

New Zealand Occupational Health Nurses Association – Position Statement

NZOHNA Members – 15th May 2020

On behalf of NZOHNA, we would like to start by acknowledging the resilience of our members as we have adapted to new ways of working and rapidly adapt our services to meet business demand. We are so proud of our OHN professional group.

Please refer to the NZOHNA Position Statement for Businesses for general workplace advice. This intention of this resource is to provide additional guidance to you and your clinical practice as an Occupational Health Provider.

Please note, safe management has become more critical as we start to see community spread in New Zealand. The government has announced a four-level COVID-19 alert system. These alert levels specify the health and social measures to be taken. As at 10th May 2020, New Zealand is at COVID-19 Alert Level 3 (Restrict) and with a phased transition into Alert Level 2 (Reduce) : [Link to Alert System](#)

As a Health Professional, you are required to undertake your own diligence in risk assessments which includes accessing latest national COVID-19 health information.

Staying Well

Please take precautions with your own health and follow the same advice that we provide to our workplaces, such as staying home if you feel unwell, physical distancing, and additional hand and environmental hygiene practices.

Clinical Practice and Standard Precautions

As we remain in pandemic alert levels, please be advised to be vigilant and remain compliant with standard infection control precautions in addition to further measures depending on current government instruction and community transmission status. COVID-19 is still out there -stay safe.

Continue to review your normal work schedule and commitments. Consider whether your OH service(s) can resume previously **postponed** or **modified** activities as the COV-19 risks reduce. Any change to your service provision will require an effective infection control, and communication, plans to your team and customers.

Risk Assessment and Planning

Key considerations/controls as we transition from Alert Level 3 to 2 then 1:

| Focus | Comment/Control Suggestion |
|----------------------------|--|
| Business | <p>Prior to visiting a workplace, and in order to protect you and your staff, it will be important to ensure that the PCBU has appropriate COVID-19 controls in place. Check to see if there are contractor COVID-19 induction processes that you will be required to complete before visiting the site.</p> <p>In addition to the listed controls below, it is recommended that you ensure that there are appropriate worker and contractor symptom checks and self-isolation processes in place. This is applicable to business visits or workers attending your premises. This will reduce the risk of inadvertent contact with someone who meets the criteria of being a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 case.</p> |
| Physical distancing | <p>As the alert levels are lowered, the 2-metre distance will become a more flexible 1 metre rule. Physical barriers can be slowly reduced. Continue to avoid body contact such as hand shaking and maintain personal space during the appointment. Physical distancing should start on arrival and until departure.</p> <p>Consider the layout of your premises and equipment, such as chairs, so 1 metre physical distancing can be facilitated.</p> |

New Zealand Occupational Health Nurses Association – Position Statement

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Personal hygiene | <p>Clean and sanitise your hands regularly. Protect your skin integrity with regular use of an emollient/moisturiser. Follow infection control etiquette.</p> <p>Ask others to do the same.</p> |
| Environmental hygiene | <p>Between each worker, clean and sanitise your work area and handled equipment. Avoid sharing items, e.g. pens.</p> <p>Antiviral hospital strength cleaning products are recommended.</p> <p>Additional environmental hygiene and premises cleaning protocols will be required, especially commonly touched areas such as reception, door handles, toilet areas.</p> <p>Remove items that can enable cross-contamination such as magazines.</p> <p>if applicable, consider non contact payment opinions.</p> <p>Good room ventilation is important.</p> |
| Contact tracing | <p>Keep a track of where you and your staff have been and who've seen until the government advises otherwise.</p> |
| Health consultation | <p>May recommence from Level 2 if safe to do so. If non-essential, consider postponing until Level 1 or later. Limit appointment duration where possible.</p> <p>MoH guidelines state, at Alert level 2 and for community health, telehealth and virtual appointments are still the preferred option.</p> <p>Face to face consultation requires:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Screening for COVID-19 symptoms prior to a F2F appointment, ● Physical distancing measures (from entry until exit). ● Infection control processes including hand cleaning and sanitising on arrival, PPE where required. ● Available respiratory protection for the client. e.g. surgical mask. |
| Health testing | <p>A recent WorkSafe response was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Health monitoring is not a control - it doesn't control risk. It should be used to verify that risk is suitably managed and as a result there are no adverse effects showing up on the health monitoring. This can be through spirometry testing and other means of respiratory assessment. ● Where health testing/monitoring is suspended due the COVID-19 risk, it is in line with a 'not reasonably practicable to do so' approach. ● Where work exposures continue, the PCBU must absolutely ensure that all controls in place to ensure risk is managed are working effectively. If there is any reason to suspect the controls are not as effective as they should be, then the PCBU needs to address that immediately. <p>Therefore, our interpretation is that you may resume testing from Level 2 only if you assess it is safe to do so and important to recommence. If non-essential, consider postponing until Level 1 or later.</p> <p>A risk assessment is required to determine whether an individual test requires additional infection transmission reduction controls such as environmental engineering controls or PPE (last resort).</p> <p>Identified heightened risk testing includes alcohol breath testing, and spirometry. A review is currently underway to determine whether urine handling presents a COVID-19 health risk.</p> <p>Spirometry testing is not recommended at Level 2/1 unless critical and should only be performed under strict and safe controls.</p> <p>Alternative options for respiratory assessment are clinical observation, gathering related health and exposure history, and use of a questionnaire.</p> |
| Spirometry | <p>Current MOH advice is to avoid aerosol generating procedures in primary health care settings. Please refer to a saved Central PHO memo on spirometry testing (20200513) in our COVID-19 resource folder on our website.</p> |

New Zealand Occupational Health Nurses Association – Position Statement

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| | <p>NZ Respiratory Specialists opinion, when approached by NZOHNA Executive members, was that workplace spirometry testing was unlikely to resume until Alert level 1 (Prepare, the disease is controlled in NZ) unless advised by MoH otherwise. This has been further validated by several OH Medical Specialists in NZ.</p> <p>Whilst the use of an anti-viral filter during spirometry testing is an important control measure, we are aware that there is a current national shortage of this item. Please be aware that the (new) use of a filter can affect results so interpret with caution.</p> <p>There remains a strong, residual risk of aerosol spread due to poor technique of the person being tested and the post-test respiratory recovery period (prone to coughing, nasal drip etc) so a risk of environment and tester contamination remains. We agree that this can be controlled to a large extent by use of COVID-19 symptom checks, good technique (including the use of a nose 'clip'), PPE, cleaning and sanitisation (personal, environment, equipment).</p> |
| PPE | <p>May be required for close contact situations (within 1-2 metres). PPE may include eye protection, gloves (right type and size), respiratory protection and disposable overalls (for aerosol generating tasks).</p> <p>Respiratory protection within 1-2 metre and heightened risk- N95/P2 correctly fitted Within 1-2 metre and low risk- surgical mask correctly fitted</p> |
| Group gatherings | <p>Avoid face to face gatherings, such as training workshops, until Level 1. However, MOH guidelines state 'group treatment (e.g. exercise classes) can occur so long as physical distancing is in place'.</p> |
| Seasonal Influenza Vaccination | <p>This is an important service to support the community health during COVID-19. Consider ways to mitigate the risk of multiple clients in proximity for 20 minutes or more. This may include a control of numbers of people seen at the clinic, seating arrangement, ventilation, and environmental hygiene.</p> |

Ways OH Providers Can Support A Workplace

Remember that OHNs don't just provide health monitoring services. Our professional support can include a strategic business health and wellbeing approach tailored to the workplace needs. During COVID-19, OHN professional advice or services can include:

- Site COVID-19 health & safety programme – supporting business continuity, and worker/visitor/contractor infection risk assessment and controls.
- Site engineering controls such environmental hygiene (cleaning and sanitation), physical distancing barriers, and high use areas controls e.g. for workplace café and toilet areas.
- People management such as on-site staff rotation and working from home.
- People care – supporting vulnerable workers (or living with), self-isolation management, contact tracing, worker rehabilitation or return to work after an illness or isolation, discomfort management, and mental wellbeing support.
- People communication and training – personal hygiene, COVID-19 controls, PPE fitting and safe use, mental wellbeing, ergonomic assessment for new work environments.

Your Business: If your business/or income are affected, remember that the Government is providing business support packages and resources to help you through difficult times:

<https://www.business.govt.nz/news/coronavirus-information-for-businesses/>

We would like to hear from you if you feel that you need collegial support during these challenging times.

During this COVID-19 high risk period, if you have any significant concerns about the practice of other Health & Safety professionals, please follow the relevant professional Association complaints process.

New Zealand Occupational Health Nurses Association – Position Statement

If you require any further Occupational Health advice and support, please contact our NZOHNA Administrator who can take your details and forward to your local NZOHNA Group person. Email at admin@nzohna.org.nz.

Further Information & Resources

- New Zealand Government 'Unite Against COVID 19' as the best place to access up-to-date COVID-19 information and resources: <https://covid19.govt.nz/>

MOH COVID-19 webpage:

<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus> or <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-information-specific-audiences/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-resources-health-professionals> and <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/updated-advice-for-health-professionals-covid-19-16-aprilv3.docx>

- WorkSafe webpage: <https://worksafe.govt.nz/managing-health-and-safety/novel-coronavirus-covid/>
- MOH pandemic planning: <https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/emergency-management/pandemic-planning-and-response/workplace-pandemic-influenza-guidance>
- International travel risk: <https://www.safetravel.govt.nz/>
- International view from Johns Hopkins: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>
- For any individual health concerns, contact the dedicated **Healthline COVID-19 line (0800 358 5453)**.
- Supporting vulnerable people (UK resource): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>

Written on behalf of NZOHNA Executive Team and with kind regards,

Clare Lynn and Heidi Börner, Acting Presidents - New Zealand Occupational Health Nurses Association.