

This document answers frequently asked questions about the COVID-19 Protection Framework (new alert level system).

This information applies from 22 October 2021

Information can be used for any government agency, local government or relevant sector and business communications.

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This version was current at 9:00am, 22 October 2021.

## COVID-19 Protection Framework (CPF)

### Q. What is the new COVID-19 Protection Framework?

The new COVID-19 Protection Framework (CPF) will replace the Alert Level system. We will transition as it's safe to do so and once the 90% vaccination rate in each DHB milestone have been hit.

This framework enables more activity and ensures people can plan ahead. High vaccination rates will mean many of the restrictions necessary under Alert Levels 3 and 4 will no longer be required to keep us safe and many of our freedoms can return.

With the CPF and high vaccine rates across every DHB we will be able to change how we manage COVID-19 domestically. This is part of our pathway to reopening our borders and reconnecting New Zealand with the world.

### Q. When will more information about CPF be made available?

More detail on how the Framework will be implemented will be available by the end of November, after further decisions are made by Ministers.

High vaccination rates mean we will soon be able to take a new approach to managing COVID-19 with fewer restrictions and less reliance on lockdowns to stop the spread of the virus. Work is now underway to develop guidance and detail to underpin the new COVID-19 Protection Framework, and we will only transition when it is safe to do so. We'll be talking with a wide range of people as this work progresses including community and business groups, education, faith-based and sport sectors, and other key stakeholders.

### Q. Why are we introducing a new framework?

Using Alert Levels to stamp out COVID-19 helped keep us safe from the worst impacts of COVID-19 that we have seen overseas. It's something we're incredibly proud of.

While Delta, and its high transmissibility, has changed our ability to control COVID-19, the vaccine has enabled us to change the way we manage the virus. High vaccination rates mean we can introduce a new system to support us to move to a new chapter, where COVID-19 is managed in a different way, minimising the impacts it has on our day-to-day lives.

## **Q. How is this different from the old system?**

This framework includes measures that New Zealanders will be familiar with from the Alert Level system that have proven to work well to keep us safe. The key shift is introducing different freedoms for those with a vaccination certificate. It also means that some activities will only be available to those with vaccination certificates. High vaccination rates mean that many of the restrictions we needed under Alert Levels 3 and 4 will not be needed as often. We will still utilise targeted and localised lockdowns where needed to keep people safe.

## **Q. When will this be implemented?**

It is likely that the CPF will be implemented in the Auckland region first, once the three Auckland DHBs have achieved 90% of their eligible populations being fully vaccinated. This is estimated to be in early December, and they would move to Red status. The rest of New Zealand will continue using the existing Alert Level system. Decisions and announcements for when the rest of the country or parts of New Zealand move reviewed at the end of November.

The rest of New Zealand will continue using the existing Alert Level system until the 90% fully vaccinated target set across each DHB region is reached.

## **Q. What is happening to the old Alert Level system?**

The existing Alert Levels have served us incredibly well. When a region begins using CPF it will replace the existing Alert Level framework.

## **Q. How will this new framework protect vulnerable communities?**

Having a highly vaccinated population protects all of us. Work is continuing to increase the rates of vaccination in vulnerable communities and populations.

A new \$120 million package is being made available to help increase Māori vaccination rates. The fund will provide direct financial support to iwi and Māori organisations, to accelerate vaccination uptake over the next two months.

## **Q. Could there still be lockdowns in the future?**

Local and targeted lockdowns will still be a part of the toolkit to help manage transmission, particularly for more vulnerable communities. But with 90% of the eligible population vaccinated, it means that we will be less reliant on more widespread lockdowns, unless urgent action is required to protect our health system or protect New Zealanders against new variants.

## **Q. Are we moving away from elimination?**

High vaccination rates mean our focus can move away from elimination to a strategy of minimisation and protection - aiming to keep the spread of COVID-19 low, whilst protecting people from the virus.

## **Q. What is the minimisation and protection approach and how does it differ from elimination?**

Under the elimination strategy, all activities were focused on getting to and maintaining 'zero COVID-19'. This was vital when treatments and, importantly, effective vaccinations were unavailable. When we did get vaccines, it was important for us to roll out vaccination to those most at risk first: our border workers, older populations and those that had other health risks.

Now as we work towards higher rates of vaccination across all our populations and all non-NZ citizens coming across our border are required to be vaccinated, we can move to a new approach.

Minimisation and protection will aim to shield both those who are most at risk of severe disease/outcomes, and the health system that is required to treat these people and continue to function to maintain other health services. This allows other priorities to be upheld, such as the importance of livelihoods and social connections, even in the context of a circulating virus. As such, impact on the necessities of life are 'minimised' and vital parts of society are 'protected'.

## **Q. Why can't the South Island move to the new framework now?**

The 90% vaccination rate target for all DHBs in the South Island would need to be met before the whole island could move to the new framework.

**Q. How far away are we from vaccinating 90% of the eligible population?**

The latest information on vaccine rates is available on the Ministry of Health [website](#).

**Q. What determines a change in level?**

Cabinet, on the advice of Health officials, will consider a range of factors to inform decisions to move parts of the countries between different levels. This will include vaccination coverage, the capacity of the health and disability system, testing, contact tracing and case management capacity, and the transmission of COVID-19 within the community, including its impact on the most vulnerable populations.

## Health system

**Q. Can our health system/hospitals cope under the new framework if there are outbreaks?**

CPF has been designed to consider health service capacity as part of determining which status an area is set at. Where there is limited capacity in a local hospital, this may result in a more restricted setting until hospital capacity increases again.

There are several health measures in place as we move to the minimisation and protection strategy. These focus on a highly vaccinated population, new testing strategy/surveillance and contact tracing under development. Further guidance on isolation for positive cases, and guidance on ventilation for indoor venues is also under way, as well as work on local public health responses.

**Q. Do we have ICU capacity if there is further community transmission?**

The capacity of ICU and HDU beds nationwide can be surged to 550 beds.

If we had to provide additional surge capacity to convert beds for ICU-level care because of COVID-19 cases it would be at the cost of other treatment and other patient care.

## Safety and wellbeing

### **Q. Is it safe to transition to a new framework while Auckland cases of COVID-19 are growing?**

Alert Levels will remain in place until vaccination levels provide some safety and we are ready to move to CPF. Until then we will maintain the current Alert Levels and continue to do the preparation to implement the next stage of the plan.

### **Q. How will this protect young children and others who cannot be vaccinated?**

Until a vaccine is approved for under 12s, the best protection for children is high community vaccination rates around them. The same goes for people who can't be vaccinated for health reasons. The more people who get vaccinated, the safer all our vulnerable people will be.

### **Q. In the future will most people with COVID-19 be able to recover at home?**

Work is going into developing support for people recovering from COVID-19 in the community. There are likely to be daily or twice daily welfare checks.

Some people recovering from COVID-19 at home may need to be provided with a pulse oximeter which sits on a patient's finger and measures their oxygen levels. Health authorities would call these patients and ask them to provide a reading from time to time to ensure their oxygen levels are not deteriorating.

### **Q. How many active cases does CPF factor in before a possible change in status would be required?**

Our pathway forward means moving away from counting individual cases. The new framework includes high levels of vaccination. Because vaccination significantly reduces the risks people face if they do get COVID-19, decisions around levels under the framework will be more about managing spread and minimising risk to the health system and vulnerable populations than total numbers of cases.

### **Q. Does this mean I don't need to wear a mask or scan anymore?**

Mandatory face coverings will still be required for domestic air travel in Green and in many places at Orange and Red. Mandatory record keeping will continue to apply under all levels.

## **Q. I'm double-vaccinated, so why can't I have more freedom now?**

We need very high levels of vaccine coverage across the whole of NZ and in all our communities before we can implement the CPF. That's the only way we can protect everyone. 90% is a minimum vaccination rate, and we need to continue pushing to get higher than that.

## **Vaccine**

### **Q. Does the CPF include the requirement to share your vaccination status?**

Yes, sometimes you may have to share your vaccination status to take part in specific activities. Part of life going forward means controlling transmission of the virus to keep New Zealand as COVID-19 free as possible. Our best defence to achieve that is having as many people vaccinated as possible.

We also need to ensure that a wide range of environments including events or large gatherings (concerts, festivals and sports competitions), and hospitality can go ahead without becoming possible COVID-19 super-spreader incidents. To enjoy the freedoms that the COVID-19 Protection Framework provides New Zealanders need to be vaccinated and be prepared to share their vaccination status.

### **Q. Will you have to show a COVID-19 Vaccination Certificate (CVC) to use essential services?**

No. You will be able to access essential services, including, supermarkets, pharmacies, hospitals and other life-preserving services without needing to present a CVC. Individual businesses may implement their own requirements, but the legislation will clearly exempt essential services from preventing entry to anyone based on their vaccination status or needing to present a CVC.

### **Q. What is being done to support Maori and Pacific (or vulnerable) communities to get vaccinated?**

The Government is providing an additional \$120 million to lift Māori vaccination rates.

The Ministry of Health vaccination programme includes support and information for Māori, Pacifica, rural, and disabled people.

Karawhiua is a unifying campaign for whānau, hapū, iwi, and Māori communities to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 through vaccination. Karawhiua is led by Te Puni Kōkiri, co-delivered by Te Hiringa Hauora and supported by the Ministry of Health and the Unite Against COVID-19 teams. Similarly, a support team is assisting disabled people to access vaccinations and providing advice and transport coordination for people with disabilities.

## **Q. What approach are you taking for hard-to-reach communities?**

The needs of vulnerable whānau are complex, and holistic services needs to be considered and implemented. The diversity of communities has meant that a wide range of strategies and tactics have been employed to ensure everyone has access to vaccination services.

A range of initiatives are currently being delivered to address the needs of vulnerable and hard-to-reach whānau.

MoH have partnered up with Oranga Tamariki to support access to vaccination for children in care.

Transitional housing and homelessness is another area where targeted pieces of work are done in conjunction with city missions and community providers.

MoH are working with whānau who have lived experiences of long-term trauma. To meet the needs of these communities MoH are facilitating access to those families through advocacy of subject matter experts and respected community leaders.

## **Q. Will children be allowed to access vaccinated-only events or places if they are unvaccinated?**

Yes. Requirements only apply to people 12 years and 3 months old and above. Anyone under this age will not be required to be present a COVID-19 Vaccination Certificate.

## **Q. Is the 90% milestone fully vaccinated or fully immunised?**

The milestone is 90% fully vaccinated, which is 90% of eligible people have had two doses of the vaccine.



## COVID Vaccination Certificates (CVC)

### **Q. What is a vaccination certificate and why do I need one?**

Later this year everyone in New Zealand will be able to access a scannable QR code as proof of vaccination and COVID-19 test results.

You may be required to show proof of vaccine in a range of public settings such as events, hospitality, retail, community, sport, and faith-based gatherings.

This will help ensure we are reducing the risk of the virus spreading over the Summer and into next year.

### **Q. Where can COVID Vaccination Certificates (CVCs) be used?**

Businesses, events, organisations, community, and a range of sectors may legally implement a vaccination entry requirement for customers.

### **Q. What is the advantage of requesting proof of vaccination?**

The use of vaccination certificates in a domestic setting provides businesses/organisations with more certainty around when they can operate at the different framework settings and whether there are capacity restrictions. This could be an event, day-to-day operations of a café, a sports fixture or faith-based organisation.

Should a business/organisation not wish to request proof of vaccine, they will have to operate with strict limits on capacity and space requirements. They may need to close in Orange and/or Red levels.

### **Q. Are there any settings where people cannot be required to present their CVC to enter?**

Everyone must be able to have access to supermarkets, pharmacies, health services, food banks and petrol stations without having to show proof of vaccine status.

### **Q. Is there guidance for those having to verify vaccination certificates?**

Detailed guidance is being developed for a range of sectors and we are engaging with them closely on the requirements within the framework, as well as verification of vaccines.

## **Q. How long will vaccination certificates be in place for?**

Proof of vaccination in New Zealand will help ensure that we are reducing the risk of the virus spreading at large gatherings and events over the Summer and into next year.

It's anticipated that the need for proof of vaccine certification when travelling internationally will be in place for years to come.

## **Q. Aren't these vaccination certificates discriminatory?**

There are very few people that are unable to get a vaccine due to medical grounds. An exemption process is in place for these people to obtain certification.

For children under the age of 12, there is no requirement to show proof of vaccination.

## **Q. Has equity been considered?**

There are options in place for people who do not have a smartphone or access to a computer.

Many local libraries have facilities where people can access the internet and printing. If you have family or friends who might not have access, see if you can help them access printing. We are also investigating how we make this available via a phone call.

## **Travel and regional boundaries**

### **Q. How does this relate to New Zealand borders reopening soon?**

We are continuing to rollout our Reconnecting New Zealanders plan to gradually open up our borders to more international travellers when it is safe to do so.

### **Q. How will CPF work across regional boundaries?**

Boundary restrictions will not generally apply between regions at different levels, although they may be required around areas in Red, or when there is a localised lockdown. If Auckland transitions earlier over to the new framework, then extra requirements are likely for movement across the boundary.

## Business

### **Q. How much warning will employers get before CPF is introduced?**

We will be sharing more detailed guidance in advance of any shift to the new framework, and there will be time for people to be prepared for the shift.

### **Q. How will the new rules under CPF be enforced and by whom?**

In the same way as for Alert Levels, CPF will be governed by legislation which applies under the Health Act. Power of enforcement sits with Police and other authorities.

### **Q. Can I legally check if my staff are vaccinated?**

Generally, a worker does not need to disclose their vaccination status to a business if it isn't directly required for their work.

If work cannot be done by an unvaccinated worker, a business can ask the worker about their vaccination status. If the worker does not disclose (or provide evidence about) their vaccination status, the business may assume the worker has not been vaccinated for the purposes of managing health and safety risks. However, businesses should first inform workers of this assumption, and what will happen if the worker is not vaccinated or does not disclose their vaccination status.

Employees cannot be redeployed or disadvantaged for refusing to disclose their vaccination status.

Some workforces have mandates which mean employees must be vaccinated. This includes border workers and education workers, as well as healthcare care and prison staff.

### **Q. Who is required to have a vaccination as part of their job?**

The education sector, including early learning teachers and support staff at education facilities, are required to be fully vaccinated by 1 January 2022. This does not yet include the tertiary sector. It's important for teachers and staff to be vaccinated as it provides further protection for our tamariki, particularly those that are unable to be vaccinated (under 12 years of age).

High-risk workers in the health and disability sector must be fully vaccinated by 1 December 2021 and receive their first dose by 30 October 2021.

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**Covid19.govt.nz**

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COVID-19**

Border workers, including maritime border and MIQ staff, are also required to be vaccinated and were the initial cohort in the vaccination rollout.

Corrections now require all prison staff, including health staff, and psychologists in prisons and in the community, to be fully vaccinated by 1 December 2021.

## **Q. Will employers be able to mandate staff to be vaccinated?**

We are actively considering how the framework will affect vaccination requirements for workers. We expect to provide further clarity in the coming weeks.

## **Q. Will the wage subsidy and resurgence payments still exist?**

The enhanced Resurgence Support Payment (RSP) will be available until Auckland moves into the new framework. The Wage Subsidy will continue to be available on the current criteria while areas of the country are still in Alert Level 3.

## **Events and gatherings**

### **Q. Will there be any music festivals and other events, and can I attend them?**

Events under all levels of the CPF can go ahead with different requirements per level.

- At Green, indoor and outdoor events can go ahead if they require a CVC. If they don't require a CVC, a limit of 100 attendees, 1metre physical distancing if food and beverage is served, seated and separated.
- At Orange, events that require a CVC for entry can go ahead without any restrictions. If they don't plan to require a CVC, the event can't go ahead.
- At Red, events can go ahead if they are requiring a CVC but are limited to 100 people with 1metre physical distancing and can't go ahead if they don't plan to require CVC.

### **Q. Can weddings and civil union ceremonies go ahead under the new framework?**

Yes, gatherings can go ahead under Green, Orange, Red with different restrictions applying under each status.