

COVID-19 declared a pandemic

12 March

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has now classified COVID-19 as a pandemic. The WHO Director-General when announcing this decision noted *“describing the situation as a pandemic does not change WHO’s assessment of the threat posed by this virus. It doesn’t change what WHO is doing, and it doesn’t change what countries should do”*.

The Minister of Health clearly reinforced this message stating this doesn’t change anything for New Zealand. He noted our Director-General of Health has been saying since January that COVID-19 is pandemic-like in all but name, and we have been working on that basis.

Border restrictions, a requirement to self-isolate on arrival in New Zealand from China, Iran, Italy and the Republic of Korea and immediate and detailed contact tracing of any confirmed cases have all been put in place to minimise risk to those in New Zealand. It is important to note those four countries account for more than 90% of cases globally and China and the Republic of Korea have significantly declining numbers of new cases.

While we have 5 confirmed cases in New Zealand, it is expected we will have more. However the Ministry of Health says that with continued vigilance the chance of widespread community outbreak is expected to remain low in New Zealand. This has not changed because of the reclassification to pandemic status. We all have a role to play in this.

A reminder about handwashing and good hygiene as well as ensuring people who are sick don’t come to school. It is also important for adults to be sensible about physical distance.

Support for parents' conversations with their children

We have developed specific guidance for parents to assist them when talking to their children about coronavirus.

You will appreciate the importance of giving children factual, age-appropriate information about COVID-19 so that they can feel informed and in control. The guidance will support parents to have those conversations – [Talking to children about coronavirus](#)

You may also have seen two very useful videos you could share with your parent community to help both parents and children better understand the virus:

- Nanogirl video clip with a great explanation for kids about coronavirus
 - [YouTube clip - Nanogirl](#)
- Watch the Prime Minister talk about coronavirus with Dr Michelle Dickinson and the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, Juliet Gerrard,
 - [Watch on the PM's Facebook page](#)
 - [Read and watch on the Newshub website](#)

Letter template for leaders

Below is a potential draft communication if you would like to send a letter to your community.

Kia ora

You may have seen that the World Health Organisation has now declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic. As noted by the Minister of Health, this doesn't change what New Zealand is doing to respond to coronavirus.

The Ministry of Health has been working through its pandemic plan since January. You will also know the Government has already implemented a range of measures to minimise the impacts to New Zealand. This includes border restrictions, a requirement to self-isolate on arrival in New Zealand from China, Iran, Italy and the Republic of Korea and immediate and detailed contact tracing of any confirmed cases. It is important to note those four countries account for more than 90% of cases globally and China and the Republic of Korea have

significantly declining numbers of new cases.

We have 5 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in New Zealand and it is pleasing to know they are all doing well and are at home. Their children, four students at Auckland schools, continue to be well and show no symptoms. While we expect that more cases will arise, the Ministry of Health says that with continued vigilance the chance of widespread community outbreak is expected to remain low in New Zealand. We all have a role to play in this.

For our school, our pandemic plan is also ready to be implemented if needed. In the mean time we will continue to focus on good hygiene practices. Hand washing and good cough etiquette are very important tools in preventing the spread of illness including colds, flu and COVID-19.

With that, there is a good video clip from Nanogirl that will help your children to better understand the virus - [YouTube clip - Nanogirl](#)

You may have also seen the Prime Minister sat down with Dr Michelle Dickinson (aka Nanogirl) and the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, Juliet Gerrard, to talk about coronavirus:

- [Watch on the PM's Facebook page](#)
- [Read and watch on the Newshub website](#)

One other action we can all take is to be vigilant about our own health and the health of our children. I will be encouraging my staff to stay away from school if they are showing signs of illness such as coughs and colds. I ask that you please do the same with your children. Colds and flus are common in schools and by staying away, seeking medical attention and practicing good hygiene, we can all keep any spread of illness to a minimum.

Ngā mihi

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