute requirements and are indicated with a '**must**' in the text below. We have also included recommendations and best practice that you should consider when determining how your service will operate safely under Alert Level 3.

Indoor temperature needs to be 18 degrees Celsius

You **must** maintain a minimum temperature of 18 degrees during operating hours at Alert Level 3. This minimum temperature becomes an ongoing regulatory requirement from 31 August 2021.

You should ensure rooms, particularly those where children are sleeping, are well ventilated to keep the temperature at a comfortable level.

Parents/caregivers are asked to be vigilant about keeping any sick children at home. If a sick child comes to the service, you must send them home.

You need to communicate clearly with parents/caregivers that children **must** not attend the service if they are sick. If parents or caregivers are sick, they **must** not enter the premises. You could consider including this information as part of an addendum to the existing enrolment agreement that parents or caregivers agree to and sign. This could be one page setting out the terms of enrolment under Alert Level 3.

Parents/caregivers should also be asked to keep children home if anyone in the household is sick as a precaution. Any child that becomes unwell while at the service **must** be immediately isolated and arrangements made for them to be collected by their parents or caregivers.

If anyone at your service has symptoms of a respiratory illness, you should call Healthline for advice.

There is no requirement to notify your community that either a child or staff member is unwell or has been tested for COVID-19, as the proportion of those tested returning a positive result is very low. There are also privacy concerns to take into account. If you are notified of a positive test result, Public Health and the Ministry will support you with messaging to your community.

Ensure everyone regularly washes and dries their hands.

You should actively encourage staff and children to regularly wash their hands, including on arrival to the service, and before and after meals. The Ministry of Health advise handwashing for at least 20 seconds, and drying hands thoroughly afterwards. Regular routines such as washing hands after blowing noses, toileting or changing nappies should continue to be emphasised.

Staff/educators should direct and supervise hand washing at a minimum of before and after eating food and going to the toilet, either through washing hands with soap and water, or use of hand sanitiser according to need. Children who are too young to wash their own hands will need to have this done for them regularly, including after having their nappy changed.

Ensure hand sanitiser is available but adults supervise its location and use.

Where soap and water are not readily available, hand sanitiser should be provided in every occupied room and staff and children actively encouraged to use this.

Staff should know where the hand sanitiser is available in the service, and should supervise its use by children. You must not leave hand sanitiser within reach of children.

Putting in place staggered entry and exit times, or a similar process, to avoid all children coming into or exiting the centre all at once and drop-off at entrance to limit numbers entering site.

You should support people to maintain a two metre physical distance if there are multiple people waiting to drop off or pick up their child at the same time. This is consistent with the general principles of life at Alert Level 3 that apply to everyone when they leave their home.

You can remind parents/caregivers about this by:

- communicating this to them when confirming whether their child will be attending during Alert Level 3.
- using chalk or tape to make two metre markers on the pathway outside the entrance.

Where practical, you **must** relocate your pick-up and drop-off register to the entrance of the premises to limit exposure of visitors to your bubble of children. Staff may sign children in and out, as long as parents/caregivers verify the attendance record in pen on a weekly basis. Adults should use hand sanitiser before using a shared pen.

Ensure that children have their own food containers and do not give and take food to and from each other. Food can be supplied in accordance with public health guidance.

You **must** ensure there is no sharing of food and drink between children, for example from one child's plate to another. This includes birthday parties at the service, and candles should not be used.

You **must** ensure drink bottles, baby bottles, crockery and cutlery are not shared between children, meaning that they are cleaned between different children using them.

Consider allowing greater physical distance when children eat together at the same table.

If continuing to provide food prepared on the premises, food handlers **must** adhere to standard good hygiene practices. See this link for advice for food handlers:

Staff **must** follow the same principles and ensure they are not sharing food, crockery or cutlery.

Meal breaks should be staggered.

You **must** ensure tables, chairs and highchairs are cleaned and disinfected before the next group of children eat at the table.

If you have multiple groups of children in different rooms, you **must** avoid mixing the groups during meal breaks.

You should consider setting up multiple meal tables if possible to reduce contact on surfaces between different groups of children.

Staff breaks should also be staggered and physical distancing should be maintained between staff not in the same bubble.

Put away any toys and resources that cannot be easily wiped down or cleaned frequently.

You should avoid using toys and resources with porous surfaces which can absorb and retain fluids, and resources which are difficult to clean. Example: soft toys, dress-ups.

If possible children in different bubbles should not access the same resources. You can rotate resources between children in different rooms, but you **must** ensure they are cleaned frequently after use by each group of children.

Consider limiting the use of art and craft materials and discarding them at the end of each activity.

Sensory and modelling resources such as playdough and finger paint can be provided in individual portions and discarded after use.

Books can be used as the virus has been shown to survive less than 24 hours on paper. However, each book should be removed after use by children in one bubble and left overnight as a precaution. Books with plastic or laminated covers **must** be wiped with a disinfectant wipe or cloth and left over night before re-use.

Disinfect and clean all surfaces daily.

You **must** ensure you have appropriate cleaning supplies and these are stored safely out of reach of children.

You **must** ensure thorough cleaning of all surfaces, including sleep furniture takes place at the end of each operating day as a minimum.

Make sure the specific instructions are followed for the disinfectant being used (e.g. spray and leave on surfaces for 30 seconds before wiping down).

Ensure the availability of appropriate cleaning supplies (e.g. disinfectant and cloths) for cleaning of high-touch surfaces. It is recommended that cleaning cloths are disposable.

You should develop a routine to disinfect and clean high touch surfaces (e.g. play gyms, tables, hard-backed chairs, doorknobs, light switches, remotes, handles, desks, toilets, sinks) regularly throughout the day. In a space with crawling infants, this will include table legs and items a child uses to pull themselves up to a standing position.

Face coverings are not required or recommended as necessary in any educational facility by the Public Health Service.

Face coverings aren't necessary in an education setting. However, if staff choose to wear a face covering, they shouldn't be prevented from doing so.

If standard procedure at the service is to wear some form of PPE when performing specific tasks (e.g. wearing gloves when changing nappies), staff can continue to do this.

QR codes must be displayed and contact tracing registers must be available for visitors who can't use the QR code.

Where visitors cannot use the QR code you **must** record the date, time, name of any person on-site (staff, child, parent/caregiver, whānau member or any visitor) and ensure their current phone contact details and physical addresses are on record. Your attendance sheets and visitor books could be used for this purpose.

Examples of visitors:

- Parents/caregivers or whānau member that enter the premises (i.e. picking up or dropping off a child).
- Tradespeople completing repairs in the premises.
- Education support workers working with children with learning support needs.

You **must** ensure any person (staff, child, parent/caregiver or any visitor) who has cold, flu or COVID-19 symptoms does not enter the premises. You can find details of COVID-19 symptoms here: [Stay home if you are sick | Unite against COVID-19 \(covid19.govt.nz\)](https://www.covid19.govt.nz/stay-home-if-you-are-sick)

You should consider limiting visitors inside the premises where possible to facilitate physical distancing between adults.

QR code posters must be displayed prominently at or near the entrance to your premises.

You should actively discourage any person that is at higher risk to COVID-19 from entering the premises.

<https://covid19.govt.nz/individuals-and-households/health-and-wellbeing/vulnerable-people/>

Additional public health measure for centre-based early learning services and kōhanga reo

Increase the minimum licensed indoor space for children from 2.5 sq m per child to at least 3 sq m per child. Outdoor requirement of 5 sq m remains. The actual number in a facility to be determined according to the ability to manage the space requirements and other public health measures. The number of children must be limited to 10 in a group. This means that the maximum number of children that can be in a room (or physical space) is 10, and children must be in the same room with the same children everyday (ie. no mixing between rooms)

Indoor space for all early learning services is calculated by excluding the space occupied by all fittings, fixed equipment, and stored goods and excludes passageways, toilet facilities, staff rooms, specific sleeping areas for children under 2 years of age, and other areas not available for play.

The indoor space available for the sole use of each ECE bubble must allow for at least 3 sq m per child.

When considering how this would work at your service think about children's ages and specific developmental needs. You will need to determine how many bubbles of children you can accommodate within the space measurements, while still meeting the other public health measures.

It is important to consider the layout of your centre, including access to things like bathrooms, sleep areas, and outside space. The ideal scenario is that each bubble will have its own facilities.

If you do not have separate bathrooms or outside space you should consider if you can still meet public health measures with multiple bubbles. You would need to stagger access to the outside space and clean the outdoor furniture or playground equipment after use by each group. Sandpits **must** not be used at this time. Two hourly cleaning of high touch areas in bathrooms is recommended.

If your service is open plan, you may be able to safely divide the space into separate areas, for example using sliding wall partitions. Furniture should not be moved to provide separation if it poses a health and safety risk such as falling if climbed on, or during an earthquake. Partitions do not need to be at ceiling height but would ideally be at adult head height or at a minimum the head height of a child. There should be no gaps that children could pass toys through or otherwise physically connect with other bubbles. Supervision alone cannot guarantee the requirement that bubbles do not mix.

You **must** still meet the regulated adult:child ratios and have a Person Responsible for every 50 children at all times.

Measuring space to meet increased licensed indoor space of 3 sq m per child

As a general principle, the length of a room multiplied by its width will give you a measurement in square metres. You will need to exclude fixtures such as cupboards or shelves from this calculation. You can include multiple adjoining rooms in your calculation, if these are to be accessed only by one bubble. The requirement at Alert Level 3 is for 3 sq m of indoor space per child.

As a rule of thumb, you can only have up to 80% of the maximum number of children displayed on your licence attending at any one time—provided you are not drastically changing the layout of your service during Alert Level 3. The maximum is further restricted depending on whether the layout of your service can support effectively separating multiple bubbles of children.

If you have any questions about measurements, contact your [local Ministry office](#).

Sleep space

Different early learning bubbles should not use the same sleep space at the same time. If it is not possible to provide furniture or items intended for children to sleep on (such as cots, beds, stretchers, or mattresses) at a ratio of 1:1, the service must ensure the hard surfaces are wiped down between each use. Each child **must** have individual linen and this **must** be washed daily after use.

Staff movement between bubbles

Staff (including part-time staff) should stay with their early learning bubble throughout Alert Level 3. It is recommended that one additional staff member is assigned to each bubble to provide cover for breaks. If staff movement between bubbles is unavoidable, you **must** keep this to a minimum and the staff member **should** aim to maintain a physical distance of 1 m at all times.

Shared facilities

If it is possible to dedicate different areas for each bubble, for example toilets and outdoor space, eating areas, that is preferred. However this will not be possible for many services.

We recommend that high touch surfaces such as taps and door handles are cleaned as often as practical and at least every two hours throughout the day.

Where spaces (eg eating areas) are shared, then all surfaces (tables, chairs including legs) **must** be wiped down with appropriate cleaner as the bubble exits that area.

A full regular clean of all areas should occur daily. Children should be reminded to wash and dry their hands well after toileting, and before and after eating.

Where outdoor space is shared, bubbles **must** access the space at separate times. All toys and play equipment **must** be wiped down with appropriate cleaner as the bubble exits that area, and if possible separate play equipment should be reserved for each bubble.

If staff/children have to pass through a space where children outside their bubble are located to access certain facilities, they **should** maintain a physical distance of 1 m from those outside of their bubble where practicable.

Your service **must** have a space where children can be isolated if they become unwell while attending. Each bubble should have its own isolation area. You should ensure this is well-stocked with supplies as required by your policy, and is ready for use. If the isolation space is shared, it **must** be thoroughly cleaned between uses and should be large enough to ensure there can be appropriate physical distancing of 1 m if children from different bubbles are needing to use this space. You should consider how use of this isolation space may impact on other operations at the service.

Managing staff absences

You should plan for how you will manage staff absences before reopening your service. You may bring in a staff member who is working from home, or you may roster additional staff to allow for this and to help with managing break times. You may also bring in a reliever who can only work for your service.

Managing bubbles throughout Alert Level 3

Children should only be part of one early learning bubble. This means if a child usually attends a combination of services (such as centre-based and home-based), then parents/caregivers **must** select one option only during Alert Level 3.

The general principle is to keep the same children in a bubble throughout Alert Level 3. If parents/caregivers decide children will no longer be attending during Alert Level 3, they can be replaced in your bubble.

If you operate a number of services within a similar geographic location, you may choose to combine children into bubbles at a single licensed service. This is permitted, as long as accurate attendance records are maintained at the service.

It is important that the service where the child is physically attending has access to all relevant records, including parent contact details, medical and allergy information, and a list of people authorised to collect the child.

There are a number of ways the combination of services could be managed. What works best will depend on your particular scenario, including the number of children and staff transferring, and whether any of the services are usually operating at their funded maximums.

In some cases you may find difficulties with accurately calculating funding and ratio requirements within your Student Management System (SMS). We recommend you seek advice from your SMS provider on how to manage this.

Arranging children into their bubbles

Arranging bubbles by age group or having a mixed age group bubble is a decision you will have to make considering specific developmental needs and the availability of resources. We recommend following your usual operating model so there is some familiarity for staff and children.

Where practicable, we recommend keeping children of any age from the same family in the same bubble at your service to reduce exposure.

Demand exceeds service capacity

Under Alert Level 3 parents or caregivers can send their children to an early learning service if they need to. If you find that demand from parents or caregivers exceeds your capacity to safely accommodate them, please contact your local Ministry office and we will work with you to find ways to support those families.

Bubble sizes for home-based services

While the bubble size is a public health measure specific to centre-based services, we strongly recommend considering limiting the size of bubbles in each home to 10 children throughout Alert Level 3. This number is made up of any children who do not live in the home, and may include school aged children. During Alert Level 3 where physical attendance at school is not required, it is permissible to have school-aged children present at home-based services during school hours.

Home-based educators can still only have up to 4 children under the age of 6 and not enrolled in school in the home at any one time. If school-aged children are present, the total number of children present in the home must not be more than 6. Any of the educator's children under 6 years old and not attending school are counted towards these limits, however the educator's school-aged children (up to age 14) are not.

Offering transport to and from service

If you transport children to and from your service, consider whether the needs of your community means this should continue under Alert Level 3. This is a private arrangement between you and your parents/caregivers, and you will still need to meet public health measures in order to ensure the health and safety of children and staff. Think about how you can best manage this. The vehicle will need to be included as part of your daily cleaning routine during Alert Level 3. You **must** only transport children from one bubble at a time. Consider bringing a teacher in the van who is part of the bubble to help the children into their seats. Physical distancing applies between the driver and with parents and whānau.

If you did not provide transport for children to and from your service prior to Alert Level 3, it is not recommended that you start now.

We recommend that you communicate any changes to your usual transport routine to parents/caregivers and whānau as soon as possible.

Excursions

Most excursions will not be possible during Alert Level 3. It is permissible to take children for walks in your local area if you can do so safely. This means physical distancing of 2 m is maintained with everyone outside your bubble and children are prevented from touching any surfaces or objects outside the service premises. This may be difficult to achieve with some age groups, so needs to be carefully considered and managed.

Before reopening your service

Site preparation

A summary of key requirements for opening and operating under Alert Level 3 is available [here](#):

A broader property checklist for reopening centre-based services is available [here](#):

Staffing

Services should manage their staff in a way that maximizes the effectiveness of health and safety measures and reduces the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

Staff members **do not** need to be fully vaccinated to work onsite. The exception to this are staff members who have a higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, if they are not yet fully vaccinated. It is recommended that they are not onsite at Alert Level 3, unless their safe return to work can be managed.

We recommend all employers initiate conversations with their staff about who may be best placed to return to work as necessary.

Where possible, it is highly recommended that teachers stay with the same bubble of learners. Please consider your staff who usually work at more than one service. You could consider assigning all the hours they would normally be employed for, in that one bubble, or a mix of onsite or remote delivery of learning.

Where the usual work that a staff member performs is not available, consider providing them with alternate duties as you adjust to different Alert Levels. Consider paying day relief or casual staff who have been booked for work but are no longer required during the Alert Level 3 restrictions.

Throughout Alert Level 3 (and 2), staff continue to have access to their usual employment agreement entitlements, including the child contact/non-contact provisions of those agreements.

You must follow Ministry of Education and public health guidance to operate in a way that minimises the risk of COVID-19 transmission and ensures a safe environment for your staff and learners.

School-aged children of staff should not be present at centre-based service. Schools are open at Alert Level 3. The health and safety of staff and children attending your early learning service should be your main priority at Alert Level 3. Having school-aged children at the centre adds another layer of complexity around keeping bubbles small.

Staff who become unwell at the service **must** be isolated and sent home. You should have a process for managing this in terms of continued compliance with ratio requirements.

Reasons some staff may need to remain at home

Staff must stay at home if they:

- are sick with COVID-19, or unwell generally.
- need to self-isolate, as per Ministry of Health guidelines, due to close contact with someone confirmed to have COVID-19.
- are caring for dependents who need to self-isolate, as per Ministry of Health guidelines.

It is recommended that staff at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and who are not fully vaccinated are not onsite at Alert Level 3. They might be prioritised to support learners from home. You may request a medical certificate for confirmation of vulnerability to assist you in providing appropriate health and safety measures for them. Staff should work with their GP or specialist if they need help understanding their own level of risk and how best to stay healthy.

Information for people considered at higher risk from the effects of COVID-19 can be found on the [Vulnerable people - COVID-19.govt.nz website](https://www.vulnerablepeople.govt.nz/)

Where specific regions are at Alert Level 3, you may have staff who cannot get to your service because they are unable to enter or exit an Alert Level 3 area. Consider asking these staff to work from home wherever practicable.

You should talk to your staff who care for children who are younger than 14 years old. Staff may require flexibility of duties, or start and finish times, due to the staggered timing of school days and limitations of before and after school care. Their children should remain at home if they have a parent or caregiver available to look after them at home, and they have access to distance learning.

Cleaning

With your premises not used during the lockdown period, you will want to undertake a thorough clean prior to re-opening. There is no specific action you need to take for COVID-19 in regard to cleaning prior to re-opening. Once staff and then children are on site, regular (at least daily) cleaning of surfaces is recommended alongside your usual cleaning schedule.

Review your cleaning policies and practices and plan for increased cleaning for high touch surfaces (door handles, table tops in common spaces etc.) and bathrooms.

There is some information about cleaning surfaces on the [COVID-govt.nz](https://www.covid.govt.nz/) website.

Learning Support

At Alert Level 3 learning support staff and independent early intervention providers are still providing remote support to their children and families/whānau for children attending services and those learning from home. Centre-based early intervention services will not be opening under Alert Level 3 although they too are providing remote support.

Education Support Workers (ESWs) are able to support children attending a service during this time, subject to availability. They **must** only work at one early learning site during Alert Level 3. Early learning services will need to work through the allocation of these resources across their sites in order to provide the required support to all the children with learning needs they have attending.

Ongoing compliance with ECE Regulations and Licensing Criteria at Alert Level 3

The ECE Regulations and Licensing Criteria set minimum standards and requirements to ensure the health, safety and well-being of children attending licensed early learning services.

At Alert Level 3, all early learning services must comply with all regulatory requirements. We acknowledge that managing staffing, adult:child ratios and first aid qualification requirements will be challenging at this time. The health, safety and well-being of children and staff should remain your primary consideration.

We know that your programmes will look a little different during this time, and that you can't operate in the same way you're used to. You will likely need to offer less group experiences and more individual or smaller group opportunities. Regular excursions and interactions with your local community will largely stop. You may need to limit access to the outdoor space or flow between teaching and learning spaces more than usual, in order to meet the public health measures. For Alert Level 3, this is necessary and ok.

If you have any concerns regarding compliance with either the Alert Level 3 health measures or ECE licensing requirements please contact your local Ministry of Education office here.

<http://education.govt.nz/our-work/contact-us/regional-ministry-contacts/>

Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

Continuity of learning

Our aim in this section is to provide you with a variety of resources and ideas that you can use to support children's learning during this time. The resources and ideas reflect the responsibility of service providers to reach out to parents/whānau encouraging the use of systems and tools to support distance learning and are aligned with public health measures. Any changes you make to learning experiences should consider children's own cultural values and worldview.

While it is acknowledged that physical distancing is not readily achievable or optimal in early learning settings, there are measures that can be taken to support the concept of physical distancing between children when they return to your early learning service. Here are some ideas.

- Consider how the setup of the physical environment could limit the number of whole group activities. For example, set up activities at each end of a table only.
- Rather than having all of your books and blocks on one shelf, try setting them up in separate areas throughout the room.
- Consider how routines could limit the number of whole group activities. For example:
 - Rather than having group times where everyone is sitting on the mat, try making more use of informal opportunities throughout the day for talking/reading books/storytelling with one or two children at a time.
 - Try having lunch in small groups and make use of both indoor *and* outdoor space for eating, resting and in some cases, for sleeping.
 - If you don't already have 'rolling' morning and afternoon teas, now could be a good time to try this.

To support children and their families/whānau, consider how teachers can best support and strengthen connections across early learning settings eg home and service. For example:

- Ensure teachers understand and connect with each child's unique home "lockdown" experience. Involve children and parents/caregivers in any changes to learning experiences.
- Encourage children to talk about their feelings/concerns/experiences. Look for opportunities to build on learning experiences linked to caring for self and others in response to pandemic.

Digital resources that can be accessed for use both at a service and in the home are available in the below links:

<https://learningfromhome.govt.nz/>

<https://www.kauwhatareo.govt.nz/mi/resource/ki-te-ao-marama/>

[COVID-19 information for parents and whānau – Parents.education.govt.nz – Practical information about education for parents and carers](https://www.education.govt.nz/parents-and-whanau/parents-education/parents-and-carers/)

Transitions back into early learning – into, within and beyond

Some children may be more ready than others to integrate back into previous routines while others may need additional support to transition back.

Responding to and managing the current pandemic environment is a time of change. Support for children and their families/whānau as they transition between home and back into early learning settings will be important. Remember individuals respond to change differently. Some may be excited, some take it in their stride, while others experience anxiety.

A child does not adapt to and cope with change in isolation. Everyone in the child's world plays an important part in facilitating the process of change with children. Early childhood teachers are important in these transitions as they support and role-model for children and their families/whānau to navigate their pathway to a new place.

Making time to listen carefully to the voices and perspectives of all children and their families/whānau during this time will be critical.

Some helpful resources:

Sparklers has a range of calming activities for young children you could try <https://sparklers.org.nz/> (external link).

There are some great online apps for this as well. Get children or young people to explore these. For example, Headspace <https://www.headspace.com/> (external link) has a section on mediation for children.

Ministry licensing activity at Alert Level 3

During Alert Level 3, Ministry licensing activity will remain largely desk-based. Where compliance with conditions on a provisional, probationary or suspended licence can be assessed through documentation, we will continue to do this. Please contact your local Ministry office if you have any questions or concerns about your particular circumstances in respect of your licence.

Education Advisers will not be undertaking assessments of premises for new probationary licences.

Ministry staff may, however, respond in person to serious incidents or complaints, particularly regarding implementation of the public health measures in early learning services.

Changes to operating hours

You may wish to change operating hours during Alert Level 3, depending on the needs of your community. For example, if you do not have families requiring early morning provision, you may decide to open the service later than usual to minimise the time staff are needed on site.

It is important to consult with your parents/caregivers and staff about these types of changes.

If you plan to operate for fewer hours or fewer days you must inform your local Ministry office. You do not need to complete any formal documentation and no changes will be made to the hours on your licence.

You must not operate outside your licensed hours. If you are considering a possible extension to your hours please contact your local Ministry office to discuss this. An increase in operating hours needs to be approved by the Ministry and a formal change made to your licence.

Note that home-based services are able to make private care arrangements for hours outside of their licence, but these are not funded by the Ministry of Education.

Providing information and advice for your community

Use your usual channels of communication and methods for translating information and advice for your community. Some template letters will be provided via the Early Learning Bulletin. Translated information and advice about COVID-19 and Alert Level 3 is available here: <https://covid19.govt.nz/iwi-and-communities/translations/>