# Risk assessment for COVID-19

This guidance will support your review of your risk management and health and safety plans and practices, in regard to COVID-19.

WorkSafe recommend you document your approach so it can be shared with others, including your school community. They have developed a [safety plan template](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz/dmsdocument/27986-covid-19-safety-plan-template-word-version/latest) for COVID-19 that may be helpful.

Please connect with your local Te Mahau/regional Ministry Office to talk through any staffing or other challenges that might arise, as part of this process.

### Review process

Your current health and safety plan is your starting point. You will already have a range of mitigations in place that align with the COVID-19 Protection Framework and public health guidance.

When identifying risks and understanding your legal duties, are there measures in place that, as far as reasonably practicable, provide for the health and safety of workers and do not put people at risk from the work that is being carried out at schools and kura?

This includes considering what work, if any, may still need to be undertaken by a vaccinated worker eg, to provide the greatest level of protection for those who are most vulnerable.

[People at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 | Unite against COVID-19](https://covid19.govt.nz/prepare-and-stay-safe/people-at-higher-risk-of-severe-illness-from-covid-19/#who-is-at-higher-risk-of-covid-19)

WorkSafe’s advice is that, in deciding what controls to implement, employers should first consider the controls that are least intrusive to employees before requiring vaccination and that few workplaces will be able to justify an employer vaccination requirement for health and safety or public health reasons. For those employers who can, this would likely only be for specific roles.

You should undertake an assessment in consultation with your workers, their representatives, and any other relevant parties such as parents and those in your wider school community. If a role is currently staffed, it is particularly important that any assessment should be undertaken in consultation with that staff member.

The public health justification for requiring vaccination is when the risk of contracting and transmitting COVID-19 at work is higher than it is in the community. When planning your controls also consider whether there is a greater risk of the worker being exposed to new variants at work than they are in the community.

Your focus must be on the role – the work being done – rather than the individuals who may perform this role.

You can rely on the public health advice of the Ministry of Health. We also encourage you to seek support from the New Zealand School Trustees Association, Te Rūnanga Nui or alternative employment advisor, or specialist health and safety advice, throughout the process of conducting or reviewing a risk assessment.

Risk profile of your school community

Each school has a unique community and context that will be taken into account when planning for and responding to COVID-19 cases in the community.

Any risk assessment will need to reflect your own school context including:

* Traffic light setting for your region
* Volume of cases in your region / community
* Vaccination status of your community
* For areas where there have been high numbers of cases, a proportion of your population will have natural immunity (through COVID-19 infection)
* Knowing which individuals may be at higher risk from COVID-19

You may determine there is a greater level of risk for some or many of your community. For example you are in an area with lower vaccination rates, you have a high proportion of staff over 60 years of age, or your community has a high proportion of the population who are at higher risk from COVID-19 such as having an underlying health condition.

If you are considering policies that go beyond the relevant health order requirements – for example, you may be thinking about requiring face masks indoors at Orange – you will need to explain why the additional mitigations are proportionate to the situation and level of risk.

It is essential to engage your staff and it is desirable to consult with your school community when your board is developing or reviewing health and safety policies.

[Community consultation – NZSTA](https://www.nzsta.org.nz/assets/Uploads/Governance-Support-Resources-Community-consultation.pdf)

Following consultation, if you do choose to implement additional measures above the framework requirements you will also need to specify the consequences for a student or employee not following those measures.

Asking that a child not attend school should not be a disciplinary option you use.

You’ll be aware that removing any student from school for disciplinary reasons is a process that requires the principal to stand-down or suspend that student.

[Education (Stand-Down, Suspension, Exclusion, and Expulsion) Rules 1999](https://www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/1999/0202/latest/LMS396259.html).

Determining community vaccination status:

* The Unite Against COVID-19 website has a map showing vaccination rates around New Zealand - [Map of COVID-19 vaccination rates in New Zealand](https://covid19.govt.nz/news-and-data/covid-19-vaccination-rates-around-new-zealand/), to help inform your planning. You can drill down to the equivalent of a suburb (Statistical Area 2) and by ages 5 – 11 and 12+.
* This data is also published in spreadsheet form by the Ministry of Health each week - [COVID-19: Vaccine data | Ministry of Health NZ](https://www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-data-and-statistics/covid-19-vaccine-data#download). Open the first spreadsheet “COVID-19 vaccination data through xx xxx 2022”. Go to the tabs ‘TLA’ and ‘SA2 All Ethnicities’ or ‘SA2 Māori and Pacific Peoples’.

## Those at higher risk

Omicron is a very infectious variant of COVID-19. Although milder than Delta, Omicron is not a mild illness, and we continue to see high daily case numbers and hospitalisations. Those who are vaccinated and boosted are less likely to get COVID-19 than someone who is not vaccinated, however both vaccinated and unvaccinated people can get COVID-19 and can pass it on.

Commonly, children have mild or no symptoms of COVID-19 with a short duration of illness. The incidence of severe or fatal disease in children is significantly lower than in adults.

As of 13 June, there has been 1,248,852 COVID-19 cases reported in New Zealand. Of those, 0.016% have been in ICU, and 1.03% have been hospitalised. Of the 1,286 reported deaths, 543 are due to COVID-19, with COVID-19 contributing to a further 300 deaths (248 deaths are yet to be classified).

The consequences of exposure to COVID-19 can therefore be extremely serious for a very small proportion of individuals exposed to COVID-19. You will know who those individuals are in your school and will already have a plan in place to support their attendance onsite as appropriate. Advice from their GP or other health professional can support that plan.

Go to the Unite Against COVID-19 website for the latest advice on [who is at higher risk of severe illness](https://covid19.govt.nz/prepare-and-stay-safe/people-at-higher-risk-of-severe-illness-from-covid-19/#who-is-at-higher-risk-of-covid-19) from Covid-19.

For those most at risk of severe illness, your risk assessment may determine that people who are in close contact with that person, as part of a wider suite of measures, will need to be vaccinated and wear a medical-grade mask.

In deciding what controls to implement, employers will need to consider what is reasonably practicable. Employers should first consider the controls that are least intrusive to employees before requiring vaccinations or other rights-limiting measures.

The public health justification for requiring vaccination is when the risk of contracting and transmitting COVID-19 at work is higher than it is in the community. This is the basis on which some Government vaccination mandates have been retained.

## Further information to support your review

* [COVID-19 controls at work - employer vaccination requirements and other measures | WorkSafe](https://www.worksafe.govt.nz/managing-health-and-safety/novel-coronavirus-covid/covid-19-controls-at-work/)
* [Addressing health and safety concerns | Employment New Zealand](https://www.employment.govt.nz/leave-and-holidays/other-types-of-leave/coronavirus-workplace/health-safety-concerns/)
* [Supporting ākonga at higher risk of illness from COVID in Orange | Te Mahau](https://temahau.govt.nz/covid-19/advice-schools-and-kura/supporting-akonga-higher-risk-illness-covid-orange)
* [Quick Guide - Risk assessment and controls | Te Mahau](https://temahau-live-storagestack-pv-assetstorages3bucket-4pgakoc5n3r5.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2022-04/Risk-Assessment-and-Planning-for-Omicron_1.docx?VersionId=7BCtWXlKrwzA4ExhVvHPRdJV2Ls3ydKb) (including a sample template)
* [Removal of Vaccine Mandates - Further Information and FAQs | Te Mahau](https://temahau.govt.nz/covid-19/advice-schools-and-kura/managing-staff/removal-vaccine-mandates-further-information-and-faqs)
* [NZSTA webinars – Reviewing Health and Safety in schools in COVID times](https://vimeo.com/696334411)
* [Health and safety requirements for school leaders | education.govt.nz](https://www.education.govt.nz/school/health-safety-and-wellbeing/health-and-safety-requirements/)

## Potential risks, issues and considerations

| Potential risk /issue | Considerations |
| --- | --- |
| Learners with higher levels of disadvantage | Consider prioritising their attendance in situations where you may need to split learning onsite and offsite |
| Learners at higher risk of severe illness especially if not fully vaccinated | Consider further health measures that might be introduced to support onsite attendance  Encourage whānau to seek medical advice regarding attendance onsite  Plan in advance for their learning from home if needed |
| Teaching and support staff at higher risk of severe illness | Encourage staff to get their booster vaccination as soon as they become eligible  Consider further health measures that might be introduced to support onsite attendance  Encourage staff member to seek medical advice regarding attendance onsite |
| Students with additional learning needs | Consider prioritising their attendance onsite in situations where you may need to split learning on and offsite  Do they have access to appropriate resources and supports at home? |
| Indoor environments in which it is challenging to maintain good ventilation | Consider adjusting the behavioural or property ventilation strategies and solutions being adopted in those spaces  Encourage regular refresh breaks, where all windows and doors are fully opened for a short time to air out the space  Consider changing the occupation and/or activity levels  Utilise the [pre-winter checklist](https://temahau-live-storagestack-pv-assetstorages3bucket-4pgakoc5n3r5.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2022-04/Pre%20winter%20checklist.pdf?VersionId=UuwZ6_4NcQeaUJe3xsKm2pJ3EC_irsDG) on the Te Mahau website |
| Vaccination rate in local community is less than 90% boosted | Continue to encourage vaccinations in your community  Consider working with your local DHB to become a vaccination site |
| Community very cautious about sending children to school when there is community transmission | Maintain communications and reassurances about the health measures you have in place to reduce risk  Prepare to support some form of learning from home, wherever possible  How can you keep connected with these children/students?  Encourage vaccination and reassure about having high levels of vaccination in your community, where appropriate  Will increased health measures at Orange encourage greater attendance onsite – eg, face coverings, groupings? |
| Very high proportion of staff and student absence (self-isolating / confirmed cases) | Implement your plan to support learning both onsite and offsite  Limit staff onsite to only those necessary to safely support children/students who are attending onsite  Prioritise attendance onsite for most vulnerable learners and those who don’t have an appropriate care option at home  Ensure there are sufficient staff / contractors to provide key functions (eg, cleaning, first-aid, emergency response) |

## Health measures - summary

The measures which already apply at each traffic light setting are highlighted and ticked (✓).

Tick (✓) the blank boxes if there are any further measures you might introduce, to reflect the risk facing your community at the time, and/or to reflect any increased vulnerability in your community.

This completed table could be inserted into your risk management plan or health and safety plan.

| Health measures | Red | Orange | Green | Notes / Actions needed |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Good hand hygiene and cough/sneeze etiquette | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |  |
| Monitor closely for symptoms and stay away if sick | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |  |
| Vaccination including boosters encouraged | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |  |
| Case management / contact tracing# | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |  |
| Good ventilation – using a range of measures (see guidance below) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |  |
| Face masks required when indoors (students and staff) for years 4 - 13 | ✓ |  |  |  |
| Face masks required on school transport and public transport for years 4 and above (age 8 and above) | ✓ |  |  |  |
| Face masks required on school transport and public transport for age 12 and above | ✓ | ✓ |  |  |
| Children with complex medical needs (particularly if not vaccinated) – seek medical advice to support onsite learning | ✓ |  |  |  |
| Physical distancing between classroom groups – 1 metre when indoors, wherever practicable | ✓ |  |  |  |
| Large groups of staff or students meeting should be held outdoors | ✓ | ✓ |  |  |
| Exercising, singing and using wind instruments strongly recommended to be held outdoors if possible, or in well-ventilated spaces if indoors. | ✓ |  |  |  |
| Students from other schools are permitted onsite for curriculum-related activities, but 1 metre physical distancing will apply where practicable | ✓ | ✓ |  |  |
| No non-essential visitors onsite | ✓ |  |  |  |
| No external students onsite for non-curriculum related inter-school activities | ✓ |  |  |  |
| Non-curriculum related events should be limited or not go ahead | ✓ |  |  |  |
| Exams can go ahead but physical distancing of 1.5 metres will apply | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |  |
| Essential services continue onsite (eg, Ministry of Education, learning support services, ERO, NZQA, Police, Fire, Mobile Dental units) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |  |
| Minimise attendance for non-essential services | ✓ |  |  |  |
| Teaching across different groups minimised as much as possible. | ✓ |  |  |  |
| Staff such as itinerant music teachers and relief teachers should not work across different schools, if possible | ✓ |  |  |  |
| Face coverings for staff in class for years 0 to 3 (consider using clear face coverings) |  |  |  |  |
| Change furniture layout to increase space between children/students |  |  |  |  |
| Have designated seating to minimise close contacts, should someone infectious with COVID-19 attend |  |  |  |  |
| If onsite delivery is not possible for all learners - roster attendance onsite (prioritising full-time attendance for those who need to attend) |  |  |  |  |
| If onsite delivery is not possible for all learners -prioritise attendance for most vulnerable learners including new entrants in primary settings |  |  |  |  |
| Issue devices / resources in readiness for possible move to Red | N/A |  |  |  |
| [Other measure] |  |  |  |  |
| [Other measure] |  |  |  |  |
| [Other measure] |  |  |  |  |
| [Other measure] |  |  |  |  |

# Contact tracing is not required. Many schools continue to notify their community if there have been active cases in particular class.

## Checklist – key functions

Do you have sufficient staffing to ensure key functions can continue to operate?

If ‘no’, you will need to take action, which at a very worst-case scenario may require the school closing onsite and moving to learning from home.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Critical functions | ✓ / 🗶 | Notes / Actions needed |
| Non-teaching staff to manage school operations onsite – eg, reception, payroll, facilities management, finances |  |  |
| First-aid staff |  |  |
| Emergency management capability onsite |  |  |
| Cleaning staff to meet minimum health and safety requirements |  |  |
| IT capability to support onsite / offsite learning |  |  |
| Qualified teachers to support the numbers of learners onsite |  |  |
| Support children with additional learning needs |  |  |
| Specialist facilities management staff eg - drinking water supply, specialist pool maintenance |  |  |
| Contact tracing# / communications when cases appear in your school |  |  |
| [add other critical functions identified in your school and business continuity plan] |  |  |
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## Further information

There are other tools and resources available to support your COVID-19 planning and response:

[Preparing for staffing absences](https://assets.education.govt.nz/public/Documents/School/SchoolsBulletin/2022-Bulletins/2022COVID/Feb-COVID-docs/1FEB22PandemicPreparedness.docx)

[COVID-19 Protection Framework Guidance for schools and kura](https://temahau.govt.nz/covid-19/advice-schools-and-kura/covid-19-protection-framework-schools-and-kura)

[Ventilation in schools](https://temahau.govt.nz/ventilation)

[Teaching and learning in 2022: Planning Checklist](https://assets.learningfromhome.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2022-01/Planning%20Checklist%20and%20Sector%20Guidance%20Jan%202022.pdf?eyJOfLHGfvxppForHvbwwxYwYbG7Wquo=)

[Case management guidance](https://temahau.govt.nz/covid-19/advice-schools-and-kura/schools-connected-confirmed-case)