

Return to Work at Alert Level 3 Information for Workers

COVID-19 safety plans for return to work at Level 3

Under Alert Level 3 businesses that are permitted to resume operations [need to have a COVID-19 safety plan](#). This sets out how they'll operate safely.

When a workplace safety plan is being developed, workers are required to be engaged and consulted. This includes contractors and suppliers. Their feedback should be included before the plan is finalised.

The plan for your workplace must be shared with everyone in the workplace. You have the right to see what your employer is doing to keep you safe from COVID-19 before you return to work. This should include a health and safety induction upon returning to work for all workers.

What you should look for in a plan:

- It covers what happens if someone in the workplace is exposed to COVID-19.
- How the worksite will be thoroughly cleaned before work recommences.
- Have effective control measures been implemented for minimizing the risk of spreading COVID-19. This should include:
 - Physical distancing to at least 2m in most cases, or between 1m and 2m with other effective controls,
 - Enabling good hygiene,
 - Contactless methods of interacting with the public, and
 - Contact tracing.
- Processes for workers to report issues.
- How it considers and manages any new risks (related to COVID-19 or not) that arise from changes in the workplace. For example, if a workplace introduces shiftwork, what measures are in place to manage fatigue?
- How the plan will continuously develop with worker input.
- A key role for Health and Safety Representatives and Health and Safety Committees in the plan.

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Don't forget about other risks

It is important that your employer continues to manage other risks as well as protecting you from the risk of COVID-19.

Make sure you know how to log and follow up risks and incidents in your workplace. Now is a great time to find out the procedures for reporting health and safety in your workplace. If there are none, or your work has inadequate procedures – now is the time employers must be remedying this in line with their COVID-19 safety plans.

As work practices change to adapt to COVID-19 safe work, new risks may present themselves. If you identify any raise this with your employer, Union or Health and Safety Representative (HSR) as necessary.

Engage your Health and Safety Representatives

Do you know who your workplace Health and Safety Representative (HSR) is? If not now is the best time to find out.

Health and Safety reps have key powers under our legislation to keep you and your workmates safe at work.

If your work doesn't have an HSR, [begin the process on establishing one](#) now.

Employers must communicate and engage with workers on how they're keeping you safe during Level 3

Our health and safety legislation requires employers to engage with workers on all matters that effect workers' health and safety. [This is a legal requirement](#). This includes when your employer is making decisions about returning to work at Level 3, what control measures are being put in place, as well as listening (and acting on) any concerns raised by workers.

If you are at risk of severe illness from COVID-19 you should not be compelled to return to work. The Ministry of Health has outlined who is most at risk [here](#).

If you have any concerns about your health and safety at work, or are vulnerable and being compelled to return to work, speak up to your employer, engage your Union, or get in touch with your health and safety representative (HSR). Your HSR has powers under the Act to assist you with workplace health and safety matters.

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Physical distancing

Given that the harm from COVID-19 can be fatal – the level of precaution taken in workplaces needs to be high. Physical distancing has been identified as one of the key precautions.

Physical distancing at Alert level 3

The obligations to ensure health and safety of workers so far as reasonably practicable still apply. This means implementing the highest levels of physical distancing practicable. For all businesses 2m should be considered the safest minimum distance during Alert Level 3. But if a business can't maintain that, it must be more than 1m in combination with effective control measures.

The requirements to continue working from home where possible remain in level 3

(In order of effectiveness) businesses should:

- Enable working from home.
- Allow for remote working.

And if unable to do either of those businesses should:

- Ensure over 2 metres space as between workers, and workers and other people.
- If not reasonably practical to maintain at least 2m, implement effective control measures for working between 1 and 2 metres.
- As noted above, no work within 1m, unless essential and the duty to implement effective controls measures still stands for essential work.

Ensuring good hygiene at work

Along with physical distancing another key precaution to minimising the spread of COVID-19 is enabling good hygiene at work.

Your employer must provide you with the ability to maintain good hygiene at work. Your employer's obligations include providing you with adequate facilities and equipment to ensure you can maintain good hygiene, as well as providing information and training on maintaining good hygiene at work.

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Good hygiene includes:

- Hand hygiene – that is, washing hands regularly with soap and water, or cleansing with hand sanitiser.
- Staying at home if you are sick. The Government have announced they are extending the paid leave scheme for Level 3 for people more at risk of Covid -19 complications so they can stay home with pay.
- Coughing or sneezing into a tissue or your elbow and then performing hand hygiene.
- Cleaning surfaces regularly.
- Ensuring good air ventilation.

You should also consider what provisions have been put in place to clean your workplace and sanitize equipment and work vehicles.

Contact tracing

This should include systems in places to be able to do effective COVID-19 contact tracing - such as customer registration logs, and logging attendance at meetings.

Note: for retail and hospitality businesses, these can only open for delivery and contactless pre-ordered pick up. Customers cannot enter stores.

Access and information on appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Government guidance has been provided on [Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\) requirements for health workers and non-health workers](#).

If you are concerned about returning to work without safety equipment, engage with your employer alongside your Health and Safety Representative and union representative to ensure that the risk of COVID-19 is being managed so far as is reasonably practicable. This means:

- Your employer has ensured all reasonably practicable control measures are in place to manage the risk of COVID-19. This may include physical distancing, staggered breaks, minimal contact with others, physical barriers, providing clean and well-equipped facilities to ensure good hygiene, and safety equipment.
- That the messaging of what control measures are in place is clear and being provided to all workers.
- That worker concerns are being actively engaged on and feedback from workers is incorporated.

Whether or not your workplace decides PPE is needed – your employer must have in place all reasonably practicable control measures to keep you safe and they need to work with you to alleviate any concerns about your return to work.

COVID-19 | Level 3 Health and Safety

If PPE is being used in your workplace, remember to use it correctly and safely. Your employer must provide information and training on how to do this. Incorrect use of PPE can be even more dangerous in spreading COVID-19.

Information on managing PPE supplies can be found [here](#).

Ensuring your mental health is being looked after as well

Dealing with COVID-19 is stressful for people's mental health. Your employer's obligations to protect your health and safety at work include work-related mental health.

As changes to workplaces occur and new pressures emerge as more businesses begin to return to work at Level 3, be mindful of your mental health and engage your channels of support to assist you including your Health and Safety Representative and Union.

Mental health resources:

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/get-help/covid-19/top-tips-to-get-through/>

<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-health-advice-general-public/covid-19-mental-health-and-wellbeing-resources>

For a range of other mental health helplines: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/get-help/in-crisis/helplines/>

Stopping unsafe work

Always remember If you believe your work is unsafe [you have the right to cease work](#).

[You can stop unsafe work when:](#)

1. The work will expose any worker or other person to a serious risk. Work should be ceased if there is a real likelihood of harm regardless of the whether the resulting injury would be minor; and
2. The exposure to the hazard is immediate or immanent.

If you are worried about unsafe work – tell your employer in writing, engage your Health and Safety Representative (and/or) your Union and [make a notification to WorkSafe](#).