

Frequently Asked Questions

This document answers frequently asked questions about **Omicron phase 2**.

This information relates to phase 2 of the Omicron plan including, testing, isolation, care in the community and support available

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

This is a living document that will be updated frequently. Information that changes or is added between versions will be **highlighted**.

Please ensure you are using the most up to date version.

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Phase 2 of the Omicron plan

What is the overall Omicron plan and how does that fit in with the Red settings?

A three phase plan was set out earlier this year and outlines the overall strategy on how Omicron will be managed. As case numbers grow the next phase of the plan will set in including changes to testing and isolation. Currently we a move to Phase 2 will occur shortly. There are currently no further planned changes to the Red settings.

What are the main changes in phase 2 compared to phase 1?

- 1.** The period of self-isolation for people who test positive for Covid-19 reduces from 14 to 10 days. The period of self-isolation for close contacts reduces from 10 to 7 days. Additionally, those who live in the same household as a confirmed case will also immediately self-isolate for 10 days as well. A test on day 8 is required. This will mean the household can complete isolation at the same time as the case, if all tests are negative.
- 2.** The close contact exemption scheme begins.
- 3.** Digital and automation is used more to speed up interactions. For example, a case, at the start of self-isolation, will fill out an online form for themselves and their household contacts that will help the health service work out how much support they need. And then close contacts will receive a text notification and will need to isolate for 7 days and have a test on day 5. There will alternatives are in place for those who aren't digitally inclined.

Why have we moved to Phase 2?

The growing number of COVID-19 cases means that we need to shift our approach to ensure our communities, health system and social settings target support where it is most needed to give our health system and supply chains, a sustainable position of managing COVID-19.

The aim of Phase One was to 'stamp it out', and to contain and eliminate local outbreaks as quickly if possible. The comprehensive approach to case investigation and contact tracing is only sustainable with low case numbers. The effectiveness of comprehensive contact tracing reduces as case numbers reach a certain point, so we have now transitioned to Phase Two.

Phase Two has a focus on minimising and slowing further spread, utilising digital pathways as the preferred tool, to enable a more timely contact tracing process. Phase Two allows for improved targeting of resources to ensure that those who most need support are prioritised.

Testing

When do I need to get a test?

You should be assessed for COVID-19, even if you have had a vaccine if:

- you have COVID-19 symptoms
- you have been identified as a contact, or
- you have been at a location of interest at the relevant time

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See [Assessment and testing for COVID-19 | Ministry of Health NZ](#) for more information on when you need to get a test, including information on who you should contact and getting tested.

When and how do I need to get a test?

Healthline, your doctor, nurse or your local health provider will tell you what you need to do if you need to be tested. Some health care centres may ask you to wait in your car or a waiting area.

If you choose to visit a community testing station, remember to be kind to the staff. They're working as quickly and as carefully as they can.

You should wear a mask when you go for a test, scan in to the QR codes located on site and if possible, bring your National Health Index (NHI) number with you. This is likely to speed up the process. You can call 0800 855 066 to find your NHI number.

If you have been tested for COVID-19 and you have COVID-19 symptoms, have been identified as a contact, or have been at a location of interest at the relevant time you need to:

Please go straight home. You will be notified when the result is available, usually between 2–5 days. If you have not received your result after 5 days, please contact your doctor or the testing centre where your swab was taken.

If you are a contact of a current case, check Contact tracing for COVID-19 for the actions you must follow.

What if I have symptoms but can't get to a testing station?

If you find yourself unable to access a test you should call Healthline or your local health provider (e.g. your doctor or health provider) for advice – they may be able to help you get access to a test.

Depending on your circumstances, support may be available to you to help you isolate – see to <https://covid19.govt.nz/isolation-and-care/getting-extra-support-if-you-have-covid-19-or-are-self-isolating/> for more information.

What type of test will I get?

At Phase Two, a PCR test will continue to be the main form of test used to check whether you are positive for COVID-19. Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) will mainly be used for critical workers that are Close Contacts to determine if they are able to return to work. See further information about the Close Contact Exemption Scheme under Rapid Antigen Testing (below).

Rapid Antigen Testing

What is a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT)?

Rapid antigen tests are a test for COVID-19 that can provide a result quickly (usually around 20 minutes).

What is the difference between a supervised and an unsupervised test?

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A trained person will assist by supervising you while you do the test. Unsupervised tests involve people testing themselves using the test kit instructions.

Do you have to pay to get RATS test?

RATS are free under the public health response. RATS are being used for critical workers who are close contacts in Phase 2 and for some priority groups. If you come under one of these categories and are required to have a RAT you do not need to pay. Routine asymptomatic surveillance testing of workers using RATs is generally not part of the Omicron testing plan.

Can I go buy or get a RATs test?

RATs are a valuable tool in our toolbox in the Omicron outbreak but they need to be used to support those that need them the most - our priority populations and the critical workers that keep the country going and underpin our wellbeing. Under Phase 2 PCR tests will remain the main diagnostic test, so no you can't go and buy RATs.

RATs are being used more in Phase 2 of the public health response, but just for certain groups of people, as detailed below.

Who is eligible to get a rapid antigen test?

These are the groups who will be eligible to use RATs in Phase 2

1. Asymptomatic critical workers who are fully vaccinated, have been identified as a close contact and need a test to go to work can get RATs from a collection site listed on Healthpoint. This is called the Close Contact Exemption Scheme – more details below and at www.business.govt.nz
2. Asymptomatic unvaccinated people aged over 12 years and three months who are travelling domestically with a transport company that requires testing of unvaccinated individuals, and asymptomatic unvaccinated people attending a court of law can access a supervised RAT test from a participating community pharmacy listed on Healthpoint.
3. Newly arrived vaccinated New Zealanders and eligible travellers from Australia will be provided with a pack of RAT tests on arrival (from 27 February), for testing while in self isolation.
4. COVID response workers, including those who work in District Health Boards, GPs, Pharmacies, Aged Residential Care facilities, Police, Corrections and Managed Isolation Quarantine Facilities who have been identified as a close contact and need a test to go to work will be given RATs by their employer.
5. Priority populations, who are at heightened risk of adverse reactions, will be able to get a supervised RAT from their GP or community provider.

Businesses may also choose to use their own private supplies of RATs with their workforce for Health and Safety purposes, but this is separate to the public health response.

What is the Close Contact Exemption Scheme?

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The Scheme, which comes into effect in Phase 2 of the Omicron Response Plan, it will allow vaccinated people working for critical businesses to be exempted from health orders requiring them to isolate due to being close contacts, if they follow certain public health rules and meet criteria. The exemption is only for attendance at the workplace.

By being registered, critical businesses' workers will be able to access free RATs from Government supplies once we are in Phase 2. Eligible workers will be able to order RATs and pick them up from a collection point (which will be listed on Healthpoint) once we are in Phase 2.

Do I need to book an appointment or is walk-in allowed at providers who assist with RATs?

This will depend on how each testing provider/facility operates and what you need the results for (eg for domestic travel, or for essential workers who are close contacts). Some might require appointments while for some walk-in will be fine.

How is the test taken?

For those who will need assistance in testing - a sample will be taken from the front of the nose and added to a solution that will tell whether you possibly have COVID-19 or not. For those conducting unsupervised testing, please follow the instructions on the kit used.

How long does the test take?

Sample collection takes about one minute, and the test takes about 10-20 minutes to provide a result. You will have to wait around for your result to be available to you.

Is it as uncomfortable as PCR nasal swab test?

Although it is a nasal swab test, it does not go as far back in your nostril as the PCR test. It is taken from the front of your nose.

How accurate are RATs?

Rapid Antigen Tests are not as sensitive as PCR tests. They require more of the virus in order to trigger a positive result. This means that there is a greater chance of a false negative than a PCR test. For this reason, and particularly in light of the hyper-transmittable Omicron covid variant, it is recommended that, even with a negative result, people still wear masks, socially distance and scan in.

What happens to the test kit and sample after testing?

Once the test result is available, the test kits and sample are discarded. Neither the test nor the swab is retained or sent anywhere. Used kits are considered medical waste and so should be disposed of safely with normal rubbish.

What is done with results information?

All supervised results are entered into Ministry of Health confidential database and your own personal "My Covid Health Record" (available online at <https://mycovidrecord.health.nz/>)

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Those who do their own test will need to enter them into their My Covid Record.

Where can I get more information about Rapid Antigen Testing?

Ministry of Health [website](#) is the best place to source information from

Cases, Contact Tracing and Isolation

If I receive a positive result, what do I need to do?

You should go home and isolate straight away. Under Phase 2, Cases are required to isolate for 10 days.

Cases will be sent a COVID-19 Contact Tracing form to complete online. If they are unable to do this a health professional will call and carry out a case investigation interview.

What does this mean for household members of a Case?

If someone in your household has COVID-19, you are considered a Household Close contact. You are required to isolate for the same 10 days as the case and get a test when the person with COVID-19 gets to their Day 8.

This means that the whole household ends their isolation period at the same time, assuming there are no new or worsening symptoms, and all of the Household Close Contacts return negative tests.

- If another household member returns a positive result during that 10 days isolation, that household member becomes a 'case' and commences the necessary 10 days of isolation.
- The rest of the household, assuming there are no new or worsening symptoms and negative tests, would still be released at the same time as the case.
- This means that in Phase 2, the maximum amount of time that a Household Close Contact has to isolate for is 10 days.

What is a Close Contact? How will I know if I am a close contact?

You are a Close Contact if you have had contact with a person with COVID-19 when they were infectious.

- At Phase 2, you will know you are a Close Contacts if:
 - You receive a text notification **[2328]** and directed to a website with instructions on what they need to do.
 - You receive a Bluetooth notification
 - You were at the Location of Interest, as published on the Ministry of Health website
 - You receive a push notification

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- Someone you are close to (partner, someone you live with, close friends) tests positive, and they let you know you are a Close Contact
- You receive notification from your education provider or workplace

People without access to a mobile phone or a website will be contacted by their Care Coordination Hub, or a primary care, Māori, iwi or Pacific health provider.

You are considered a Close Contact if:

- You live with someone who has tested positive to COVID-19.
- You have been close (within 1.5 metres) to someone who is positive:
 - for more than 15 minutes and
 - they were not wearing a mask or not wearing it properly.
- You have had direct contact with someone who is positive. For example:
 - kissing
 - sharing a cigarette, vape or drink bottle
 - if the person coughed or sneezed directly on you.
- You spent time in an indoor space with someone who is positive for more than 1 hour and at least one of the following:
 - they were singing, shouting, smoking, vaping, exercising, or dancing
 - they were not wearing a mask or it was not on properly
 - it was poorly ventilated
 - it was smaller than 100m² (about 3 double garages).

What is the COVID-19 Contact Tracing form?

As case numbers grow, low-risk people who test positive for COVID-19 will be asked to complete an online form instead of doing an on phone or in person interview.

People who test positive will be sent a text message with an access code and link to the form. Any information shared is private and secure. People will be asked to share the same information as in an interview – symptoms, details of household close contacts, high risk locations and close contacts, and NZ COVID Tracer diary and Bluetooth data.

Completing the form online has benefits for people. It's quicker than an interview and only takes about 30 minutes to complete. Once people receive the message, they can start this anytime within 24 hours and can continue to add and share information with us for 3 days. If the form isn't started within 24 hours, someone will call to check in. There is also a dedicated email address (help@tracing.min.health.nz) and phone number (0800 117 788) if people need help.

Important that you build potential isolation time into your travel plans, as the growing number of COVID-19 cases will mean you are more likely to be exposed to COVID-19 while you're away.

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Isolation

How long do I have to self-isolate for? What does this mean for my household members?

At phase 2, the period of self-isolation for people who test positive for Covid-19 will reduce from 14 to 10 days.

The period of self-isolation for close contacts reduces from 10 to 7 days.

That applies across the board including at MIQ, so once our border reopening begins at the end of this month, those who come in will be self-isolating for 7 days.

People who live in the same household as a confirmed case will also immediately self-isolate for 10 days as well. A test on day 8 is required. This will mean the household can complete isolation at the same time as the case, if all tests are negative.

If another household member becomes positive during that time, that household member would commence 10 days of isolation as a case, however the rest of the household, assuming there are no new or worsening symptoms and negative tests, would still be released on the first case's day one.

This means that the maximum amount of time that a household close contact has to isolate for is 10 days (provided they do not become a case themselves).

If you have been a confirmed or probable COVID-19 case within the past month, you will not be required to isolate for a further period.

How do I self-isolate?

See UAC [How to self-isolate | Unite against COVID-19 \(covid19.govt.nz\)](https://www.covid19.govt.nz/how-to-self-isolate)

What happens if I am required to isolate when I have been travelling, and am somewhere other than my home?

Under the COVID-19 Protection Framework you may travel within New Zealand. Ahead of your travel, you should make a contingency plan of what you will do if you test positive for COVID-19 or become close contact while you are away. If you do become a case, you might not be able to return home for a minimum of 10 days. It's important that you build potential isolation time into your travel plans, as the growing number of COVID-19 cases will mean you are more likely to be exposed to COVID-19 while you're away.

How should I prepare for self-isolation?

Being ready for getting COVID-19 is about making sure you and your household have a plan and know what to do. You will need to be ready to look after yourself at home. It will mean your whānau and community can help each other if needed.

See [Be prepared for COVID-19 | Unite against COVID-19 \(covid19.govt.nz\)](https://www.covid19.govt.nz/be-prepared-for-covid-19) for how you can get prepared to self-isolate, and key things to consider when you make a plan. Your plan should allow for the fact that you could be required to isolate for up to 10 days as a

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household or close contact, or longer if you are a close contact who then tests positive case for COVID-19.

Is there a legal requirement to isolate?

Yes, a Section 70, is in place that includes isolation and testing requirements for cases and close contacts under Phase 2.

What support is available to me to help when in self-isolation?

Welfare support such as help with accessing food, may be available to you if you are required to self-isolate.

If I am in paid employment and have to self-isolate or am sick with COVID-19, is there any financial support available?

If you need to self-isolate and can't work from home, your employer may be able to get a payment to help pay you. Self-employed people can also apply.

There's more information about the Leave Support Scheme and Short-term Absence Payment on the Work and Income website. Talk to your employer about this.

An overview of leave entitlements and guidance for employers and employees can be found here: [Leave and pay entitlements during COVID-19 » Employment New Zealand](#)

If you are sick or caring for a dependent who is sick, you can use your existing sick leave entitlements.

Business and employers can access:

- [Short-Term Absence Payment](#)
- [Leave Support Scheme](#)
- [Small business cash flow loan scheme](#)

If I am not in paid employment and have to isolate due to COVID-19, what support is available?

Most people can manage with help from friends and whānau. If you need extra support while you're self-isolating, there is help available.

You may already have someone to support you while you're self-isolating. If you don't, MSD can coordinate some support for you. This could be from a community organisation, a government agency, a marae-based service or support established by iwi.

This could include getting access to food and essential items, or getting support for personal care or daily tasks. It depends what you need.

You can ask for some help when you are talking to the contact tracers, or filling in the COVID-19 online form telling us about your situation.

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You can also call the COVID Welfare Support line, 0800 512 337 or go directly to the online COVID Welfare Support form.

Test to Return

Test to Return will enable critical workers to 'return to work' when they would otherwise have to be isolating as a close contact, provided they are asymptomatic, vaccinated, and return a negative Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) regularly. Critical workers will be required to follow other public health rules to help keep everybody safe.

Businesses and organisations will self-assess if they meet the criteria for being critical services. If a business meets the definition for critical service, and considers that it has workers that are critical to its operation, it can register a self-declaration that they are a critical service with critical workers on the **Critical Services Register**.

By being registered, critical businesses' workers will be able to access RATs from Government supplies when they are close contacts for the purpose of the scheme, noting Health and Safety Act requirements still remain. Businesses may also choose to use their own private supplies of RATs.

What is a Bubble of One?

'Bubble of One' enables all workers that are able to work in isolation from others to return to work when they are close contacts, provided they are asymptomatic and vaccinated. They do not need to return a negative RAT before doing so, and are not required to be registered on the Critical Services register.

Workers following a Bubble of One approach must follow certain public health requirements. Their normal Health and Safety Act requirements still remain.

What type of mask should I wear?

Everyone must wear a face mask that is attached to the face by loops around the ears or head. This means people can no longer use scarves, bandannas or t-shirts as face coverings.

Workers who are mandated to be vaccinated need to wear a medical grade mask when working in public facing roles. This includes food and drink businesses, close-proximity businesses, gyms, events and gatherings, and teachers of students in Years 4 to 13. You can take your face mask off to eat or drink.

For more information on masks, see [Wear a face mask | Unite against COVID-19 \(covid19.govt.nz\)](https://www.covid19.govt.nz/wear-a-face-mask)

Will N95 masks be considered for the general population, as they have been in other countries?

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In New Zealand P2/N95 particulate respirators are used for working in specific high-risk areas such as at the border or for undertaking specific procedures that increase the risk of infection. To give effective protection, people working in areas needing P2/N95 masks should be “fit tested” to ensure they are selecting a particulate respirator that fits them. Users should also perform a “user seal check” each time they put a P2/N95 mask on.

For essential workers a certified well-fitting medical mask offers an increased level of protection.

The Ministry of Health holds a good supply of N95/P2 particulate respirators (masks) for the COVID-19 response. N95/P2 masks are in high demand globally and we want to ensure that we use these appropriately, commensurate with our context in New Zealand. Decisions about mask requirements are made first and foremost with an infection prevention and control lens.

Will there be any changes to COVID-19 Protection Framework rules?

The whole country is currently in the Red traffic light setting.

The COVID-19 Protection Framework will continually be kept under review to ensure they remain fit for purpose. Changes have already been made to the COVID-19 Protection Framework in light of Omicron; masking requirements have been strengthened.

At Phase 2, should I travel regionally?

At Phase 2 you can travel if you would like to. Before you travel, you should make a plan for what you will do as a close contact, or potentially should you test positive for COVID-19, while at your destination. This includes taking enough medication and clothes with you for an extended stay. You will also need to think about where you would stay if you had to self-isolate and how you would pay for it.

At Phase 2, should I work from home?

Having workers work from home is one way that businesses and services can manage the risk of work-related COVID-19 transmission. At Phase 2, you should work from home if you and your employer agree that this is suitable, for example to meet statutory Health and Safety at Work Act obligations.

At Phase 2, is it safe to go to school?

At Phase 2 schools are open. Public health measures will be in place to minimise transmission risk and to protect students and staff.

Is paid time off available to get boosters?

Yes. Employees are entitled to reasonable paid time away from work during their normal working hours to receive a dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, including a vaccine booster, as long as providing the time off does not unreasonably disrupt:

- their employer’s business; or
- the employee’s performance of their employment duties.

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More information is available at [Vaccines and the workplace » Employment New Zealand](#)

What assistance is available for those with higher needs, such as clinical or welfare needs?

For people identified most at risk during an outbreak due to high clinical needs the local Care Coordination Hubs will triage and assist those that may be most at risk of exacerbating existing health conditions.

I'm concerned about someone that is self-isolating. How can I help them?

If you are concerned about someone that is self-isolating, get in touch with them in a way that does not breach their isolation, e.g. via phone call, online message, or letter, to understand what they need. You may be able to then assist them directly, for example by dropping a food parcel at their letter box, or indirectly by connecting them with Care in the Community support, or a local NGO or health provider.

Why should I get a test?

Getting tested, and isolating if positive or as a close contact, reduces the chances that you will infect others and helps to slow the spread. Getting tested helps to keep everybody safe. If you're sick, returning a positive test will also help you to access appropriate health and welfare support.

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Key contacts for official advice

Immigration

Visit www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/covid-19 or call the Immigration Contact Centre (6am – 10pm, Monday – Friday (NZST) from landlines only on 0508 558 855, or Auckland 09 914 4100, Wellington 04 910 9915, or from overseas +64 9 914 4100

Kiwis returning from overseas

Managed Isolation and Quarantine www.miq.govt.nz or call on on +64 4 888 1670 if you're overseas (rates will apply) or 0800 476 647 if you're in New Zealand (calls are free). Hours are 0800 to 2200 hours (NZST), seven days a week.

All New Zealanders overseas are encouraged to see the advice and register on www.safetravel.govt.nz

Healthline 0800 358 5453 or +64 9 358 5453

Translations

For resources in other languages, visit <https://covid19.govt.nz/updates-and-resources/translations/>

Accessible information

Information and advice in other formats for people with particular accessibility needs <https://covid19.govt.nz/updates-and-resources/accessible-information/>

Pacific communities

For information to support Pacific communities, visit <https://www.facebook.com/MinistryforPacificPeoples/>

Transport

For information on transport go to www.transport.govt.nz/about/covid-19 or email essentialtravel@transport.govt.nz

Unite Against Covid 19

Website www.covid19.govt.nz
Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/UniteAgainstCOVID19/>
LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/company/uniteagainstcovid19/>
Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/uniteagainstcovid19/>
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