

ALERT LEVEL 2 PREPARATION – A GUIDE FOR PUBLIC SECTOR AGENCIES

This document includes practical guidance for agencies to support with planning for COVID-19 Alert Level 2. Note that at Alert Level 2 there is a general requirement for physical distancing of one metre at work. Agencies should conduct their own risk assessments and engage with unions and workers to determine the most appropriate measures across different work sites and operations. Always refer to [covid19.govt.nz](https://www.covid19.govt.nz) for more information on Alert Level 2 and to www.worksafe.govt.nz/managing-health-and-safety/novel-coronavirus-covid/ for up to date COVID-19 workplace health and safety guidance.

SECTION ONE: Transitioning people back to the workplace during COVID-19 Alert Level Two



Key Principles

- ✓ Returning to the workplace should be managed gradually, focusing on the essential functions first. This will allow agencies time to test and check to ensure controls are in place and working. It also helps people feel more secure about returning to the workplace.
- ✓ Staff wellbeing should remain a priority alongside resuming operations. Be sensitive to different attitudes that people will display, particularly at the early stages of returning to work. Consider options including maintaining working from home. Some staff may be concerned about getting to work on public transport, so temporarily working from closer offices may be an option for some employees in some agencies.
- ✓ Agencies should engage with staff and unions to develop and test your plans.
- ✓ Agencies must continue to support staff temporarily deployed to other agencies such as to assist the all-of-government COVID-19 response. [Refer to SSC workforce mobility guidance for more information.](#)

Actions

- **Identify which workers will return to the workplace first, and how you will then transition more people back into the workplace over time.**

Develop a plan that focuses on what is needed to resume operations and what functions are needed in the workplace to support this. Then consider the mix of staff that will be needed to perform these tasks and plan to progressively return staff to work to support this plan. Using alternative measures such as alternating shifts may be necessary if the workplace design does not allow physical distancing to be maintained.

Engage with workers and Health and Safety Representatives to understand how the plan is working at each site. Review and adjust your plan regularly based on worker feedback and observations.

- **Identify workers who may not yet be ready or able to return to the workplace immediately, and how they will be supported.**

Some workers may feel uncomfortable returning to the workplace for a variety of different reasons. This may include vulnerable workers or those with vulnerable people in their household unit or bubble, as well as those not yet comfortable taking public transport.

- **Provide clear communication and guidance to managers and workers on who the return to the workplace affects, when it applies, and how to implement changes. Ensure your messages include the importance of mutual responsibility – everyone playing a role in keeping each other safe.**

Before returning to work, managers and workers need to understand what measures will be in place to keep them safe, and what to expect when they return to work. Clear communications and guidance in advance will help to ensure workers know is expected of them and how to raise issues or concerns. Clear guidance may also help alleviate concerns about how the risk will be managed.

Considerations:

- Prioritise the needs of workers in deciding who returns to work when, e.g. some workers who have been working from home may prefer to return to work as soon as possible, especially if feeling pain or discomfort working from home, experiencing mental health issues or if home is cramped or not safe. Other workers may be comfortable continuing to work from home until the workplace is fully accessible.
- Consider the impact on physical space – e.g. starting off with lower numbers from each team and floor and gradually building up.
- Consider the impacts on “work bubbles” that have been formed by some workers during Alert levels 4 and 3. These workers may be concerned about adding new people. Can you keep different groups separate at work, at least for a while until workers are more comfortable? If not, how will you transition new people into existing work bubbles?
- How your agency can continue to support some working from home. Longer-term working from home arrangements will require further consideration from a health, safety, wellbeing perspective, along with information privacy & security considerations – see the [GHSL working from home agency guidance](#).
- Whether there are alternative working options available, for example providing staff the opportunity to temporarily work at an office location closer to home (with a suitable workstation) to avoid public transport.
- How you will enable vulnerable people to work from home, if required.
- What support you can provide to assist employees with additional caring responsibilities because of COVID-19.
- Develop an induction process to assist workers adjust to any changes to work arrangements. This could be delivered in a simple stand-up style upon arrival, or sent out as a video, e-learning package or welcome pack, prior to returning to the workplace. If possible, include a declaration or equivalent to ensure workers have completed and understood any new requirements.
- Ensure that managers engage with workers regularly throughout the return to work period, providing opportunities for questions and feedback. Regular “pulse check” surveys can also be a useful way to identify issues and check that things are working as they should.
- **Tip:** Use Health and Safety Representatives as ‘COVID-19’ champions to assist in maintaining new standards in the workplace. Champions can also be appointed to support in other areas, for example “tech champs” to alleviate pressures on ICT help desks.



SECTION TWO: Preparing your **workplace** for alert level 2

Key Principles

- ✓ Agencies must adhere to legislative and government requirements, including implementing controls and measures to meet Alert Level 2 standards, such as physical distancing, hygiene practices, contact tracing and provision of PPE, **(if required)**. Some changes to the workplace* will be required to achieve these requirements, for example limiting the number of people in lifts or changes to reception areas so clients are seated at a distance.
- ✓ Government workplaces vary considerably, along with the way different sites are designed and used. Agencies should consider what is **reasonably practicable** when considering the most appropriate controls.

Actions:	Considerations:
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Consider how each work space is used and where changes may be required in order to ensure physical distancing is able to be managed.</p> <p><i>It's important to think about the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How each workspace is normally used ○ Any changes under Alert Level 2, and ○ The impact of re-starting of services or operations. <p><i>Controls to support physical distancing in public areas should be based on the expected flow of customers under Alert Level 2 which may be lower or higher in some cases (e.g. opening a regional office following a period of closure may create a surge in customers for a period of time).</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about each different area, the way each space is used and what controls are likely to be the most effective but also appropriate to maintain physical distancing. Physical barriers or screens may be needed where physical distancing cannot be achieved (particularly when engaging with the public), in other areas, floor markers, signage or similar measures may be appropriate. Regular communications should be used to reinforce why physical distancing is important. Examples of different types of areas include; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Congregation spaces such as kitchens, meeting rooms and utility areas are high usage areas so may require a combination of controls such as procedural changes (split shifts / meal breaks, restricted use), along with signage, floor markers and/or physical barriers. ○ Confined spaces e.g. lifts, hallways, entrance ways, bathrooms require a pragmatic approach using a mix of controls including procedural changes (one direction of travel in stairwells, circulation space on floors), along with signage and floor markers to remind staff to keep their distance. ○ Public areas e.g. building entrance, lobbies and reception areas may require physical controls such as barriers. ○ Workstations differ according to the type of work being undertaken. Clear desk policy may need to be enforced to facilitate cleaning of surfaces. Consider personalised equipment (wireless keyboard and mouse). Workers must be able to maintain the minimum physical distancing requirements.
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Implement any physical changes to the workplace that are required in order to meet physical distancing and hygiene requirements in the workplace.</p> <p><i>Physical changes should be implemented prior to workers returning to the workplace. It is important to monitor and check to ensure controls are working, and refine or implement new controls if not.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a checklist of all physical changes required across each workplace and the different types of areas within those sites. This may include any physical barriers or screens, movement or removal of furniture (e.g. reduce the number of chairs in meeting rooms or meal areas, spread out desks if additional space is required), along with the installation of floor markers, tape etc. Include reference to these in communications with staff. • Ensure workplaces are well equipped with appropriate hand hygiene facilities and cleaning materials for self-sanitisation of high-touch work surfaces, equipment and facilities. • Equip the workplace with visible signs in common/shared spaces explaining processes and requirements for use e.g. clear signage of one-directional use of stairwell, capacity limit on lifts etc.
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Engage with contractors, suppliers and other relevant PCBUs</p> <p><i>Contractor and supplier arrangement should be reviewed and updated to reflect changes required under Alert level 2. Agencies should consider any overlapping PCBU responsibilities also, including shared premises or facilities. This is important where two or more agencies occupy sites on a co-location basis.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review contractor and supplier arrangements, including leases and sub-leases, to determine whether these require clarification or amendment, including what additional supplies or equipment may be required, e.g. cleaning and sanitising (products and services), PPE, waste disposal services, mail, couriers and deliveries. • Identify all contractors, suppliers and others who may be required to enter your premises during Alert Level 2, and ensure your communications clearly include these parties so they know what will be required of them.
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Develop and implement procedures for work conducted outside of government workplaces</p> <p><i>A large portion of government work is conducted out in the community, away from government workplaces that are managed by agencies. Agencies must ensure their planning, procedures and communications include how to keep staff safe while working, regardless of where that work is performed.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and update risk assessments for all work conducted off agency premises, including community work, field work, working from other locations (vehicles, private businesses, boats etc.). Specific COVID-19 considerations be incorporated into on-site risk assessments, such as when workers conduct a risk assessment prior to entering a client's home address. • Develop alternative ways of working if physical distancing cannot be maintained, except for essential services where relevant guidance including Ministry of Health guidance on PPE should be followed. • Amend procedures and provide clear guidance to all workers on any changes. This may include things like requiring workers to phone ahead and check COVID-19 procedures before conducting site visits.

*Also refer to the [Government Property Group website](#) for government property information relating to COVID-19.



SECTION THREE: Workplace policy and procedure changes required during COVID-19 Alert Level Two

Key Principles

- ✓ Workplace policies and procedures should be reviewed ahead of Alert Level 2. These may include new policies and procedures related to managing the spread of infection within the workplace, along with updates to existing policies and procedures as a direct or indirect result of covid-19.
- ✓ Staff and unions should be involved in the development of policy and procedural changes and provided opportunity to raise concerns and provide feedback.
- ✓ Agencies should ensure change communications are clear and regular – it's important for agencies to communicate how they will ensure the safety of everyone at work – including workers, contractors, suppliers and members of the public during Alert Level 2

Actions	Considerations:
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Implement a system for all workers to confirm they are fit to work before entering the workplace, ensuring they understand that if they are unwell they must not come to work.</p> <p><i>All PCBUs are required to have a system in place to gather information on the wellness of your staff to ensure that they are safe to work. WorkSafe guidelines recommend considering daily health screening checks, discussing options with workers, follow-up procedures for ill workers and contact tracing information.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Agencies should consider the most appropriate method of confirming workers are fit for work, based on the degree of risk. • Agencies should clearly communicate requirements for workers who are sick to remain at home. Some additional checks may be required in some environments, such as those at higher-risk of infection (e.g. prisons, hospitals) which may require staff to undertake more comprehensive daily health checks. • Clear guidelines should be developed for managers and staff and these should be communicated to ensure everyone knows what's required of them.
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Implement clear processes and systems to manage an exposure or suspected exposure to COVID-19, including a system to collect information to support contact tracing.</p> <p><i>All PCBUs are required to have a system in place to manage an exposure or suspected exposure to COVID-19. This includes isolation procedures, gathering and using workplace contact tracing information, clean down procedures, contacting GP and/or Healthline.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider each worksite and how your agency will capture and store information to support contact tracing in each different sites. (See WorkSafe contact tracing information). Some smaller work sites may use registers that workers and others must use to sign in and sign out each day (agencies can also use this process to declare they are fit for work). For larger sites such as CBD offices, agencies will need to develop more comprehensive procedures for workers to record information on people in their “work bubble” and others they have had contact with. In buildings with swipe cards, these can be a useful way to record movements. • Use of technology such as apps, can be helpful too, particularly for agencies with field staff. Agencies need to consider how they will store this information – refer to privacy.org.nz COVID-19 information • Develop clear guidelines on the process for managing a suspected exposure to COVID-19, including the process for contact tracing for managers and staff. Ensure these are communicated extensively so everyone knows what procedures to follow immediately following notification of an exposure or suspected exposure.
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Review existing health and safety risks, policies and procedures (including incident response, incident reporting and emergency management) and update to reflect changes as a result of COVID-19</p> <p><i>All agencies should conduct a risk assessment to identify changes to all critical health and safety risks and adjust policies and procedures accordingly. Ensure you include incident response, reporting and emergency management procedures in your review.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has changed that may impact existing health and safety risks, or may create new risks? For example, changes to work location, work flow or procedural changes. Remember to include health and mental health along with safety-related risks, including prevention of other infections (e.g. provision of influenza vaccinations). • What existing health and safety controls and procedures may be impacted? E.g., your procedures for lifting may require two people to lift an item, but this may not be achievable when physical distancing is required. • How will your agency manage emergency procedures such as fire or earthquake if all appointed wardens are not yet back at work? Consider prioritising these workers' return to work or appointing temporary wardens. Consider any changes to first aid procedures, e.g. make available mouth-to-mouth CPR barrier devices.
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Update other agency policies and procedures that require temporary or permanent changes as a result of COVID-19 or restrictions due to Alert Level 2.</p> <p><i>Alert Level 2 restrictions including physical distancing and limited travel will impact a number of areas and your agency should consider implementing temporary or permanent changes and communicate these to managers and staff. This may include areas such as workstation use, training, recruitment, travel, events and meetings. Employment provisions including leave and pay should also be considered (refer to State Services Commission Workforce Guidance)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider what changes are required to existing policies or procedures in order to meet Alert Level 2 requirements and what practical changes may be made. Some examples we are seeing across the sector already include; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establishing cleaning regimes to ensure workstations are cleaned before and after use. Clear desk policies, use of simple signs to indicate a desk has been sanitised. ○ Recruitment being conducted via video conferencing technology and online assessments. ○ Training being delivered through e-learning and online platforms. ○ Some travel being restricted (e.g. limited to essential domestic travel only), and use of pool vehicles temporarily suspended (or allocated to individuals), minimising unnecessary movements or exposure e.g. preference for internal as well as external meetings to be conducted via skype, zoom, MS teams etc.