



# Canterbury Health System ready for novel coronavirus COVID-19

**Key people from across our health system have been preparing for weeks and we are ready to care for someone with COVID-19 should a case be confirmed in Canterbury.**

Our Emergency Coordination Centre has been activated and we are regularly liaising with the Ministry of Health. Our Community & Public Health team's Emergency Operations Centre has been operating for the past five weeks with a presence at our airports and ports, providing information to everyone arriving on all international flights into Christchurch and also health screening checks for anyone who is unwell.

Canterbury Health Laboratories is one of three labs in New Zealand that can carry out same-day testing for COVID-19, and we are in close contact with primary care to ensure our General Practice Teams are equipped and prepared to assess and treat anyone who arrives at their practice. The Canterbury Primary Response Group has also stood up a virtual Emergency Operations Centre. Work is underway to ensure sufficient personal protective equipment (PPE) is available where it's needed, and training and information on how to put PPE on and off safely is also being shared. Our health system's Infection



Members of the Community & Public Health Incident Management team at their daily COVID-19 meeting. From left, South Canterbury Manager Neil Brosnahan, Administrator Sarah Kerr and Medical Officer of Health Ramon Pink

Prevention and Control Executive Committee has also issued guidance for clinical staff in primary care and our hospitals.

Canterbury DHB's Emergency Coordination Centre is providing coordination and support to the planning activity across our health system. Our people have presented to a number of key groups, including the Mayoral forum, and will be presenting to the next combined Emergency Services Group meeting. Last Friday Chief Medical Officer Sue Nightingale,

Medical Officer of Health Ramon Pink, Clinical Director of Microbiology Josh Freeman and Community & Public Health's Emergency Preparedness Coordinator Hamish Sandison attended the Canterbury Civil Defence Emergency Management Joint Committee (comprising the mayors of Christchurch City and Canterbury District Councils). Hamish presented on COVID-19, focusing on timeline, symptoms, risk assessment for New Zealand, transmission, infection prevention, and wellbeing.

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New Zealand currently has one confirmed case of COVID-19 in Auckland, with a number of close contacts of that person in self-isolation for 14 days.

More than 136 lab tests have been carried out in New Zealand, largely to rule out COVID-19 in people who have travelled to affected countries and have influenza-like acute respiratory symptoms. At the time of writing there are a further 11 COVID-19 test results due back.

Symptoms of COVID-19 include a cough, fever and breathing difficulties.

I know there has been a lot of concern about the scaremongering and misinformation on social media, in particular, about COVID-19. The facts are that we have a [national pandemic plan](#) and as the lead agency in New Zealand, the [Ministry of Health website](#) can be trusted to have the latest information. We also have a localised [Canterbury pandemic plan](#). Our plan outlines the various groups involved in our response and their roles in managing the risk of a pandemic. The intention of our local plan is to provide:

- › a coordinated view of the multiple and detailed plans at service, hospital and sector level that form the Canterbury Health System response

- › guidance around processes to be followed to ensure appropriate support, decision-making and direction is provided by the DHB for reduction, readiness, response and recovery in the event of a pandemic.

It's important to stress we have only had one isolated case in New Zealand to date and we have robust contact tracing and the ability to isolate and manage cases in New Zealand. In areas overseas where there are large numbers of cases it's important to remember that for most people COVID-19 is a mild illness and people can safely be cared for at home. Those who need hospital care are generally older and often have other long-term health conditions.

To put things in perspective in the peak of Canterbury's winter 'flu season' last year we were admitting an additional 50 people with influenza to Christchurch Hospital each day. Our contingency planning includes modelling a 'worst case scenario' if we had another heavy influenza season and an influx of COVID-19 patients at the same time. Our plan would be to discharge anyone who could safely continue their recovery at home with appropriate in-home care to free up available space for those in need of specialist hospital care.

It's likely we would also have to postpone some planned surgery to free up beds and staff, and perhaps transfer more patients to other health facilities. We have dedicated areas for infectious patients at Christchurch Hospital. These areas have already been identified as part of our annual winter planning process and we are running over this again to ensure everyone is up to date with the plan. Our plans include flexing up staff numbers to accommodate 'surge capacity' in the event of a large influx of patients in a short timeframe.

Christchurch Hospital currently has 11 negative pressure rooms which are needed when carrying out aerosol-creating procedures on patients with infectious diseases. These rooms are used regularly for caring for people with a wide range of infectious diseases every week.

**Together we're powerful - containment starts with you. Our greatest enemy right now is not the virus itself - it's fear, rumors & stigma. And our greatest assets are facts, reason and solidarity.**

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, World Health Organisation

If you have questions, concerns or suggestions about our preparedness or plans, please talk to your manager in the first instance or email [ECCManagerCDHB@cdhb.health.nz](mailto:ECCManagerCDHB@cdhb.health.nz).

## Frequently asked questions about COVID-19

### Who needs to self-isolate - what are the current 'Category 1' and 'Category 2' countries?

Any member of the public who has travelled to mainland China, Iran, South Korea or Northern Italy in the 14 days prior to arriving in New Zealand is being asked to self-isolate. These countries and regions are classed as Category 1 countries.

People who return to New Zealand after visiting Category 2 countries which include: Japan, Singapore, Thailand and Hong Kong do not need to self-isolate, however, if they develop any COVID-19 symptoms they should either phone

the dedicated Healthline COVID-19 line 0800 358 5453 or call their General Practice team ahead of their visit, to ensure the practice is appropriately prepared before you arrive. The dedicated COVID-19 advice line is free and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Note, Canterbury DHB is taking a precautionary approach with staff returning from overseas, and each case of a staff member returning from a country where there is community spread of COVID-19 is being assessed individually. Staff should call their manager before turning up to work. See page 4 for more information.

### What can you do to keep yourself and your whānau safe?

Keeping individuals, families and our communities safe and healthy in the current global environment requires a team effort and that's what we're seeing across New Zealand. Border restrictions and travel advice are regularly being reviewed and advice around any changes should be followed.

The Ministry of Health website has the latest information which is being updated daily: [health.govt.nz/covid-19](https://health.govt.nz/covid-19).

Here are some simple steps you can take to help stop the spread of diseases like COVID-19:

- › Avoid close contact with people with cold or flu-like illnesses.
- › Cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or clothing, or sneeze into the crook of your elbow.
- › Wash hands for at least 20 seconds\* with soap and water and dry them thoroughly:
  - Before eating or handling food
  - After using the toilet
  - After coughing, sneezing, blowing your nose or wiping children's noses
  - After caring for sick people.

- › If you don't have soap and water available, you can use an alcohol-based hand gel. Rub it all over your hands, including the backs of your hands and between your fingers. Rub it in until it dries.

(\*As a guide for how long you should wash your hands for 20 seconds is about as long as it takes to sing two verses of 'Happy Birthday to you')

- › Clean all hard surfaces regularly with disinfectant or diluted bleach (one teaspoon of bleach diluted with 500 ml of water) especially if someone in your household or workplace is unwell.
- › Importantly if you're sick please stay home.

The Ministry of Health has launched the campaign shown on the right to promote public health messages encouraging good hygiene practices that help protect you and your whānau from a range of viruses and illnesses.

**Ministry of Health - Manatū Hauora**  
Just now · 🌐

Here's a top tip to protect yourself and others from germs and viruses – wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water, and dry them well.

**Wash hands with this.**

**Ministry of Health - Manatū Hauora**  
Sponsored · 🌐

Here's another top tip to stop the spread of germs and viruses – if you don't have tissues handy, fire that cough or sneeze into the crook of your elbow.

**Sneeze here.**

**Your health is in your hands**  
Help stop the spread of germs and viruses

### If COVID-19 is similar to influenza, why are we trying so hard to keep it out of New Zealand?

Minimising the number of people infected and transmitting the virus for as long as we can is important. It means that overall, fewer people are likely to get infected and that they are less likely to all get infected in a short period of time.

Some individuals are at higher risk from viral infections such as influenza, including those with co-morbidities (other illnesses or long-term conditions that affect their health). It is important to protect all New Zealanders from the spread of COVID-19 to protect these vulnerable groups. Isolation and contact tracing are proven to be the best ways to reduce the spread of infection.

Reducing the rate of spread of COVID-19 reduces the potential demand on the health sector and provides time for us to learn about the virus, ensuring that our policies and procedures will be effective as the situation changes.

### Are we going to open community-based assessment centres (CBACs)?

Planning is underway for how New Zealand will manage if there are a lot of people with COVID-19 infection. Canterbury DHB is in discussions with primary care providers such as General Practices and Primary Health Organisations to plan and create pathways of care and settings that best suit our region and population.

### Do patients who test positive for COVID-19 require admission to hospital for inpatient care?

Patients with suspected infection of COVID-19 should be managed according to their symptoms and clinical state. They do not need to be hospitalised unless it is clinically indicated.

### As a health care worker, what is my risk of catching COVID-19?

The risk of catching COVID-19 from a confirmed case largely depends on the patient and how you are caring for them. COVID-19 transmission is similar to that of the influenza virus and it is recommended that standard droplet and contact precautions are used when managing patients with suspect COVID-19 infection. Standard droplet and contact precautions include:

- > gloves
- > surgical face mask
- > disposable, fluid resistant gown
- > eye protection.

Regular hand hygiene is important. The risk is higher when performing aerosol-generating procedures, and the PPE is slightly different when performing these procedures. It is not recommended that aerosol-generating procedures are undertaken in primary care. The Ministry's infection prevention and control advice for primary care health workers can be found under [Resources for health professionals](#).

Aerosol-generating procedures are those that produce droplets that are small enough to be widely dispersed. They pose a higher infection risk for health professionals. Aerosol generating procedures (including using nebulisers) should only be done in a hospital setting if COVID-19 infection is suspected.

### Do I need to start wearing a mask?

No. For most people in the community, Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) such as face masks are not recommended. However, for people with symptoms of an acute respiratory infection and who have travelled to a country where there are cases of COVID-19 you should wear a face mask when seeking medical attention. You should phone ahead of your visit to the doctor. Call Healthline's dedicated 24/7 COVID-19 advice line 0800 358 5453 or your own general practice team's number 24/7.

### What's the advice for staff travelling or returning from overseas?

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade website has the most up to date information on travel. This can be found on [Safe Travel](#). Please note that Canterbury DHB's travel insurer has advised it is not providing cover for any claims in relation to COVID-19 (coronavirus) for international travel booked after 30 January 2020.

Canterbury DHB is taking a precautionary approach with staff returning from overseas, and each case of a staff member returning from a country where there is community spread of COVID-19 is being assessed individually. Staff must call their manager before turning up to work. We are taking a more stringent approach with healthcare workers than with other members of the public because of the particular risk posed by having contact with vulnerable patients in the course of their work.

Any Canterbury DHB staff member returning to New Zealand from mainland China, Iran, Northern Italy or South Korea will need to [self-isolate](#) for 14 days from the date of departure of the 'high risk' country.

As at 2 March 2020 staff who have returned from other countries currently in Category 2 (which includes Japan, Singapore, Thailand and Hong Kong) do not need to self-isolate as the risk from exposure does not justify standing down staff who do not have symptoms – unless you have been in close contact with a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19.

Any staff member who develops symptoms of COVID-19 (including a cough, fever and breathing difficulties) at any stage within the 14-day period after having returned from any Category 1 or Category 2 country should phone their General Practice team to get advice on testing/clinical management and their line manager for wellbeing and leave advice.



### If I need to self-isolate or stand-down from work what sort of leave do I need to take?

Please talk to your manager for advice as everyone's situation is different. The People and Capability team is finalising nationally consistent detailed advice for managers which covers a range of scenarios. This will be sent to managers by Tuesday 3 March.

### How infectious is COVID-19?

This novel coronavirus is similar to seasonal influenza in terms of its symptoms and it has a similar infectivity rate – one person with novel coronavirus is expected to infect two others. This is much lower than measles which is highly contagious, with one infected person expected to infect 12-18 unimmunised people.

### What is a pandemic?

A pandemic isn't nearly as scary as it sounds. It's a term used by health organisations to describe an epidemic that becomes very widespread and affects a large proportion of the population in a whole region, a continent or the world. Despite its rapid spread, COVID-19 (commonly known as the coronavirus), has *not* been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Our health system is well-prepared for an infectious disease outbreak and we have the skills and expertise to ensure we can respond appropriately. There will be some challenges in terms of space and resources, but we have met such challenges before.

We aren't in this alone. We are part of a nationally informed and resourced response which is able to tap into global leadership and expertise.

## COVID-19 public information evening

Te Papa Hauora Health Precinct is hosting a public information evening on Coronavirus COVID-19 at Manawa on Monday 9 March.

The event is an opportunity for members of the public to hear from experts and ask questions about this rapidly developing situation.

The following issues will be covered:

- › Understanding the disease: What is the virus, its features, nature, and how does it infect and affect us?
- › Protection: How we can protect ourselves, our families/whānau and community, and what can we tell our tamariki?
- › Management: How prepared are we, what actions are being taken to prevent and control the virus, and management plans for an outbreak?

### What is COVID-19?



Transcript -

Short videos in New Zealand sign language about COVID-19 are available on the Ministry of Health's website

### Where can I get more information of the wider impacts of COVID-19?

An All-of-Government website has been set up as the key information hub for coronavirus: <https://www.govt.nz/novel-coronavirus-covid-19>

The Ministry of Health is the lead agency for national planning and people should go to its website for accurate and reliable information on the health risks associated with the virus: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>

Civil Defence and Emergency Management groups will support the health sector with welfare coordination if required.

The presentation will be followed by an expert panel discussion and question time, led by international infectious diseases expert David Murdoch.

**Registrations are essential. For more information and to register visit the [Eventbrite website here](#).**