



## MPI generic guidance on COVID-19 safety requirements for primary industry and food businesses at Alert Level 2

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### Purpose

These guidelines provide primary industry and food businesses with the minimum requirements that should be put in place to prevent transmission of COVID-19 when New Zealand is, or regions are, at COVID-19 Alert Level 2.

The MPI guidelines take into account relevant aspects of WHO, MoH, WorkSafe and MBIE guidelines for COVID-19. Business sectors and business operators within those sectors should refer to these as appropriate when writing their safety protocols, and in particular these specific statements from WorkSafe (Health and Safety at Work Act 2015).

- *Leadership*: The expectations of customers, the community, workers, and regulators that workplaces will meet the highest possible standards and that managers, supervisors, and individual workers will actively manage adherence to the safety measures and expectations. We expect all involved to demonstrate leadership and appropriate self-supervision to ensure that these standards are met and that they are looking out for the health and safety of their colleagues and community while at work.
- *Elimination*: Businesses are obliged to eliminate transmission risks where possible, and where not, to substitute work practices or provide as higher level of control as possible. We expect that businesses maintain, or create new, practices that meet or exceed the MoH/WorkSafe guidelines as they are updated.
- *Participation*: Workplaces should engage with employees (as individuals or representatives) in any decision making for changes to work practices. Any staff consultation and/or feedback should be an ongoing process so that workplaces are able to improve practices and learn lessons to continuously improve management and safety.

## Scope of the guidelines

These generic guidelines reflect the responsibility of MPI in guiding and verifying safe public health practices by all primary industry and food businesses. They can also be used for other parts of primary industry supply chains e.g. food manufacturing businesses.

Guidelines for staff travelling to and from a workplace, as well as their accommodation in some circumstances e.g. seasonal workers in the horticulture industry, are the responsibility of the Ministry of Transport and MBIE. Guidance for these areas can be found here.

<https://www.transport.govt.nz/about/covid-19/transport-and-travel-by-alert-level/>

<https://covid19.govt.nz/covid-19/>

## Primary industry context

MPI has consulted regularly with MoH in the development of this generic guidance on COVID-19 safety requirements for primary industry businesses. MPI guidance for primary industry businesses is entirely congruent with MoH and WHO guidelines; the latter having been developed primarily for health care situations where risks of transmission of infection are higher.

NZ Food Safety is working closely with primary industry organisations on a sector-by-sector basis to assist them in incorporating generic MPI guidance within their sector guidance. Safety plans implemented by industry will be verified by NZ Food Safety Verification Services, along with other government agencies and accredited bodies, as determined by the Alert Level.

All premises should have a COVID-19 safety plan that is tailored to the business.

New scientific information on risks of transmission and best operating practice in business environments is continually coming to hand. In this regard, it has been very recently reported that infectious aerosols from a single infected person can travel at least as far as 8 metres and infect other people. Albeit less than at Alert Level 3, there remains a risk of exposure at Alert Level 2 when 2 metre distancing cannot be maintained. It also seems that the likelihood of transmission of infection via common contact surfaces is far less important than droplet or aerosol transmission.

The following processing environment risk factors have been postulated to increase the opportunity for person to person spread in food businesses: humidity, cold temperatures that promote virus survival, limited air flow, physical exertion, talking and shouting, and opportunities for close grouping of people. This particularly applies to red meat, poultry and seafood processing industries.

MPI will update generic guidance as appropriate and inform industry organisations and verifiers of any significant changes.

## MPI guidance

COVID-19 is transmitted from person to person, predominantly by respiratory droplets and aerosols generated when an infected person (not necessarily with symptoms) breathes, coughs, sneezes or talks. Transmission is primarily airborne face-to-face.

MPI guidance incorporates a flexible approach in setting the minimum safety requirements for primary industry businesses operating at Alert Level 2.

The specific requirements for preventing the transmission of COVID-19 at Alert Level 2 are drawn from the following principles:

- Staying away from the work site if there is any suspicion of Covid-19 illness or contact with an infected person
- Monitoring the health and contact status of all workers (staff and contractors) and visitors onto the work site
- Forming workplace teams (“bubbles”) and movement corridors
- Physical distancing of staff and visitors/customers to the extent practical
- Use of clean face masks (of an appropriate grade for food processors) where adequate physical distancing can’t be maintained.
- Using other relevant personal protection.
- Changing group behaviour likely to facilitate transmission e.g. canteen bubbles
- General hygiene e.g. coughing etiquette, handwashing, cleaning
- Sanitising of high touch surfaces, as appropriate
- Monitoring airflow across the workspace and directing away from workers plus maximising air flow to a level practicable

Refer to the WorkSafe websites for general physical distancing guidance at Alert Level 2.

## **General safety requirements at Alert Level 2**

General requirements should be in place for all areas of the business e.g. harvesting, processing, storage and distribution, cleaning and maintenance and other essential support activities.

The safety plan should be fully socialised with staff, preferably including involvement in writing.

### **Eligibility for work**

- All staff and contractors should stay at home if they are unwell and report to the Manager for further instructions.
- Anyone who has been identified as a close contact of a suspect or confirmed case should self-isolate, report to the Manager and not come to work for 14 days.
- Workers should sign off their COVID-19 health status immediately prior to entry to the workplace (not after going to changing rooms, canteen, etc).
- To support contact tracing, all staff, contractors and visitors should provide their full name, two forms of contact (e.g. mobile phone and email address) and time of arrival at the workplace; or alternatively use the NZ COVID Tracer app and register their visit.

- Any staff feeling ill with Covid-19 like symptoms in transit to work, upon entry to work, or at work, should report immediately to their Manager. All workers having contact with ill staff should be treated the same and managed as specified in MoH guidelines (<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>).

### Workplace “bubbles”

- Workplace bubbles should be formed wherever practical to minimise the possibility of transmission between different groups and to facilitate business continuity.
- Each workplace bubble should enter and exit their working location as a group, and sit together during breaks.
- The size of a bubble will need to be determined on a case-by-case basis and will depend on workplace functionality and business continuity expectations.
- In small businesses, a workplace bubble may be considered the same as a “family” bubble outside the workplace if the same bubble measures are applied.
- If a case or suspected case arises, all workers in the bubble should be managed as specified in MoH guidelines (<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>).
- Workplace supervisors should continuously monitor bubble arrangements.

### Hygiene

- All staff should have facilities to wash their hands properly, with visual reminders that hands need to be washed well with soap and water for 20 seconds and properly dried; especially upon arrival at work, after using the bathroom, after blowing their nose and before eating.
- Staff should be instructed in all aspects of safety hygiene e.g. cover coughs, sneezes with their elbow or use tissues (disposing of any tissues promptly), avoid touching their face unless they have washed their hands; such instruction should be periodically repeated.
- In enclosed buildings, masks (of an appropriate grade for food processors) should be worn whenever 2 metre distancing cannot be maintained.
- When outside, masks should be worn whenever 1 metre distancing cannot be maintained, there is mingling with external visitors, or entering buildings.
- Masks should be replaced immediately they become inoperable, wet or contaminated. Used masks must not be put back on. Single use masks must be disposed of. Reusable masks must be washed before reuse.
- Staff should be instructed in correct use of masks. (<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-information-specific-audiences/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-workers>).
- Visors cannot be used as substitutes for masks.

- Protective clothing for normal use in processing areas should be sufficient, and protective clothing in other areas should be considered on a case-by-case basis. Glasses are not considered to be PPE.
- Work areas should be sanitised as per normal cleaning regimes using disinfectants approved for use (required in food premises), taking into consideration surface type, appropriate concentration and effective contact time; work areas include common rooms and break rooms, communal condiment containers e.g. saltshakers, tea dispensers.
- Common “*high-touch-rate*” contact surfaces specific for each business should be cleaned and sanitised more frequently, and hand sanitiser made available for staff after their use.
- Signage on safety hygiene should be prominently displayed in work areas and amenities.

### **Other requirements**

- All premises should apply for and display the NZ COVID Tracer QR code posters to ensure staff, visitors and customers can record their visits.
- All staff should be encouraged to download and register on the NZ COVID Tracer app and maintain a digital diary of the locations they visit.
- In the absence of the NZ COVID Tracer procedures, premises should require all staff, contractors and visitors to manually provide their full name, two forms of contact (e.g. mobile phone and email address) and time of arrival at the workplace.
- Masks should be worn by all essential and non-essential external visitors to the business premises. Any customers should use “no-contact” facilities to the extent practical. All sites should apply for and display the NZ COVID Tracer QR code posters to ensure visitors and customers can record their visits.
- The premises COVID-19 safety plan should be available to visitors and for external verification, if required.
- Food hygiene controls in food businesses should be maintained as per normal practice. If operating procedures for Covid-19 safety have changed significantly, the HACCP plan for food safety should be reviewed to ensure that it continues to operate as planned.

Technical questions from the food business or verifier with respect to these requirements should be directed to the NZFS Director Food Science and Risk Assessment.