

Alert Level 3 guidance for disability community residential care providers

25 APRIL 2020

On 20 April 2020, the Government announced that New Zealand would be transitioning to Alert Level 3. Whilst some of the guidance provided under Alert Level 4 will still apply, the following is additional guidance to help support a safe transition into Alert Level 3.

Balancing equity and safety

The Government has indicated a cautious approach to any consideration of additional physical contact under Alert Level 3. The risk remains high for all New Zealanders as we transition into Alert Level 3. As providers the safety and well-being of your staff and residents is paramount. Providers are managing a very complex situation in terms of balancing the need for residents to connect with their families and limiting risk of transmission for staff and residents.

The Ministry strongly acknowledges the challenge providers have in managing these dynamics and appreciates what you are doing to work through these issues. Providers may develop further communications themselves for residents and family members explaining how they are going to manage life under Alert Level 3.

For Alert Level 3, we want to make sure the same approach applies to disabled people and whānau as they do for everyone else. Some disabled people may have underlying health conditions that make them a higher-risk of severe illness from COVID-19. In these cases, Government advice is for the person to take extra precautions to keep safe. However, everyone else will be subject to Alert Level 3 restrictions, meaning they have the same right to go out for a walk, visit the supermarket, and see/keep in contact with close family and friends in a safe way.

What changes for residential services under Alert Level 3?

Community residential services are essential services and must continue to operate throughout all COVID-19 alert levels

Community residential services continue to be essential services under Alert Level 3.

Services provided under the High and Complex Framework such as Regional Intellectual Disability Secure Services and Regional Intellectual Disability Supported Accommodation Services will also continue to operate as essential services. Hospital level services under the High and Complex Framework will be guided by the wider rules of the hospital care system. For further information on essential services see:

www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-current-situation/covid-19-essential-services-health-and-disability-system

Under Alert Level 3, you must comply with the Alert Level 3 restrictions

In practice, this means that:

- residents should not move to a new home unless it is essential (or an emergency). See below for further details
- staff movement between residential houses must be minimised so that staff are in physical contact with a minimum number of people to prevent infection spreading
- residents can have visitors (from outside of their bubble) to their residential home. Alternatively, they can meet visitors elsewhere while maintaining physical distancing rules. Good hygiene, infection control and physical distancing guidance must be followed. Considerations about additional vulnerabilities (including underlying health conditions which put them at a higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19) must be factored into decision-making for visits
- it is important that residents' mental health and wellbeing is maintained by reducing their social isolation as much as possible. Alert Level 3 provides a greater opportunity for safe social contact
- essential support workers who have close physical contact should follow guidance on appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) use
- providers must continue to report when restrictive practices have been used and critical incidents occur.

General guidance under Alert Level 3 is that you can extend your bubble to include other households if you can do so safely. We acknowledge that this is difficult for residential homes which may already have extended bubbles due to the numbers of residents and support workers. Therefore it is particularly important that visitors are allowed only where possible.

How can we ensure visits are safe?

Controlled, safe visits are encouraged under Alert Level 3 in agreement with the resident and whānau. This is an important mechanism to ensure resident and staff wellbeing and safety.

How providers can ensure safe visits

All visitors must follow Alert Level 3 precautions:

- all visitors must follow good hand hygiene, physical distancing over 2 metres and use PPE if essential care cannot be provided while maintaining physical distancing (such as for personal cares)
- all visitors to be recorded to aid with contact tracing
- there should be no non-essential visits of non-family or whānau members.

Guidance for providers to support safe visits:

- communicate with families and close friends that they must contact the home before visiting, so that you can minimise the amount of people visiting at any one time, and that only one visitor (from the same household) should attend at a time
- register visitors with the house manager
- log visits and contact details clearly so that contact tracing can occur if necessary
- designate a separate area for visitors to use in the home if possible, i.e. one room of the home, talking through a closed window, or meeting in an open public space such as a park or garden
- do not allow visitors into the home who are sick, who have been sick recently, who have COVID-19 symptoms, or have been in contact with someone with COVID-19
- minimise contact between visitors and other residents and staff
- ensure a maximum number of visits per day can be established on a case-by-case basis

- complete infection control and disinfection once visitors have left.

Providers must communicate this policy clearly with residents, staff and any visitors before/when they arrive.

Deciding who can visit

Providers will need to take a lead around visits acknowledging the complex set of dynamics that need to be managed. Providers will need to support residents and their whānau to agree who will visit, and what everyone needs to do to keep themselves and everyone in the home safe. This includes residents and their support staff. There may be instances where visits may not be possible during Alert Level 3 due to difficulties of managing some of the health risks posed to residents and staff.

Decisions about who residents would like to have as visitors must be led by the person and their families. Providers should not make these decisions, but instead support people and their families to make these decisions. To do this, you must always communicate what is happening with residents in a way they understand.

You will want to encourage residents and their whānau to consider:

- if they are at high-risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (<https://covid19.govt.nz/individuals-and-households/health-and-wellbeing/vulnerable-people/>), whether they want to see anyone outside of their bubble or whether they want to be cautious and wait until we move to Alert Level 2
- if someone else in the home is at high-risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (<https://covid19.govt.nz/individuals-and-households/health-and-wellbeing/vulnerable-people/>), whether they want to see anyone outside of their bubble or whether they want to be cautious and wait until we move to Alert Level 2
- choosing to not see a visitor who is in a high-risk profession such as those who are meeting with lots of other people (i.e. who works in a hospital or supermarket).

What happens if the household can't decide on who should visit?

Where there are differences of opinion within the home, it is for the provider to facilitate a way forward.

You may want to encourage everyone to think about:

- is there anyone in the home whose social connections have been completely cut off or significantly reduced i.e. is there anyone who doesn't have a phone, internet connection to talk to their family/close friends? They could be prioritised to have a visitor
- is there anyone in the home who will be particularly confused, distressed, anxious about not seeing family/friends etc, or will be particularly distressed/confused if they do?
- if it is not possible for someone to visit are there other ways of ensuring social contact i.e. can the person have access to a phone, video call, can a family member come and wave/talk through the window - i.e. maintaining a good distance.

If you are struggling to come to a decision you are welcome to contact your portfolio manager and seek additional guidance and/or support.

What is appropriate use of PPE?

The Ministry is continually reviewing its advice and guidance on PPE as local issues emerge and as understanding from international experience grows. For up to date information on PPE please see:

www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-information-specific-audiences/covid-19-advice-essential-workers-including-personal-protective-equipment/personal-protective-equipment-use-health-care

What recreation or daily activities can we do and how far can we go?

It is important that residents are also able to go out for a walk, visit the supermarket, and see/keep in contact with close family and friends in a safe way.

Under Alert Level 3 the rules are:

- **stay regional**, it is okay to exercise at parks or beaches within your region, but the closer to home the better. Activities must be safe – keep 2 metres away from anybody not in your bubble. Make minimal trips
- personal travel is only allowed for permitted movement in your local area – e.g. for going to work or school, shopping, or getting exercise
- this is not a time for people to go on a holiday, travel between regions to celebrate birthdays, or travel from one side of a city to the other to go to a supermarket when there is a suitable one in your local area
- if residents need to go to work, they can make their usual commute, even if they cross a regional boundary to do so, but cannot travel further for work unless they are an essential worker travelling for work
- as with visitors, additional issues relating to complex health needs need to be considered.

What if someone needs to move residence?

Under Alert Level 3, people can only move when it is an emergency or essential. This is to manage the risk of infection. Some examples of when a move might be essential/an emergency include:

1. when a person is being discharged from hospital
2. managing a situation or risk to ensure the ongoing safety of a resident
3. a court ordered assessment for a person going through a criminal justice process who may require placement under the High and Complex Framework. This will only impact on Regional Intellectual Disability Supported Accommodation Services (RIDSAS) that are required to maintain access to assessment beds. RIDSAS providers need to be prepared for possible referrals to assessment beds
4. where there are concerns that a resident has been abused, or is likely to be abused, a move may be required of the alleged perpetrator in order to keep the resident safe. Please contact your local NASC about this kind of situation to discuss
5. where a person has become deeply distressed by the disruption to their usual routine or support, and their behaviour challenges the ability of their family or carers to sustain the support they provide
6. people who have been staying with their family during Level 4 who wish to return back to their home. These situations would need to follow any isolation requirements.

It is important for providers, NASCs and the Ministry of Health to work together to ensure any proposed move is warranted and appropriate for the individual concerned.

What hygiene practices do we need to have under Alert Level 3?

Advice about hygiene remains the same under Alert Level 3 as it did under Alert Level 4.

What does Alert Level 3 mean for people under the High and Complex Framework?

- For people living in residential or hospital level services under Intellectual Disability (Compulsory Care & Rehabilitation) Act 2003, the guidance will be the same as for mainstream residential services in relation to Alert Level 3 requirements for managing transmission risk. However, as individuals in High and Complex Framework services, assessment of any risks will also be required in relation to visitors at any time.
- For people who are subject to the Intellectual Disability (Compulsory Care & Rehabilitation) Act 2003, leave will be required for visits into the community including visits with family as part of limited social contact. For care recipients, leave will be approved by Care Managers. For Special Care Recipients leave approvals need to come through the Ministry as per usual process.

More information

We hope this information has been useful. Please get in touch with your portfolio manager if you have any further questions.