



SUBJECT Operational update COVID-19

DATE 21 March 2020

TO All personnel

FROM Kerry Gregory – National Commander

STATUS Operational instruction

Action Please ensure all personnel read and follow these instructions.

Situation Following yesterday’s operational update, this afternoon the Prime Minister announced a new four-level alert for COVID-19, along with new advice and restrictions to help limit its spread within New Zealand. We are currently at alert level 2. This gives us a clear framework to apply across our planning. We are aligning our planning for how we will respond as an organisation if New Zealand continues to progress through the levels.

My message to you remains the same: This is a time for us as an emergency services organisation to remain calm and apply the same risk management thinking we use every day at the calls we attend. FENZ personnel are of critical importance to NZ in these times and although the measures we are deploying will cause inconvenience we must take all precautions to prevent the exposure to and spread of the virus amongst ourselves so we can continue to serve our communities as the risk escalates.

We now need to be very focused on limiting contact with each other to help minimise exposure and spread. It is important to limit our personal exposures outside of the station environment so we can continue to maintain our service to New Zealand should the outbreak escalate as we have seen overseas.

The Service Delivery Leadership team has established a national team led by Nick Pyatt. This team is working with working groups in each region and the organisational COVID-19 team led by Rachael Thorp. They are planning Service Delivery’s approach across the country. This team are planning for escalation and what steps we will put into effect at what stage.

Further to the Operational Instruction given yesterday, in line with the government’s advice:

Operational activities

- Activities involving face to face community interaction for operational career crews will cease except for emergency response. This includes the use of off-station gyms. Any exceptions will be on approval from Area management.
 - Where practicable, when attending emergency response callouts ascertain if there is any known COVID-19 status, or if anyone in self-isolation. This is also being requested by our communications centres and communicated when responding crews.
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- Physical Competency Assessments are postponed.
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Personnel over 70 years old

In line with the announcement today to limit their exposure as a high-risk group, operational career and volunteer personnel over the age of 70 will not respond to incidents until further notice.

- As such career personnel in this age group who are rostered on duty will be taken off duty on special leave effective immediately.
 - All operational personnel in this age group shall make contact with Area/District Management so they can monitor their wellbeing.
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Higher risk staff

- People with underlying medical conditions respiratory conditions, such as COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease), heart conditions, high blood pressure, kidney problems and diabetes or who are pregnant, will need to take more precautions to protect themselves against all infections including COVID-19 and should work from home, if possible. For operational personnel who have an underlying medical condition please bring this to the attention of your Area Manager or Principal Rural Fire Officer.
 - There will be issues that arise as more people work from home and we will have to adapt to those as we progress.
 - If you have a high-risk member of your household (for example your partner or child), please work from home, please advise your Manager and discuss arrangements with them.
 - If you are self-isolating please ensure your Manager is aware.
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Visitors on station and to Area/District/Region offices

We need to ensure our stations and headquarters remain fully operational and limit the exposure between our people where we can. This means taking care not to cross-contaminate each other.

- Unless you are rostered on, carrying out essential work to maintain our capability, or responding to an incident please avoid visiting other stations.
 - Please ask family and friends not to visit stations or Area/District and Region HQs.
 - Cover moves will continue. Covering crews are to be released prior to home crew, or another crew returning.
 - Access to Stations/Area/District and Region offices will be limited to essential personnel (as per agreed working arrangements described in this notice) and only visited for essential work to maintain our capability.
 - Contractors visiting our sites who are critical to maintaining the operational readiness and efficiency of our stations are to be asked the following questions where interactions will occur with our people:
 - Have you had a sore throat?
 - Have you had a cough?
 - Have you had shortness of breath?
 - Have you had a fever?
 - Have you recently returned from overseas?
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If the answer to any of these questions is yes, total separation needs to be put in place, or the work delayed for a different provider if the maintenance is not urgent.

If the answers to all questions are no, maintain physical distance and clean surfaces once work is completed.

While on station

It is vital that we keep our stations and areas of work clean and hygienic and minimise exposure. We need to do what we can to minimise spread to other watches, other members of your Brigade, and to anyone else who may be on station e.g. cover crews.

- Where possible you need to maintain a distance of 1m from each other and keep surfaces clean.
 - For career personnel, you will need to limit exposure with other watches and other brigades.
 - For volunteers, you need also minimise the contact you have with each other.
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Training - Scheduled

As a result of today's announcements the training leadership team have advised all scheduled training is cancelled from now until 30 April. Scheduled training is any course with a course number assigned by Training Business Services. There are two exceptions:

- Courses that are already underway and participants are on site are permitted to continue as this does not require additional travel, however, attendees who wish to return home will be permitted to do so. Measures are being initiated to ensure exposures are limited.
- The current Career Recruit course will continue until it finishes. Arrangements have been to ensure that our Career Recruits are well protected at their hotel accommodation where they now have exclusive accommodation and dining areas.

Training Business Services will be managing all changes to travel and other course logistics. Any enquiries to 0800 874 746.

Training – Skills Maintenance

Stations shall continue maintenance of critical skills on their own station. As per the National Notice 20/2020. Area Managers and PRFOs will work with individual Volunteer brigades to discuss how to best maintain critical training skills while limiting exposure across the Brigade.

All inter station training will cease until further notice.

Changes to working arrangements at Area/ District and Region Offices

- **If you are able to work from home, that is our strong preference, however this needs to be managed well so please discuss how this will work for you with your Manager:** The focus will be on maintaining critical services and capability at those points. As Regions activate their plans at Area/District, Region and National Branch offices for people to work from home your managers will be in touch to discuss these arrangements as they progress.
 - Key essential services, including personnel required for NCC, RCC and LCC must be maintained. Please follow advice to limit exposure, maintain physical distance, and follow hygiene advice.
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- **If you are in the office ensure physical distancing is maintained:** Ministry of Health guidelines are available here [advice on workplace physical distancing](#)
 - **Do not come to work if you are unwell.**
 - **Do not meet face to face with suppliers or other people if they are unwell.**
 - **Business continuity plans are being activated on a national and regional basis.** These BCPs outline our critical functions and there are clear plans in place to ensure these continue to operate, including how these can operate from home as required.

**More
information
and questions**

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- If you have been in close proximity to known cases of the COVID-19 virus, you should immediately self-isolate and immediately notify the Area or District Office or Brigade management to do that on your behalf.
 - Keep checking the [COVID-19 Portal page](#) for the latest updates. It is publicly available, and you don't need to be logged in.
 - If you have questions that need addressing or decisions that need to be made send them to Covid@fireandemergency.nz.
 - If you are feeling stressed or anxious and want to talk to someone please talk to your manager or use the [support available](#) for all Fire and Emergency personnel and their immediate families. If you know others are in self-isolation please keep in contact so that they feel supported.
 - You can also check the wellbeing advice from the Mental Health Foundation - <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/get-help/covid-19/>

As the situation continues to change I'm committed to keeping you up to date and ask you to be alert for updates and to follow the directives from Fire and Emergency and the government. Keep up the good work.

End of Notice.
