



MPI generic guidance on COVID-19 safety requirements for primary industry businesses at Alert Levels 4 and 3

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Purpose

These guidelines provide primary industry businesses with the minimum requirements that should be put in place to minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19 when New Zealand is at COVID-19 Alert Level 4 and Level 3.

The MPI guidelines take into account relevant aspects of MoH 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.

A checklist is provided as an Appendix to assist businesses and verifiers in developing and monitoring implementation of the guidelines.

Scope of the guidelines

These generic guidelines reflect the responsibility of MPI in guiding and verifying safe practices by all primary industry 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 MoT and MBIE. Guidance for these areas can be found here.

<https://www.transport.govt.nz/assets/Import/Uploads/About/Travel-Advice-for-Small-Passenger-Services-Taxi-and-Ride-Sharing-Schemes.pdf>

<https://covid19.govt.nz/individuals-and-households/travelling-and-moving-around/taxi-and-ride-sharing-services/>

Primary industry context

All eligible businesses should have registered a COVID-19 safety plan with MPI that is tailored to the business and the risk management Alert Level that is in place.

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 this 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.

New scientific information on risks of transmission and best operating practice in business environments is continually coming to hand. 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 generated when an infected person (not necessarily with symptoms) coughs, sneezes or talks. Transmission is directly face-to-face or indirectly via contaminated contact surfaces.

MPI guidance incorporates a flexible approach in setting the minimum safety requirements for primary industry businesses operating at Alert Level 4 or 3. Flexibility is offered to industry on the basis of equivalence i.e. the safety outcome when alternative choices are made for some measures remains the same.

The requirements for minimising the transmission of COVID-19 are drawn from the following components:

- Staying away from the work site if unwell
- Checking all workers (staff and contractors) and visitors onto the work site, and forming workplace teams (“bubbles”)
- Physical distancing of staff and visitors/customers
- General hygiene e.g. coughing etiquette, handwashing, cleaning

- Sanitising of common contact surfaces
- Personal protection e.g. clothing, masks, gloves.

All businesses should strive for a minimum physical distancing of 2 metres or more between staff at Alert Level 4 and 1 metre or more at Alert Level 3. However, MPI recognises that this is not reasonably achievable for all staff in all workplace situations and flexibility is offered where this is the case (see below).

General safety requirements at Alert Level 4 and Alert Level 3

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

The safety plan should be well 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 probable or confirmed case should self-isolate and not come to work for 14 days
- Worker COVID-19 health should be assessed by supervisory staff before work starts each day
- 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 work place.

Physical distancing

- Physical distancing of staff and any visitors/customers to the business should be:
 - 2 metres or more where reasonably achievable
 - between 1 and 2 metres where unavoidable because of layout
 - less than 1 metre in extraordinary situations that are few in number; in which case special requirements apply (see below)
- Physical distancing should be measured face-to-face across a table and face-to-face when heads are turned to the side
- Maintenance of physical distancing should include:
 - staggered breaks and shift changeover times for different teams
 - creation of “walkways” for staff when moving through and around their work area
 - people not facing each other when passing in narrow passageways; instead passing “side-by-side” or “back-to-back”
 - separate entry and exit zones.

Workplace “bubbles”

- Work team bubbles should be formed wherever practical so as to minimise the possibility of transmission between different groups and support business continuity
- The size of a bubble will need to be determined on a case-by-case basis taking into account workplace functionality and business continuity expectations
- In small businesses, a workplace bubble may be the same as a “family” bubble outside the workplace as long as 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 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
- Use of PPE (clothing, masks, visors, gloves) is optional and should be evaluated by the business on a case-by-case basis. If masks are deployed, staff should be instructed in their correct use (<https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/hp7353-ppe-donning-and-doffing-guidance-28mar20.pdf>). Glasses are not considered to be PPE.
- Gloves are recommended if there are a number of common “high-touch” contact surfaces used by staff working in adjacent areas
- Work areas should be cleaned periodically using disinfectants approved for use (especially the case in food premises); work areas include common rooms and break rooms, communal condiment containers e.g. salt shakers, tea dispensers
- Common “high-touch” contact surfaces should be cleaned and sanitised more frequently
- Signage on safety hygiene should be prominently displayed in work areas and amenities.

Other requirements

- All non-essential external visits to the business should be minimised. Any customers should use “no-contact” facilities to the extent practical
- The safety plan should be available for external verification if required
- Food hygiene controls in food businesses must be maintained as per normal practice.

Additional safety requirements when the physical distance between staff is less than 1 metre

In extraordinary circumstances where operations cannot proceed without physical distancing of staff at less than a metre, additional controls should be put in place to reduce any likelihood of viral transmission. Businesses should minimise the number of people in this situation.

Food businesses

In food businesses, use of screens is advocated and the minimum requirements are as follows:

- Workers should be separated by a physical intact screen so that the face-to-face distance between workers, around the screen, is a minimum of 1 metre
- The screen should be:
 - fixed in place
 - large enough that the minimum face-to-face distance between workers above, below or around the screen is 1 metre, taking into account whether the worker is static within a workstation or moves within a range
 - made of materials approved for use in the workplace
 - durable and able to be regularly cleaned (generally at the end of each shift).
- In facilities with circulating air flow or additional fans, the screen should not lead to increased air funnelling between work stations
- While PPE is optional, it is recommended that masks or visors are routinely worn as a precautionary measure.

The process for implementing the above requirements in food businesses is as follows:

- Notification to the NZFS Director Verification Services by the business
- Implementation of the above requirements by the business
- Verification of acceptable implementation of requirements will take place on a case-by-case basis
- Where the food business or the verifier has technical questions over the minimum requirements, they should contact the NZFS Director Food Science and Risk Assessment for clarification.

Measures other than screens may also be acceptable in food businesses. To date, equivalent options that do not include screening have not been proposed to MPI. However, future guidance may be provided that enables an equivalent level of health protection where screens cannot be installed e.g. a level of PPE that includes sealed visors and mandatory use of masks.

Other primary industry businesses

In primary industries other than food businesses, screens may be used as above or there may be other measures that provide an equivalent level of safety. These will be judged as acceptable on a case-by-case basis by the verification agency that is responsible.

APPENDIX: MPI COVID Alert Level Safety Guidelines Checklist

New Zealand COVID-19 MPI Safety Guidelines Checklist

Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua



These guidelines provide primary industry businesses with the minimum requirements that should be put in place to minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19 when New Zealand is at different COVID-19 Alert Levels.

The MPI guidelines take into account relevant aspects of MoH and MBIE guidelines for COVID-19. Business operators should refer to these as well as the general *MPI guidance on COVID-19 safety requirements for primary industry* when tailoring a protocol for their specific business.

	Level 4 Eliminate Likely that disease is not contained	Level 3 Restrict Heightened risk that disease is not contained	Level 2 Reduce Disease is contained but risks of community transmission growing	Level 1 Prepare Disease is contained	S.O.E. lifted
Post peak outcome	Disease contained	Possibility of return to L4	Occasional localised, controllable clusters	Rare localised, controllable cases	As determined by Govt.
Minimum requirements for each Alert Level					
General safety requirements	√	√	√	√	
Workers have physical distancing of 2 metres or more	√	√			
Workers have physical distancing of 1 to 2 metres where unavoidable due to layout	√	√	√		
Physical distancing of less than 1 metre allowed in extraordinary operational circumstances	√	√	√		
Businesses have a registered COVID-19 safety plan	√	√			

A. General safety requirements

People

- Staff should stay home for 14 days if unwell, have had close contact with a case or suspect case, or are under quarantine
- Staff should maintain physical distances as specified for the Alert Level (see above)
- Workplace bubbles can be formed to better maintain business functionality in the case of a team member found to be infected or a team member who has had close contact with an infected person (<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-information-specific-audiences/covid-19-advice-workplaces>); if formed, bubbles should prevent mixing e.g. working in clearly separate areas of the premises, staggered breaks
- In small businesses, a workplace bubble may be the same as a "family" bubble outside the workplace as long as the same bubble measures are applied.

Hygiene

- Facilities should be provided for handwashing, along with instructions for use
- Staff should be instructed on coughing and sneezing etiquette, e.g. use elbows or tissues, and to not touch face
- Use of personal protective equipment (clothing, face masks, visors, gloves) is optional. Glasses are not considered to be PPE.
- Gloves are recommended if common contact surfaces are used by adjacent workers
- The safety plan should include frequent cleaning and sanitation of common contact surfaces, as well as general cleaning
- The business operator should monitor compliance of workers with safety requirements
- The safety plan should be available for external verification if required
- Safety signage should be in place to reinforce messaging
- Food hygiene practices are to be maintained as per normal practice.

B. Additional safety requirements in extraordinary situations where the physical distance between staff is less than 1 metre

- Workers should be separated by a physical screen of correct specification
- PPE (clothing and gloves) should be worn as appropriate to the situation
- Face masks or visors should be routinely worn
- Case-by-case judgement of equivalent measures is available upon request from industry to NZ Food Safety