



HOW TO PRACTISE UNDER ALERT LEVEL 3

(non-DHB settings)

UPDATE as of 27 October 2021

Introduction

In recent weeks we have received many enquiries asking what services can be provided under changing COVID-19 Alert Levels. Until now our advice has been to follow the Ministry of Health guidance.

The Ministry of Health rules regarding the provision of health services (including psychology) are set out in Alert Level Requirements orders made by the Minister for COVID-19 Response.

Mandatory requirements

Regulatory requirements

Current Alert Level requirements are set out in an Order that commenced on 21 September 2021. The Order specifies mandatory legal requirements for individuals, businesses, and services at various alert levels. Requirements for business and services include matters such as the number of customers and clients allowed in a workplace, physical distancing rules, and contact record rules.

Importantly, apart from a few specific exceptions, nothing in the current Order applies to health services (including psychology). In other words, the Order enables psychologists to provide health services to the public provided they comply with those exceptions.

In summary, the exceptions **require psychologists to take the following actions:**

Under all Alert Levels

- Display of QR codes in workplaces (clause 9)
- Workplace systems and processes to enable keeping of contact records (clause 11)

Under Alert Levels 2 and 3

- Systems and processes for contact record rule (clauses 28 and 44)

The person in control of a workplace of any health service must have systems and processes in place to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that each person (except other workers of the health service) aged 12 years or older who enters the workplace—

1. scans the QR code for the workplace or otherwise makes their own contact record;
or
2. provides a contact record that the person in control of the workplace collects

Additional face covering requirements for individuals (clauses 23 and 39)

Every person who is not a patient or worker of the health service must wear a face covering on the premises of the health service.

Ethical and other legal requirements

When deciding whether to provide face-to-face services where COVID-19 alert levels apply psychologists must consider their ethical obligations to clients. This includes ethical principle 2.1, which states that psychologists must consider the health and wellbeing of the patient to be their first priority.

This principle requires the psychologist to apply their professional judgment to balance the treatment needs of the patient against the need to take appropriate steps to keep the patient, and others who may be in the workplace, safe from the risk of infection.

Always conduct a suitable risk assessment and take appropriate measures to mitigate identified risks having regard to:

- the nature of the presentation,
- the health condition and vulnerability of the patient and others present,
- alternative treatment options
- implementation of hygiene measures such as hand sanitation, mask wearing, and ventilation.

The risk assessment, measures taken, and clinical reasoning for decisions made should be documented in each case.

Psychologists who are persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) for the purposes of health and safety legislation should also consider their obligations to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of their workers and others who could be put at risk by the work of the business, for example staff, clients, visitors, children and young people, or the general public.

Guidance (non-mandatory)

Psychologists may consider the current Ministry guidance and apply it where considered appropriate.

What does this all mean?

The mandatory requirements identified above are the law and **must** be followed in all cases to which they apply. The non-mandatory guidance from the Ministry of Health is there to help inform your decision making; it says what the Ministry thinks you **should** do, rather

than what you **must** do. It requires your own professional judgement that takes into consideration your own particular circumstances so that you can make choices about what sort of psychology services you will provide and who you will provide them to.

You are required to use your judgement to balance the needs of your client, your perception of their risk and your risk, and your capacity to implement infection control measures particularly around distancing and ventilation.

Future updates

The rules relating to COVID-19 Alert Levels are not made by the Board and are constantly changing. Therefore, we should all expect further changes to be made to the rules as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to progress. We will try to keep you informed if changes are made to the current order.

Disclaimer

This document provides a brief summary of the current rules as we understand them. You should refer to the Order at the link provided above and consult the Ministry of Health for more detailed information. Please note that the advice we provide is general in nature and is not a substitute for legal advice. You should seek advice from a lawyer should you wish to understand how the rules apply to your specific circumstances.

Further Resources

- [QR code for your place of work](#)
- [Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) requirements \(MoH\)](#)
- [Donning and removing PPE \(MoH\)](#)
- [Advice for all health professionals \(MoH\)](#)
- [Ministry of Health guidance for Community Allied Health Scientific and Technical Providers in Alert Level 3](#)
- [Decision tree](#)

COVID-19

ALERT LEVEL 3 AND 4: HEALTH AND DISABILITY SECTOR RISK ASSESSMENT FOR INTERACTIONS WITH PEOPLE OF UNKNOWN COVID-19 STATUS

This document provides guidance for a risk assessment that should be undertaken at the first point of contact with people whose COVID-19 status is unknown. Please ask the questions before contact with the person, if possible (by phone or signage); otherwise maintain physical distancing of at least 2 metres when asking them.¹ Defer care or use telemedicine where possible. Follow Standard Precautions for all care.² Also, refer to your organisational Infection Prevention and Control Guidance.

Clinical Criteria: Does the person have an acute respiratory infection with at least one of the following symptoms (with or without fever): new or worsening cough, fever (at least 38°C), shortness of breath, sore throat, sneezing or runny nose, loss of sense of smell or altered sense of taste.

✓ YES

✗ NO

Risk Factors:

In the 14 days prior to seeking care has the person:

- ▶ Had contact with a COVID-19 case **OR**
- ▶ Been in attendance at a current location of interest ³ **OR**
- ▶ Meets the **Higher Index for Suspicion Criteria (HIS)**⁴: Check the Ministry of Health website for updated information.

✓ YES

✗ NO

✓ YES

✗ NO

- ▶ Provide them with a medical mask to wear for source control.
- ▶ Ensure they are at least 2m from others in a well ventilated space, ie single room or other space outdoors if available.
- ▶ If the person needs clinical assessment or direct care wear a P2/N95 particulate respirator, eye protection, gown and gloves.

- ▶ Provide them with a medical mask to wear for source control.
- ▶ Maintain 2m from others or move them into a single room.
- ▶ Wear a medical mask and eye protection.
- ▶ When care is provided in a confined poorly ventilated space wear a P2/N95 particulate respirator and eye protection.

- ▶ Provide them with a medical mask to wear for source control.
- ▶ Maintain 2m from others or move them into a single room.
- ▶ Wear a medical mask.
- ▶ Eye protection optional.
- ▶ When care is provided in a confined poorly ventilated space wear a P2/N95 particulate respirator.

- ▶ Person to wear a face covering (their own or medical mask provided).
- ▶ Wear a medical mask.
- ▶ Eye protection optional.
- ▶ Apply Standard Precautions depending on the nature of care to be provided.

SESSIONAL MASK USE: Where possible a mask or particulate respirator can be worn continuously. Replace if it becomes damp, damaged, or at the end of a session (up to 4 hours).

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1. This assessment will determine what additional IPC precautions are required.
2. Refer to Frequently Asked Questions about PPE www.health.govt.nz/ppe-health
3. Refer to MCH for contact tracing places of interest www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-contact-tracing-locations-interest#current
4. Refer to MCH case definition: www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-case-definition.