

## **COVID-19 – Alert Level 2 Guidelines: Updated 6 September 2021**

The following statement has been issued from the Ministry of Health:

*Clinical reasoning and risk assessment remain the fundamental principles for considering care at Alert Level 2. Telehealth and virtual appointments are still the preferred option and please exercise extra caution when treating vulnerable groups*

*Clinicians will be able to see patients face to face if the following processes are in place:*

- *screening for COVID-19 symptoms prior to face-to-face appointment*
- *physical distancing measures*
- *infection prevention control measures including PPE where required, and*
- *transmission precaution measures including consideration of ventilation.*

*When considering travel within and between regions ensure all risks have been taken into account before undertaking to provide care to patients and traveling to receive training.*

*Group treatment (e.g., exercise classes) can occur so long as physical distancing is in place.*

[Click here](#)<sup>1</sup> for further information.

**While practices can reopen for routine face-to-face consultations/dispensing under Alert Level 2, protocols must be implemented by Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians to maximise patient safety, including ongoing risk assessment and appropriate infection prevention control procedures.**

### **Screening**

Screening or risk assessment of patients/customers and any support persons for risk of COVID-19 prior to entering your practices is **mandatory**. If there is any risk identified **do not** allow them into your practice or see them in the community until they have medical clearance.

Risk screening should be based on the COVID-19 case definition [click here](#)<sup>2</sup>

The Ministry of Health recommend the following screening questions:

- *Do they have new or worsening respiratory symptoms including one of the following: cough, sore throat, shortness of breath, coryza (runny nose) or temporary loss of smell, with or without fever?*
- *In the last two weeks, have they been in contact with others who have been unwell with respiratory symptoms or fever, or are suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19?*

You must continue to have a high level of vigilance to ensure hygiene protocols are maintained.

Employers are responsible for conducting risk assessments for staff moving back into work premises during Alert Level 2. This may include individual discussions with each staff member prior to returning to work.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-information-health-professionals/covid-19-advice-community-allied-health-scientific-and-technical-providers>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-information-health-professionals/case-definition-and-clinical-testing-guidelines-covid-19>

## **Physical distancing**

Physical distancing must occur, and you must ensure that the practice environment allows for this which includes controlled entry and exit. Under Alert Level 2, in a controlled environment, 1 metre physical distancing is required.

A controlled environment (as defined by Work Safe NZ) are those in which you can:

- Reasonably require hand sanitising/cleaning.
- Clean frequently including between occupancy by different groups.
- Manage distancing of people.
- Keep groups contained and not mixing groups.
- Inquire regarding the health of users and refuse access if necessary.
- Keep a record (name, phone and physical address) of people who are present to facilitate contact tracing if necessary.

## **Infection prevention control measures and personal protective equipment (PPE)**

You must continue to have a high level of vigilance to ensure hygiene protocols are maintained.

The best defence against COVID-19 are basic hygiene measures, which include

- cough or sneeze into your elbow or by covering your mouth and nose with tissues
- put used tissues in the bin or a bag immediately
- wash your hands with soap and water often (for at least 20 seconds)
- avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- clean surfaces regularly

During Alert Level 2 the risk of community transmission is low or minimal. Your risk assessment should consider this when you are determining the correct level of PPE.

In general, the Ministry of Health advice is that if a patient has been screened as indicated above, is not symptomatic, and you are not undertaking an aerosol generating procedure, and there is no exposure to bodily fluids, then Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians **are not** required to wear PPE. Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians or patients, may still choose to wear PPE if they wish.

However, if after risk assessment you identify there is a risk and it's not possible to maintain physical distancing then Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians **should** wear a mask. A risk includes customers/patients who are at a higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 or part of a vulnerable group. If, in any case there is uncertainty **you should** wear a mask.

[Click here](#)<sup>3</sup> for further information regarding PPE.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-information-specific-audiences/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-central-supply>

## **Contact Tracing**

Mandatory record keeping comes into effect from 11:59 pm on 7 September 2021.

Everyone aged 12 and over legally must keep a record of where they have been when visiting certain places so contact tracing can happen quickly. You must do this at all Alert Levels.

Please ensure any member of the public entering your place of business uses the NZ COVID Tracer app if they can. Otherwise, you must make sure you record their details to ensure effective contact tracing.

At all Alert Levels, businesses and workplaces legally must display an NZ COVID Tracer QR code for each location.

## **Working with vulnerable people**

The government guidance for Alert Level 2 states: *“People at high risk of severe illness such as older people and those with existing medical conditions are encouraged to stay at home where possible and take additional precautions when leaving home. They may choose to work.”*

Practitioners must carefully weigh up the risks and benefits of seeing patients who may have vulnerabilities to COVID-19 for face-to-face consultations/dispensing. You must discuss the risks and benefits with the customer/patient and/or carer. If it is decided a face-to-face consultation/dispensing is appropriate, screening and the use of a mask is **required** as stated above.

## **SOVS, University of Auckland practicum (placements and externship)**

As we move to Alert Level 2, some of you may also be involved in hosting a student for their practicum. In making sure you are fit to practice, you will also need to ensure that both you and the student follow all the protocols mentioned above and that you take all the necessary steps to protect the health and safety of the public.

**The Board would like to remind all Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians the importance of adhering to the Alert Level 2 protocols.**