

17 June 2020

Letter to Auckland frontline COVID-19 staff

Hi everyone

I'd like to begin by acknowledging how difficult the last 48 hours must have been for many of you, especially given how hard you've worked running our managed isolation facilities. Thank you for your ongoing contributions.

As you'll know, we're now actively tracing and testing the contacts of the two new cases – all along their travel route into New Zealand – and we're doing the same for any frontline staff that may have had contact. We're also implementing the Minister's suspension of compassionate exemptions from managed isolation.

All of this may raise questions to you from hotel guests and others. Our key messages to them are:

1. A new case is something we anticipated and planned for.
2. We have geared up our contact tracing and testing capability to be able to respond rapidly.
3. Recent changes to the testing strategy will see everyone in managed isolation being tested on days 3 and 12.
4. Compassionate exemptions are suspended, while we ensure the system is working as intended.
5. We have great sympathy for families dealing with bereavements, but the new cases underscore a recent decision to no longer grant compassionate exemptions to attend funerals or tangihanga.

Guests in managed isolation and quarantine can continue to access information or support from:

1. health professionals at each facility
2. Healthline (0800 3585453)
3. Free call or text 1737 any time to connect with a trained counsellor.

We also want to clarify some points for you:

1. all compassionate exemptions are suspended, effective immediately (regardless of testing results)
2. persons arriving at international airports with previous exemptions from managed isolation on compassionate grounds must now go directly into managed isolation
3. for the time being, any new applications for compassionate exemptions will be declined
4. 'visiting' relatives on daily visits (under compassionate grounds) is to be ceased
5. all those leaving managed isolation must test negative before leaving, regardless of circumstances. They can refuse the test but must understand this will result in them remaining in managed isolation.
6. we are clarifying transit and medivac exemption criteria with the clinical team, i.e. what conditions would we consider support person/s. These applications are still being processed.
7. for those currently in the community (having had an exemption) and self-isolating we are not getting them back into managed isolation or calling (other than contact tracing as part of the response to the positive cases).

Thanks again for your ongoing support.

Deborah Woodley
Deputy Director General

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