



COVID-19 Government Property Workplace Guidelines – Moving to Alert Level One

The overriding consideration for managing workplaces is a focus on the health, safety and well-being of workers and people accessing the workplace.

This guidance is provided to assist agencies with workplace matters as they plan to move to Alert Level 1. It is based on current information about Alert Level 1 as at 8 June 2020.

Guidance on [health and safety](#) and [workforce](#) considerations for moving Alert Levels is available from the Government Health and Safety Lead and the State Services Commission.

The latest information on COVID-19 can be found on covid19.govt.nz

Key points for the workplace under Alert Level One

Moving to Alert Level 1 is a shift from response mode to recovery mode and getting workers, public and visitors back to the workplace.

- Alert Level 1 looks a lot like pre-COVID-19 business as usual, agencies may choose to keep additional measures in place where it is practicable to do so.
- Workplaces are open to staff, public and visitors.
- Plans for Alert Level 1 should ensure that staff are working from their usual place of work.
- Agencies must adhere to general Health and Safety at Work Act obligations. It will also be important to be aware of the public health advice for Alert Level 1. Continue to engage with staff and unions as part of planning for staff to return to the workplace.
- There are no requirements for physical distancing or to keep records to enable contact tracing.
- Arrangements agencies have had in place to support staff working from home at higher alert levels were directly linked to the requirements of the COVID-19 response phase. This is not the same as flexible working.
- Agencies should continue to engage with staff and unions. This includes involvement in planning for Alert Level 1, communicating how you will continue to keep people in the workplace safe and the development of any flexible working approach.
- Ensure that procedures, processes and systems in place during Alert Levels 2 to 4 are robust enough to be re-established in the event that current Alert Levels are raised.

General guidance for transitioning the workplace to Alert Level One

Consider what has been implemented during higher alert levels, how each work space is used and any changes that may be needed.

- Agencies may wish to continue to use physical barriers or screens, particularly when engaging with the public.
- Where workplaces have been unoccupied, undertake a deep cleaning before staff return to the workplace.
- Establishing a clear desk policy is recommended in both traditional and flexible environments to facilitate cleaning of surfaces. Regular communications should be used to reinforce why this is important.
- Whilst physical distancing* is not required. We encourage consideration where necessary; for example, public reception entries or where large groups where attendees are unknown to each other. Ensure clear communication is provided.
- Review existing workplace behaviours and protocols to adapt to the new environment. For example, adoption of virtual meeting tools may generate more noise in the open plan areas, which may require the use of headphones to reduce disruption. Confidentiality and privacy implications may also require consideration. Ensure clear communication is provided.
- Agencies should also consider any risks that have changed / increased due to COVID-19 (mental health, fatigue etc.).

** Agencies should conduct their own risk assessments and engage with unions and workers to determine appropriate measures across different work sites and operations. Always refer to covid19.govt.nz for more information and to worksafe.govt.nz for up to date COVID-19 workplace health and safety guidance.*

Consider any physical changes to the workplace that are required.

- Changes must be completed prior to staff returning to the workplace.
- Review checklist of all physical changes made under Alert Level 2 to determine what is required; this may include putting back furniture that was removed, remove/update signage etc. Include reference to these in communications.
- Consider deploying personalised equipment such as wireless keyboard and mouse to minimise sharing of hard to clean equipment and establishing this as business as usual.
- Continue to ensure workplaces are well equipped with appropriate hand hygiene facilities and cleaning materials for self-sanitisation of high-touch work surfaces, equipment and facilities.
- Equip the workplace with visible signs in common/shared spaces explaining processes and requirements for use, if required.

Ensure evacuation procedures are reviewed.

- Evacuation of premises in an emergency is a priority and should operate as business as usual.
- Review procedures that may have changed under higher alert levels to determine any further changes needed or to re-establish business as usual procedures.
- Ensure that adequate provision of floor wardens and first aiders are available to support increased numbers to the workplace.
- Provide clear communication to staff and update signage etc., where required.

Engage with contractors, suppliers and others that require regular access to your premises.

- Identify all contractors, suppliers and others who access your premises and advise them of updated procedures; ensuring those parties that accessed premises during higher alert levels are included so they are aware of any changes.
- Review and consider whether all persons that had access to the workplace during higher alert levels still require access, and ensure parties that no longer need to have access are aware that access will not be available to them.
- Review arrangements established during Alert Level 2 to 4 with contractors and suppliers, including leases and sub-leases, to determine whether these require clarification or amendment. These arrangements may have included additional supplies or equipment, e.g. cleaning and sanitising (products and services), PPE (where appropriate), waste disposal services, mail, couriers and deliveries.
- Engage directly with your facilities management service provider to ensure that any new or amended service levels (including, for example, cleaning services) are clarified, understood and documented.
- Consider what arrangements, procedures and processes are needed and ensure they are robust enough should they need to be re-established in the event that current Alert Levels are raised.

Procedure for managing unwell people in the workplace

These procedures remain the same throughout all alert levels.

If someone displays symptoms of COVID-19 or is generally unwell, agencies are encouraged to take the following steps:

- Escort the unwell person from the general office area to the room designated for the care of unwell people. Once the person is in the designated room:
 - Keep the unwell person a distance of at least 2 meters away from others
 - Open a window in the room if there is one
 - Wash and dry your hands after escorting the person to the designated room
 - Reassure the unwell person and advise them that you will notify the appropriate people within the office to support them
- Use common sense and avoid direct contact or touching people or as few surfaces and objects, as possible.
- Advise the unwell person's manager or organisation (if a visitor) that the person has become unwell.
- The unwell person should call Healthline for free on 0800 358 5453 (or their doctor) immediately and explain the situation and their symptoms.
- The person should be asked to exit the building, ensuring they contact as few surfaces and people as possible.
- Arrange transport home/to a medical facility (as appropriate) for the unwell person, and encourage the following:
 - Avoid the use of public transport
 - The preferred option is transport by a family/whanau member
 - If a taxi is required, ensure the person sits in the back seat

- Check in with the unwell person to make sure they made it to their destination safely.
- Regularly check on the unwell person.
- Ensure the room the unwell person has been isolated in, is cleaned and disinfected as appropriate before being used again.

If the individual is seriously unwell or their life is at risk, dial 111.

Review procedures for work conducted outside of government workplaces

- Review procedures established under higher alert levels for all work conducted off agency premises to determine any changes required to re-establish business as usual. Work may include community work, field work, working from other locations (vehicles, private businesses, boats etc.).
- As part of re-establishing business as usual, COVID-19 considerations may still need to be incorporated into on-site risk assessments, such as when workers conduct a risk assessment prior to entering a client's home address.
- Amend procedures and provide clear guidance to all workers on any changes. This may include things like requiring workers to phone ahead and check COVID-19 procedures before conducting site visits, where applicable.

Risk review and regular review and monitoring of new practices and procedures

- It is important to continually monitor and review any new practices and procedures, however the frequency of monitoring may be less.
- Ensure a process is established to review, agree and adapt to further changes that may be required when implementing new or temporary measures.
- Agencies should review risks associated with the return to pre-COVID-19 practices. For example, some workers may need to be refreshed on safety practices associated with re-starting certain operations or activities.

Activity that needs to be maintained throughout Alert Level One

Record keeping to support contact tracing

- Whilst there is no requirement to maintain records to enable contact tracing, agencies are encouraged to enable contact tracing for workers, public and visitors (e.g. by displaying QR codes) as long as they protect peoples' privacy and safety.
- Ensure that systems in place are robust enough to be re-established in the event that current Alert Levels are raised.

Review workplace cleaning frequency and scope

- Consider appropriate cleaning regime for premises as new business as usual; for example more frequent cleaning of:
 - common areas, such as kitchens, bathrooms and meeting rooms
 - high contact areas, such as door handles, tables, handrails and photocopier touchpads
- Ensuring that:

- cleaning contractors are regularly cleaning the common areas and high contact areas, and that they are cleaning surfaces with a suitable cleaner and/or disinfectant and following the manufacturer's instructions for use.
- rubbish bins (kitchen, café, bathroom etc.) are lined to make it easy to empty bins and reduce the cleaner's exposure to rubbish.

Make cleaning products readily available to workers

- Ensure there is sufficient soap and paper towels (unless hand dryers are installed) in bathrooms. Consider providing paper towels as well as hand dryers for those who would prefer not to use hand dryers.
- Install sanitisers at all entry points to the building and/or floors; lifts, lobbies and kitchen areas. Make alcohol based cleaning wipes or similar cleaning products available in multiple locations around the general office area.
- Ensure suitable cleaning products and disposable cloths are made available in multiple locations around the office (e.g. utility bays, near personal lockers or tambours).

Ensure good ventilation

- Agencies should request their landlords ensure air conditioning systems are well maintained. Air conditioning systems should not re-circulate air and should be vented to the outside as much as possible.
- Where a buildings air conditioning system has not been fully operational during Alert Levels 2 to 4, due diligence should be undertaken to ensure that air conditioning systems are functioning safely.
- If the workplace does not have an air conditioning system, open windows regularly to circulate fresh air.
- Other considerations
 - At nights and weekends, do not switch off ventilation, but keep systems running at low speed
 - Avoid opening windows in toilets to ensure the right direction of ventilation
 - Switch air handling units with recirculation to 100% outdoor air
 - Replace central outdoor air and extract air filters as usual, according to maintenance schedule
 - Perform regular filter replacement and maintenance works with common protective measures including respiratory protection

Preparation needed should Alert Levels be raised

Review procedures, processes and systems in place during Alert Levels 2 to 4 to ensure they are robust enough to be re-established should current Alert Levels be raised.

- Reflect on lessons learnt from this experience to consider what may be needed in the event of raised Alert Levels, or other emergency events in the future.
- Consider other arrangements, procedures and processes that might be needed and ensure they are robust enough to respond quickly.
- Processes should be established to review, agree and adapt to further changes that may be required when implementing new or temporary measures.
- Whilst considering changes needed to respond to COVID-19, also consider what changes may improve future BAU.

Duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (HSWA)

Under the HSWA, Persons Conducting a Business or Undertaking (PCBU) have a range of health and safety obligations in respect of their workers. In particular, a PCBU's primary duty is to ensure as far as reasonably practicable, the health and safety of its workers while at work for the PCBU, and any workers whose activities in carrying out work are influenced or directed by the PCBU while carrying out work. The term "worker" includes employees, contractors, subcontractors, apprentices and volunteers.

As such, Chief Executives, Directors and other "officers" under the HSWA of agencies as PCBU's need to consider and apply these guidelines in light of their primary duty of care towards their workers.

Links to other Resources and Guidance

[Workplace principles relating to COVID-19 alert levels from the Government Property Group](#)

[State Services Alert Level 1 COVID-19 workforce guidelines](#)

[Government Health and Safety Lead COVID-19 Guidance](#)

[Worksafe guidance on managing health and safety during COVID-19](#)

[Operating safely at Alert Level 2 from Worksafe – what you need to think about](#)

[Preparing for Alert Level 2, a guide for Public Sector agencies from Government Health and Safety Lead](#)

[Alert Level 2 workforce guidelines from State Services](#)

[COVID-19 Alert Level system](#)

[Digital.govt.nz provides advice and support for government organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic, or if needing support to maintain critical digital services, email \[gcd@dia.govt.nz\]\(mailto:gcd@dia.govt.nz\)](#)