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29 August 2021

## He Pānui Kōhungahunga

the Early Learning Bulletin



### Early Learning Bulletin 29 August 2021

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#### **Auckland and Northland remain at Alert Level 4, the rest of New Zealand moves to Alert Level 3 at 11:59pm Tuesday 31 August**

#### **Message from the Secretary for Education**

Kia ora koutou,

As is always the case the advice we have provided has been agreed by Public Health.

The Guidance is very much the same as in the previous Alert Level 3 – the differences are:

- Bubbles should be no more than 10 tamariki
- And staff with higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 can be onsite if they are fully vaccinated.

The question of whether face coverings must be worn under Alert Level 3 in schools and early learning services has been the subject of detailed investigation by Public Health. They have advised against the use of face coverings for a range of reasons, most particularly because face coverings that are handled incorrectly or are moved around can present a greater risk than no covering.

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For those of you south of the Auckland boundary you are able to enter early learning centres on Monday and Tuesday during Alert Level 4, in order to prepare for opening to limited numbers of tamariki who need to attend from Wednesday. Staff going on site should have a letter confirming their authority to travel from the service provider or manager.

I apologise for the length of this Bulletin, but we have tried to be comprehensive. The final new Alert Level 3 Public Health Order has not been released, in the unlikely event there are any variations we will advise you immediately. I wanted to get this information out as soon as possible.

At the time of this going out, we're having some technical issues with our website. We should have the website up to date shortly.

Ngā mihi,  
Iona

In today's bulletin:

- Planning for Alert Level change
- Who can access school and early learning services at Alert Level 3?
- General guidance for Alert Level 3
- Supporting staff at Alert Level 3
  - Key messages
  - Reasons some staff may need to remain at home
  - Staffing FAQs
- Ventilating early learning spaces
- Travel across alert levels

### **Planning for an alert level change**

Your people can set up services from Monday to prepare for Alert Level 3.

Section 18 of the Health Order allows people to go into a workplace to prepare the premises for opening (and to meet public health guidance).

This means, with an alert level change announced, as long as you follow public health guidance some staff and contractors can access your site to prepare for returning to work. This might include general cleaning, configuring learning spaces and reactivating processes to ensure compliance with public health requirements at the new alert level. You can find more information about preparing for opening at Alert Level 3 on our website.

[Early learning services checklist for Alert Level 3 \[DOCX, 793KB\]](#)

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The number of people on site should remain small while at Alert Level 4. We recommend you provide your staff with a letter they can take with them explaining why they are going to their place of work. The relevant clause can be found on the New Zealand Legislation website.

[COVID-19 Public Health Response \(Alert Level Requirements\) Order \(No 9\) 2021 - New Zealand Legislation website](#)

### **Who can access school and early learning services at Alert level 3?**

At Alert Level 3, most children and young people will continue to learn from home, however schools and early learning services are open for all children and young people whose parents or carers need to go to work and there is no one at home to supervise them. Under Alert Level 3 there is no limitation on specifically who can work and therefore will need to use early learning services, as there is under the Alert Level 4 businesses and services arrangements.

We understand that the cumulative impact of reduced bubble sizes, vaccination requirements for ‘at risk’ staff, and staff not being able to cross from an Alert Level 4 area to an Alert Level 3 area to work means that early learning services may have a reduced capacity to have tamariki onsite.

Please contact our regional teams if you need any support in this regard.

[Local Ministry offices](#)

### **General guidance for Alert Level 3**

The Public Health team at the Ministry of Health has closely reviewed the current guidance for schools and early learning services at Alert Level 3 and identified the following areas where changes need to be made.

- ‘Early Learning bubbles’ are to be formed, but on Public Health’s advice they are to have no more than 10 tamariki per bubble. Staff are in addition to that number
- staff who are at a higher risk from severe illness because of COVID-19 can work onsite at Alert Level 3 if they are fully vaccinated ([head to Unite Against COVID-19 for more information](#))

Underlying medical conditions that could place people at higher risk include:

- serious respiratory disease, including chronic lung disease and severe asthma
  - serious heart conditions
  - immunocompromised conditions
  - severe obesity — a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or higher
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- hypertension that is not well controlled
- diabetes that is not well controlled
- chronic kidney disease
- liver disease.

Once the Alert Level 3 Public Health Response Order is gazetted tomorrow, we will do a final check to ensure all aspects of the order are reflected in our guidance. If there are further changes, we'll notify you immediately.

The Government has maintained a risk-averse approach to COVID-19 throughout their response. Their decisions on alert levels are informed by record volumes of testing for COVID-19 in the community, extensive wastewater testing and record numbers of people being vaccinated.

These new recommendations by Public Health further support a lowering of risk for staff, children, students and whānau.

The table linked below summarises all the currently known requirements and recommendations for early learning services at Alert Level 3.

[Alert Level 3 requirements summary table \[DOCX, 18KB\]](#)

We have also prepared up to date Alert Level 3 guidance material and a letter your services can send to families if they wish.

[COVID-19 guidance for early learning services and kōhanga reo at Alert Level 3 \[PDF, 339KB\]](#)

[Letter template - regions moving to Alert Level 3 \[DOCX, 18KB\]](#)

### **Supporting staff at Alert Level 3**

We want all early learning services and staff to feel confident and prepared for change in COVID-19 alert levels next week.

#### **Key messages about staffing for early learning services at Alert Level 3:**

- 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. Unless they have medical advice that it is safe to do so, they should not be onsite at Alert Level 3.
  - We recommend all employers initiate conversations with their staff about who may be best placed to return to work as necessary.
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- 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.

### **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.

Staff at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and who are not fully vaccinated should not be 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.

Note generally, people are considered fully vaccinated two weeks after they have received the second of the two doses of the vaccine.

Information for people considered at higher risk from the effects of COVID-19 can be found on the [Ministry of Health website](#).

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.

### **Staffing Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **I have an issue with pay or employment - where can I get support for employment matters?**

We appreciate that employers and employees alike are all doing their very best to make things work under unusual and challenging circumstances. We encourage employers and employees to work together in good faith through the implications

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of COVID-19 on employment arrangements. Working together in good faith means having an open and honest conversation and working constructively through options together. It requires both parties to be active, responsive and communicative.

To help you with those conversations, there is information on the Employment NZ website. This includes some advice about working from home and annual leave.

[Employment New Zealand website](#)

The Work and Income website also provides information about the COVID-19 wage subsidy, including obligations on employers in receipt of the subsidy.

[Work and Income website](#)

**Can I require a staff member who is at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 to tell me if they have been vaccinated?**

You can ask a staff member whether or not they have been vaccinated, however they do not have to disclose their vaccination status. If they choose not to disclose their vaccination status you may assume they are unvaccinated, but you should inform the staff member of this assumption.

Where a person cannot work onsite because they are higher risk and not yet fully vaccinated, they should provide you with appropriate medical evidence to support this (such as a medical certificate obtained at the employee's cost). Staff should work with their GP or specialist if they need help understanding their own level of risk and how best to stay healthy.

Personal information about vaccine status must be protected and cannot be shared without the staff member's consent.

**Disclosure of vaccination status**

Ministry of Health advice is for everyone to get vaccinated, however you cannot make it a requirement for anyone get vaccinated.

You can ask a staff member whether they have been vaccinated, but they do not have to disclose their vaccination status. If they choose not to disclose their vaccination status, you may assume that they are unvaccinated but should inform the staff member of this assumption.

Personal information about vaccine status must be protected and cannot be shared without the staff member's consent.

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### **What does it mean to be fully vaccinated?**

Generally, people are considered fully vaccinated two weeks after they have received the second of the two doses of the vaccine. However, staff should work with their GP or specialist if they need help understanding their own level of risk and how best to stay healthy. Further information is available from the Ministry of Health website.

[COVID-19: Vaccine effectiveness and protection - Ministry of Health website](#)

### **Can the Government prioritise vaccinations for early learning services?**

Many teachers and education workforce staff may already be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or be in the process of becoming fully vaccinated. This will be because they fell into Group 2 (people living in high-risk places) and Group 3 (people who are at risk of getting severe illness from COVID-19).

From 1 September 2021, all people in New Zealand age 12 and over are eligible to book their COVID-19 vaccine.

More information about the Government's COVID-19 vaccination roll-out can be found on the COVID-19 website.

[COVID-19 Vaccinations - COVID-19 website](#)

### **Do families have to wear face coverings when dropping off their tamariki to Early Learning?**

Staff in early learning services and Schools are not required to wear face coverings at Alert Level 3. For everyone else they legally must wear a face covering:

- on public transport and at departure points, for example airports, train stations and bus stops
- on flights
- in taxi or ride-share vehicles — drivers and passengers
- when visiting healthcare facilities
- if you are a delivery driver to residential addresses
- inside any Alert Level 3 businesses and services that are open and involve customer contact, for example supermarkets, pharmacies, hospitality venues, takeaways, and petrol stations
- in the public areas of courts and tribunals, local and central government agencies, and social service providers with customer service counters.

Early learning services may want to encourage parents and caregivers when doing pick-ups and drop offs to wear face coverings, in the same way they are strongly recommended to do so when out and about and not able to safely physically distance from others.

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## Ventilating early learning spaces

As your staff and ākonga start returning to the classroom, you should pay particular attention to ventilating teaching spaces. The more fresh air the better.

The fastest and easiest way to ventilate rooms is by opening the windows, doors, and any vents. It's good practice to fully open all windows at the end of the day for as long as possible. Ventilation considerations will also need to be balanced with the need to maintain minimum indoor temperatures.

For spaces using mechanical ventilation alone or with passive ventilation, ensure that:

- there is as much fresh, outside air flow as possible by running systems for longer periods before and after a space is being used
- adjust any ventilation systems which have recirculation ('economiser' circuits) so they run on full fresh air mode, with no recirculation
- change ventilation system air filters frequently to increase the fresh air flow and ensure they are well maintained.

Heat pumps do not provide ventilation – they only heat and cool the air in the room. If you are using a heat pump remember to open your windows regularly and ensure the filters are clean.

## Travel across alert levels

You may recall that when different alert levels have been in place before, that an exemption is needed from the Ministry of Health in order for someone to move between alert level areas. The threshold is likely to be extremely high and the Ministry of Education cannot approve applications, however we can help you with the process.

The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment will provide us with more information and share with you in our next Bulletin.

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Contact us at: [earlylearning.bulletin@education.govt.nz](mailto:earlylearning.bulletin@education.govt.nz) | 0800 ECE ECE  
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