

Guidance on staff health and safety during Alert Level 4 - Horticulture

Updated 18 August 2021. Updates in yellow

Under Alert Level 4, all people – except those employed in essential services – must stay at home. Food producers and their essential supply chain businesses are considered essential services and can continue to operate. Horticulture businesses involved in food production already have exceptional health and hygiene practices which provide a basis for ensuring the health and safety of their staff and the public from Covid-19.

The current strain in New Zealand is the Delta variant which has a number of differences compared to earlier iterations of the virus. These differences mean that the Delta variant is a greater threat to the health of individuals who contract the infection and a greater challenge to contain the spread of the virus in an outbreak. For example:

- Delta can cause people to develop more serious COVID-19 illness than other variants of the virus
- People with a Delta infection are at higher risk of needing hospitalisation.
- The chance of infecting others such as within your household or other contacts is very high because Delta is so transmissible. It is estimated that on average, one person infected with Delta may infect 5 or 6 other people. This is how Delta outbreaks in places overseas have grown so rapidly.
- People with Delta infections seem to carry much more virus (have a higher viral load) and for a longer period of time than those infected with the original virus or other variants.
- The time from exposure to the virus until first symptoms is shorter for the Delta variant. Some people may have no symptoms (asymptomatic) when infectious. More information on the Delta variant can be found <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/about-covid-19/covid-19-about-delta-variant>

A specific Covid-19 risk management protocol and effective verification is a requirement for every essential workplace. There must exist within each organization a document that outlines the procedures in place for managing the above elements along with a specific process for that organization to verify these procedures. Organizations should have a suitably skilled person or group to coordinate these functions and report to senior management or verification agencies when required.

To assist in the development of these procedures this document provides guidance around the requirements for workplaces in Horticulture to be consistent, compliant and safe.

Guiding Principles

1. Prevent the introduction of Covid-19 into the workplace
2. Prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the workplace
3. Eliminate Covid-19

1. Prevent the introduction of Covid-19 into the workplace

Covid-19 will almost always be introduced into the workplace through people. Each business shall have procedures in place to address the following risks:

- Restrict high-risk workers
 - Have procedures to identify any staff member or their members close contacts that have had potential exposure to Covid-19
 - Utilise staff declarations to ensure that required self-isolation has been undertaken, where required
 - Have procedures to regularly check the health of all workers and visitors before entering the workplace ensuring that any staff with possible illness stay at home. This should include regular temperature checks of staff and visitors and keeping of records.
 - Make sure there are no financial disincentives for staff to stay at home when unwell.
- Mandate the wearing of masks for ALL staff and visitors on site at all times
- Educate workers on risks and requirements
- Prevent non-essential people from entering the workplace
 - Maintain records of all personnel entering the workplace
 - Ensure all visitors scan the NZ Covid Tracer QR Code on entry
- Require all personnel to wash their hands in accordance with best practice on arrival at the workplace and at regular intervals after entry
- If not already in place, implement a documented sanitation procedure for all worker contact 'high touch' common area surfaces
- Provide sufficient supervisory capability to enforce separation and periodically verify and document compliance with the establishment protocol

2. Prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the workplace

All establishments must have in place a registered Covid-19 risk management plan and this should strive for a minimum social distancing of 2 metres at all times. However, it is important that all businesses tailor the principles of disease control for their specific circumstances. Each business shall have the following procedures in place:

- Implement a documented sanitation procedure for all 'high-touch' common area surfaces
 - Clean common areas frequently using disinfectants approved for use in food processing businesses, including common rooms and break rooms, especially high touch areas.
- Check and maintain ventilation systems to ensure optimum operation.
- Implement a documented hygiene system for workers
 - Ensure that staff wash their hands properly with reminders that hands need to be washed well with soap and water for 20 seconds and properly dried, especially upon arrival at work, after using the bathroom, after blowing their nose, before eating and before going home
- Educate workers on risks and requirements
 - Utilise guidance material from the Covid-19 website (or equivalent)

- Reinforce messages around respiratory and hand hygiene and **the correct use of PPE including masks.**
- Remind staff that they should avoid touching their face/**mask** unless they have washed their hands.
- Ensure that staff are regularly briefed on measures to minimise the chance of transmission of infection, and routinely monitor compliance.
- **Strengthen the ability to trace the movements and interactions of staff within the facility and test these systems regularly.**
- Establish fixed work teams (bubbles) where staff work in the same localised area so that you minimise mixing between staff. **Be particularly mindful of how staff travel to and from work, and congregate during break times.** If one of the team gets sick, quarantine the whole team offsite (if they are considered close contacts) and use a replacement team, contact the DHB and follow the instructions of that government agency with regard to further actions.
- **Seek to maintain a 2m distance (head-to-head) between all staff at all times including:**
 - Break times
 - ✦ Consider breaks taken as working groups either staggered or in different locations.
 - ✦ Chairs and tables marked at 2m intervals.
 - ✦ Create 'walkways' so that staff are separated when moving through and around the work area.
 - ✦ Create separate ingress and egress zones and staggered change over times so that teams do not mix in toilets or break areas
 - ✦ Leaving and re-entering workstations
 - ✦ Arriving and leaving work (including car parks)
- It is accepted that in some confined spaces, workers will need to pass each other e.g. on the way to their work station, with less than 2 metre spacing. Such situations must be minimised wherever possible e.g. staggered entry and exit of teams to their work stations.
- **Where workstations between 1 and 2 metres apart cannot be avoided** implement additional risk mitigation measures according to an evaluation of the workplace:
 - Designate and document working groups that may interact closer than 2m. **Minimise the number of people in these groups as much as possible.**
 - **Ensure masks are worn** and maximise forward-facing distance to the extent possible as the main risk is from sneezing and coughing and droplet spread
 - In addition to the clothes workers normally wear in carrying out their roles, risk mitigation measures may include:
 - Other PPE including gloves
 - additional verification by supervisors
- **In exceptional circumstances where there is no alternative to work stations spaced less than 1 metre apart:**
 - Workers must be separated by a physical intact screen so that the head to head distance between workers, around the screen, is a minimum of 1 metre

- The screen must be:
- fixed in place or fully self-supported
- large enough that the minimum face to face distance between workers above, below or around the screen is 1 m, taking into account whether the worker is static within a workstation or moves within a range
- made of materials approved for use in the workplace
- durable and able to be regularly cleaned (for both Covid-19 and food safety purposes) as per usual premises hygiene requirements (generally at the end of each shift), and more frequently if there is regular worker contact with the screens
- In facilities with circulating air flow or additional fans, the screen should not lead to increased air funnelling between work stations
- Whereby an operator has an alternative mechanism to minimise the risk where workstations are spaced less than 1 metre apart, a request can be made to the Director Food Science and Risk Assessment to permit a case-by-case evaluation on the basis that this spacing is critical to continuing operations.
- Employers should provide sufficient supervisory capability to enforce separation and periodically verify and document compliance with the establishment protocol

NOTE: Masks must be worn at all times, except where it would be unsafe or impractical to do so. The use of gloves is discretionary. For both masks and gloves, when worn ensure staff are trained how to use them and how to dispose of them

3. Eliminate Covid-19

Every workplace must maintain and implement processes for managing a positive Covid-19 detection in the workplace. These must include:

- Display of a NZ Covid Tracer QR Code and ensuring all visitors entering the site scan the App
- Immediate notification of the DHB of any positive cases
- Worker welfare procedures for infected person and those within their work bubble
- Contact tracing information including accommodation and transport and procedures to notify transport and accommodation providers
- Sanitisation and cleaning procedures
- Nomination of a business contact for the DHB and other Government agencies to liaise with

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