

Changes to COVID-19 settings – information for the public

August 2023

What's changing?

Some of New Zealand's COVID-19 health settings are changing. This means the last remaining mandatory requirements for 7-day isolation periods and the wearing of face masks for visitors to healthcare facilities have been removed.

What does this mean for me?

The wearing of facemasks in healthcare settings and continuing to isolate if positive for COVID-19 are still being strongly recommended. These measures remain an important way that we can prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19.

Stay at home if you are feeling unwell - if you, or someone in your household develops one or more of the following symptoms, for COVID-19: a runny nose, sore throat, cough, fever, vomiting, diarrhoea, headache, loss of smell or taste, shortness of breath, you should take a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT).

Remember to report your RAT result at <https://mycovidrecord.health.nz/> (or call the RAT helpline on 0800 222 478 and choose option 1), so you can be connected with any help and support you might need.

For more information go to covid19.govt.nz

Are antivirals available?

People with a high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 are eligible for treatment with COVID-19 antiviral medicines. These medicines reduce the amount of virus in your body, so you do not get as sick, and you are less likely to go to hospital.

You can get free antiviral medicines if you:

- have COVID-19 and symptoms, and
- became sick within the last 5 days, and
- are eligible for the medicine.

You can check your eligibility here: <https://pharmac.govt.nz/news-and-resources/covid19/access-criteria-for-covid-19-medicines/covid-antivirals/access-criteria-assessment-tool/>

What do I need to do if I've tested positive for COVID-19?

If you have tested positive for COVID-19, it's **recommended you isolate for 5 days**, even if you only have mild symptoms, starting at Day 0, which is the day your symptoms started or when you tested positive, whichever came first. This means you should not go to work or school. You should discuss your return to work with your employer or your child's return

to school with their school principal, as your employer or your school may require additional precautions.

What if I'm a close contact of someone with COVID-19?

If you, or a household member, test positive for COVID-19, other people living with you are also at higher risk of becoming infected. We recommend that all household contacts continue to test daily with a RAT from the day the person with COVID-19 tests positive. You are considered to be a household contact if you live with, or have spent at least one night or day (more than 8 hours) with, someone who has COVID-19. Household contacts should **test daily for 5 days** using a RAT.

What happens after I've completed my recommended isolation period?

If your symptoms have resolved and you feel well, you can return to your normal activities. We recommend you **wear a mask** if you need to visit a healthcare facility or an aged residential care facility, or you have contact with anyone at risk of getting seriously unwell with COVID-19 up until 10 days after your symptoms started or you tested positive. This is because some people are infectious for up to 10 days.

If you still feel unwell, we recommend you stay home until you have recovered. If you do need to leave the house, we recommend you **wear a mask** and do not visit a healthcare facility (other than to seek medical attention), or an aged residential care facility, or have contact with anyone at risk of getting seriously unwell with COVID-19.

You don't need to do another RAT after testing positive. But if you are concerned you may still be infectious after isolating for 5 days, testing negative with a RAT provides a good indication that you are unlikely to be infectious. You may still wish to wear a mask if you have contact with someone at risk of serious illness and some facilities may still require all visitors to wear masks.

Where can I get further support?

If your COVID-19 symptoms get worse, or you are concerned about someone you care for, you can call Healthline on 0800 611 116 anytime for free health advice and information. If it's an emergency, call 111.

For further advice visit the [COVID-19 Health Hub \(covid19.health.nz\)](https://covid19.health.nz) or call the COVID Healthline on 0800 358 5453.

The dedicated Disability Helpline (0800 11 12 13 or text 8988) has been supporting members of the disability community with testing, face mask exemptions and managing COVID at home. The helpline team can also help with:

- any general health concerns
- if a support worker/carer is unavailable or hasn't arrived
- connecting you with information and support you need.

If you need communication assistance, you can access using the NZ Relay Service www.nzrelay.co.nz. A person with experience or knowledge of disability will answer your call from 8am – 8pm. After 8pm, calls are answered by a trained member of the Healthline team.

When do I need to wear a face mask?

Mask wearing remains an important way we can prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19, particularly in health and disability care settings.

It is especially important to wear a face mask when visiting people who are at higher risk of becoming seriously unwell, like older people and kaumātua, babies, people living in aged residential care facilities, patients in hospital and those with other health conditions.

It's **recommended you wear a face mask** when visiting healthcare services. Please respect their policy on mask wearing when visiting, as **you may be asked to wear a mask in particular situations or locations within a healthcare facility** to help protect those at higher risk.

Facility policies may still require mask wearing to comply with Health and Safety requirements.

Free masks are available for you to pick up with free RATs from participating collection sites. Find a collection centre near you: www.healthpoint.co.nz/covid-19/

Where can I find more information?

For more information go to [covid19.govt.nz](http://www.covid19.govt.nz) (<http://www.covid19.govt.nz/>). For free health advice and information, call Healthline on 0800 611 116 anytime, visit the [COVID-19 Health Hub](https://www.health.govt.nz/our-services/health-hub) ([covid19.health.nz](https://www.health.govt.nz/our-services/health-hub)) or call the COVID Healthline on 0800 358 5453.