



Presbyterian Church
of Aotearoa New Zealand

COVID-19 virus: update

This is an update following on previous communication by both the Council of Assembly and the Assembly Executive Secretary.

[\(View previous documents here\)](#)

Date of issue: 13 May 2020

COVID-19 virus

Below is information for Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand staff, ministers, chaplains, parishes, and presbyteries to provide guidance around the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. It provides ways we can help manage the life of our Church and our communities during Level 2 of this pandemic.

We remind ourselves that we are called to be a people of prayer. The Council of Assembly continue to pray for all those who have been infected with the deadly coronavirus (COVID-19) and for the families who have lost loved ones. We also pray for healthcare personnel and other caregivers who are offering essential services and caring for those infected, even at the risk of their own health.

We encourage everyone to remain compliant with health and safety procedures, avoid unnecessary exposure and act responsibly to reduce the risk of spreading the virus.

Overarching safe practices at COVID-19 Level 2

The following safe practices apply to all activities under COVID-19 Level 2 and should be adhered to by all people:

- Any person who is sick or feeling unwell should remain at home and seek medical advice from their GP or Healthline (phone number 0800 3585453).
- Practice physical distancing of between 1 and 2 metres in all situations outside of your home.
- People at high risk of severe illness (older people and those with existing medical conditions) are encouraged to stay at home where possible and take additional precautions when leaving home.
- Practice safe personal hygiene with frequent handwashing with soap and water.
- Practice safe hygiene of all facilities by regular cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces.
- Ensure signage is in place in each facility to notify safe practices and room capacity.
- Ensure collection of adequate individual information is undertaken to support potential contact tracing.
- Ensure all physical meeting spaces are assessed for maximum capacity within physical distancing requirements and numbers advertised.

A word about responsibility

We have been facing the COVID-19 restrictions for the past 7 weeks and together we have made significant advances in reducing the anticipated rate of infection in our communities. We have done this together by ensuring that we have complied with the restrictions under COVID-19 Level 4 and Level 3.

We have heard the message from the Government that we will need to maintain vigilance into Level 2 in order to maintain the suppression of the COVID-19 coronavirus in our

communities. We can continue to do this together if we all take responsibility for ourselves and for one another. We have legislation that mandates all people responsible for conducting business to take every reasonable steps to ensure that people are safe at work and in their workplaces.

We stress that it is our expectation that we will all adhere to the Government released Level 2 measures to ensure we are kept safe.

As a Church we want to be hospitable to all people and we need to work together to see that the spaces we provide for worship, community gatherings, office workers, parish administrators, home groups and all places of ministry prioritise the safety and well-being of all.

We have shown that we can do this together. As we prepare to move to COVID-19 Level 2 we all need to remember the responsibility we hold towards one another for our actions, as we prioritise the care of our neighbour in the way that we conduct our ministry activities. May we each be given creativity, compassion and resilience so that our actions may be an action of love to our neighbour as God has given us love and grace.

Life at Alert Level 2

Life at Alert Level 2 means we can resume many of our everyday activities — but we have to do so safely observing the Level 2 restrictions for all these activities. Note that in the first two weeks of Level 2 that socialising, gatherings and recreation activities must be kept to no more than 10 people to enable contact tracing. This limit will be reviewed by the Government in two weeks.

- All businesses can open if they can do it safely. This will help to get people back to work.
- We can go in-store at local businesses.
- Tertiary education facilities, schools and early learning centres will be open.
- We can travel between regions (but must keep records of what travel services you use, who you have been in contact with, keep your distance from groups of people you don't know, minimise the number of places you stop on the way to your destination).
- We can safely connect and socialise with close friends and family.
- We can visit local restaurants, cafes and bars.
- We can return to our regular recreation activities.
- We can celebrate life's important moments with our loved ones such as weddings, funerals, birthdays and anniversaries – but with limited numbers.

*Currently all physical gathering for public services of worship in the Presbyterian Church are suspended.

For full details on life at alert Level 2 – please see

<https://covid19.govt.nz/alert-system/alert-level-2/#controls-at-alert-level-2>

The first step in considering the requirements and obligations for the local congregation is the development of a COVID-19 Safety Plan that meets government guidelines as well as meeting our health and safety obligations towards employees, users, and visitors. This needs to cover all areas of the life of the local church – not just physically gathering for worship – so must include your plan related to ministry with children, youth, pastoral care, home groups etc. This should be completed by your Health and Safety Officer and lodged with your presbytery (who have asked specifically that they receive a copy) and acknowledged by them **before** you operate under Level 2.

To assist – we highlight a number of key areas and provide guidelines.

Pastoral Care

Safe Practices in addition to Overarching Principles for Level 2:

We want to continue to extend Pastoral Care to our community especially at a time when many people have been isolated from others due to living alone or in small ‘bubbles’. We must ensure that the pastoral care that we offer can be done appropriately and with the health and well-being of both caregiver and person as first priority. In caring for the vulnerable and offering safe pastoral care we are doing our best in difficult circumstances to extend the compassionate love of God through our care.

Our safe practices should consider:

- Each person must be responsible for considering their own health and the health of those in their home before agreeing to make a pastoral visit to another home.
- People must be contacted prior to visiting at home to establish expectations regarding physical distancing and assess their vulnerability to health issues.
- If the person you visit is not alone when you visit, if they have other visitors, you will need to gather contact tracing details from each person that you come into contact with.
- If there is any risk then take a cautious approach and consider phone contact being sufficient.

Home Groups/Study Groups

Safe Practices in addition to Overarching Principles for Level 2:

- Each home group leader should discuss the appropriateness of hosting a group in their home under COVID-19 Level 2 with the Church Health and Safety Officer.
- The requirements for catering, physical distancing, contact tracing, personal and venue hygiene must be adhered to as a Home Group is an extension of the authorised ministries of the parish and not a private event.
- Consider withholding the gathering of Home Groups/Study Groups until Level 1.

Gathered In Person Worship

Safe Practices in addition to Overarching Principles for Level 2:

Enabling worship to take place safely in our church buildings is a way of ‘loving our neighbours as ourselves’ – caring for everyone, especially vulnerable people.

We should consider continuing worship through online services (or other means) at Level 2. When the suspension is lifted, if you plan to meet physically – and noting the maximum number that can gather as per Government directives:

- Each gathering space, church, hall, morning tea area, must be assessed for seating capacity within the limitations of physical distancing requirements under Level 2 i.e. at least 1m distance between people when sitting or standing.
- Communicate with all about expectations of new practices.
- Communicate the week prior to the service about new practices that will be in place in line with the requirements of COVID-19 Level 2.
- A normal clean of all facilities to be completed before worship recommences as churches and halls have not been used for many weeks.
- All surfaces to be cleaned and disinfected regularly.
- All high touch surfaces to be cleaned and disinfected between services if multiple services are being provided on the same day, and also before any other group uses this space on a different day.

Considerations need to be made around safely practicing communion in a gathered worship service. We are currently suggesting that church councils consider deferring communion in a public gathering until the pandemic has passed. Should councils wish to proceed with communion, heightened caution should be exercised. Great care should be taken when preparing the elements for communion, with those preparing the elements washing their hands thoroughly and regularly. Regarding distribution, use of individual cups is advised, however this does not fully eliminate the possibility of cross-contamination as several hands may touch the cups in the process. Pre-cut bread pieces are advised, and the use of tongs by one person to individually distribute the bread is suggested. Passing the peace should be observed in accordance with physical distancing guidelines. Some retailers are selling individually packaged communion cups with wafers for use at communion services, however if this method is utilised care should be taken to follow proper hygiene practices when distributing these items to members.

Funerals, Weddings

Safe Practices in addition to Overarching Principles for Level 2:

- These gatherings are permissible at Level 2 and should follow the government guidelines in particular relating to physical distancing and maximum number able to be present.
- Consideration must be given and planned as to how this will be communicated and who polices this limitation.

Ministry with Children and Youth

Safe Practices in addition to Overarching Principles for Level 2:

- Contact all volunteers who support such things as Sunday School, Play Groups, Toy Libraries, Mainly Music, Youth Groups etc to assess their health and availability and determine if you can meet all measures required to operate at Level 2 and/or will you continue on-line platforms as you have been doing during Level 4 and Level 3?
- Assess spaces used for these ministries and determine the capacity of them to meet

Social distancing requirements under Level 2.

- Communicate with all volunteers about expectations of new practices.
- Communicate with people - if possible, the week prior to the session about new practices that will be in place in line with the requirements of COVID-19 Level 2.
- Ensure all activities planned – be they on site or off site - follow health and safety polices.
- Continue to adhere to all of the health and safety and ethical considerations from the Safety WOF training.
- If food is being served, serve individually and adhere to safety hygiene at all times.
- A normal clean of all facilities to be completed before the sessions recommence.
- All surfaces to be cleaned and disinfected regularly and undertaken at the end of each activity. All equipment used to be cleaned and disinfected after every session.
- Contact tracing information to be collected for every participant and volunteer in attendance and ensure this includes parent/guardian details.

Administration Centres / Parish Offices

Safe Practices in addition to Overarching Principles for Level 2:

We all have a responsibility to support one another's safety and well-being in the workplace and to report any risks to our or others' well-being. We must work together in a way that continues to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission by ensuring that health, hygiene and safety measures are in place. These guidelines need to be adapted to suit the physical context of your facilities.

- No person who is sick with COVID-19, or who has had close contact and is required to self-isolate, may go into the workplace in any circumstances.
- Any person who has flu like symptoms is to stay home and contact their GP or call Healthline on 0800 358 5453 to ascertain the need to undertake COVID-19 testing.
- Any person who is sick or feeling unwell with other illnesses should not come into the workplace. If they can work from home, they should,
- Line managers must contact all employees to consult with them about their availability to return to the office space.
- Each workspace, gathering space, morning tea area, must be assessed for suitability to comply with limitations under Level 2 – including for seating capacity within limitations of physical distancing requirements under Level 2 i.e. at least 1m distance between people when sitting or standing.
- All surfaces to be cleaned and disinfected regularly.
- Choose the ONE point of entry/exit for the office and place notices. This is to monitor flow of foot traffic and to manage contact tracing requirements.

General Cleaning and Multiple Users of Buildings

Safe Practices in addition to Overarching Principles for Level 2:

The proper use and care of our buildings is an act of stewardship of the gifts that we have received from God through the Church community. We are responsible as users of these buildings to provide a safe environment for everyone who enters.

- All buildings will need to be assessed for maximum capacity to maintain physical distancing during Level 2.
- All buildings, facilities will need to have a normal clean prior to being able to be used as these buildings will have been unused for many weeks.

- Building users must be contacted to discuss whether they intend to return to using the facility, and whether their activity is permitted under COVID- 19 Level 2.
- Building users include internal parish groups and all external groups.
- Good hygiene under Level 2 includes both cleaning with detergent and disinfecting with a suitable solution. The church remains responsible for managing the day-to-day use of the building and that the building is safe to use, including that it is clean and hygienic.

Other matters:

We remind you of the information contained on our website related to COVID-19

<https://www.presbyterian.org.nz/for-parishes/coronavirus-information>

PCANZ Assembly Office

Some or all staff may be working remotely, therefore emailing may be the best method of contact.

Travel

Council of Assembly has determined we will continue the international travel suspension for all at this time

Domestic travel will remain very severely limited for all national staff and our various committees. As a general rule the Moderator, staff – together with all national committees and workgroups - will be required to continue to operate using online platforms.

Council may update and or amend this communication in the light of advice and/or direction.

We repeat the words of the Psalmist:

‘Ko te Atua to tatou te piringa, te kaha, te awhina i nga wa katoa. Na reira, kaore tatou e matakū ... ’/ God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear...” Psalm 46: 1-2

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13 May 2020

Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. What about the Health and Safety at Work Act?** The Health and Safety at work Act continues to apply as normal. Having a COVID-19 Safety Plan that meets Government guidelines also meets our health and safety obligations towards ministers, employees, users, and visitors.
- 2. What responsibility do we have for external users of church buildings?** The church remains responsible for managing the day-to-day use of the building and that the building is safe to use, including that it is clean and hygienic. External users have responsibility for ensuring their activity meets the relevant Alert Level rules. As responsible members of the community we can ask external groups to tell us how they intend to meet the rules.
- 3. What about Ministry of Education approved playgroups and other ECE activities?** If a playgroup or other activity is an approved early learning service they can reopen in line with the Ministry of Education rules. It is the responsibility of the early learning service to comply with the rules.
- 4. Is a COVID-19 Safety Plan necessary?** Yes. A COVID-19 Safety Plan provides assurance that activities are safe and consistent with the relevant Alert Level rules. Displaying the Safety Plan where it can be seen by everyone allows users of a building or space to know what steps they need to take to remain safe.
- 5. What responsibility do we have for home groups and other activities away from the church?** If an activity is church sponsored, you have responsibility for ensuring they comply with the Alert Level 2 rules. You should also ensure that someone who is physically present at this activity is tasked with monitoring compliance.
- 6. Do I have to hold face-to-face services?** Once the current suspension is lifted...No. It is your decision what activities you have under Alert Level 2. Activities must be safe and compliant with Alert Level 2 rules and if you would prefer to delay gatherings you may do so.
- 7. Who can I contact if I have any questions?** For general COVID-19 questions the [Government website](#) is an excellent resource. For questions about how your church can comply with Alert Level rules, [Matthew Hague](#) our Compliance Director, can provide support.
- 8. Who is responsible for making sure people comply with the COVID-19 Safety Plan?** For activities in a church building, the Health and Safety Officer. For church activities away from church buildings, ie home groups, the person organising the activity is responsible. If the person responsible is not physically present at the activity, a person who is present should be specifically tasked with monitoring compliance. (This should be covered in the safety plan).
- 9. Are we allowed to collect and store information on the COVID-19 Contact Register?** Yes. Information should be stored securely and only used for the purposes of contact tracing, which normally will be simply providing it to the Ministry of Health for that purpose if required.
- 10. I have heard that the NZ Government does not have an official government contact tracing app but I have head of the contract tracing service at www.tracing.co.nz/get. Can I use this?** Yes but please read their privacy notice first. The service appears to be a great way of easily recording details. All that is required is your location details to be registered at the website. You are given a QR code which anyone with a phone can scan. The same QR code can be used for multiple activities if they are at the same location. If a person uses this service, they do not have to complete a physical register. Not everyone has access to technology so if used, it should be used in conjunction with a physical register.
For those in the Wellington region, the Wellington City Council is using a secure, easy-to-use contact tracing app, called Rippl, with [free three month licences for community organisations](#).
Contact your local city or district council to see if they are offering a free contact tracing app.

COVID-19 Safety Plan Template

The content of this template is for guidance only. All safety plans should reflect the current Alert Level rules in place and be appropriate for the location.

Safety plans should be communicated and displayed to all users of the location.

Rule	Safety Measure	Notes
Gatherings are permitted, but should be minimised where possible.	Consider whether teleconferencing or other remote access methods are appropriate.	Gatherings should have a specific end time to limit duration.
(*once current suspension lifted) Public Gatherings only allowed for up to 10 people.	A person is tasked to be responsible for monitoring numbers and intervening if necessary.	If possible, groups that have ongoing meetings should contain the same members to reduce overall interactions. Adhere to Alert Level time restrictions.
People who know each other should keep 1 metre apart. People who do not know each other should keep 2 metres apart.	Seats are placed at least 1 or 2 metres apart.	Individuals from the same "bubble" can sit together. If seating is fixed, consider blocking access to some seats.
	Clearly marked separate entry and exit points.	
	Floor markings indicating 1 or 2 metres distance where people are likely to congregate or queue.	
	Food and drinks are served in single servings, not shared plates.	Consider whether food and drinks are necessary.
Hygiene measures.	Cleaning schedule frequency is increased.	Facilities should be cleaned after use by a group.
	Surfaces are regularly disinfected.	
	Hand wash facilities and hand sanitiser is readily available.	
	Individuals who feel unwell stay home.	
People who have COVID-19 symptoms or need to be in isolation or quarantine are not allowed for any reason.		
Contact tracing.	Contact tracing register is used	Several sheets can be used to minimise groups of people waiting.
At-risk people.	People who are at-risk are encouraged to take additional precautions, or stay home.	
	Activities which have a heightened risk, for example choirs and singing, are subject to additional controls.	Controls may include increased physical distancing.

