

## Guidance for growers and packers

### Preventing Covid-19 while carrying out essential business.

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September 2021

This document provides guidance for horticultural workplaces to ensure they are consistent, compliant, and safe during elevated Covid-19 alert levels. Use this to develop or check your businesses Covid-19 risk management plan.

#### DELTA VARIANT

The current strain circulating in New Zealand is the Delta variant which has several differences 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.
- 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 carry much more virus (have a higher viral load) and for a longer period than those infected with previous 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: <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>

### Guiding Principles for workplaces

1. Prevent the introduction of Covid-19
2. Prevent the spread of Covid-19
3. Manage an incidence of Covid-19

#### **1. Prevent the introduction of Covid-19**

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 and visitors.
  - Have procedures to identify whether any staff member or their close contacts have

- had potential exposure to Covid-19,
- Use staff declarations to ensure that required self-isolation and Covid testing has been undertaken, where required,
- Have procedures to check the health of all workers and visitors before entering the workplace, and ensuring that any staff with possible illness stays at home,
- This should include regular temperature checks of staff and visitors where possible,
- Keep records including:
  - health status & temperature of staff and visitors
  - health status of home bubbles
  - Anyone classified as a contact of a case
- Make sure there are no financial disincentives for staff to stay at home when unwell.
- Educate workers on risks and requirements. **Staff need to comply with all public health advice when not at work.**
- Build a culture which encourages staff to speak up if they are not feeling safe at work.
- 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. If QR code scanning is not available, require all staff, contractors, and visitors to manually provide their full name, two forms of contact (e.g. mobile phone and email address) and time of arrival at the workplace.
- 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 social distancing and/or physical separation (see below) and periodically verify and document compliance with the establishment protocol.
- **Vaccination is the best way to reduce the risk of sickness and spread of the disease. Encourage and help all staff to get vaccinated.**

**NOTE: The DELTA VARIANT is highly contagious – mask wearing in all areas of business operation is strongly advised at all times. Masks are mandatory when out in public areas and inside premises.**

## **2. Prevent the spread of Covid-19**

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

- Mask use;
  - **Masks (of an appropriate grade for food processors) should be worn at all times by staff working in enclosed buildings/greenhouses.**
  - Staff working outdoors (open areas) who are able to maintain a minimum of 1-2 metre physical distancing do not need to wear masks. However, masks should be donned on entering buildings or greenhouses where 1-2 metre distancing cannot be maintained.

- Masks should be replaced immediately when they become inoperable, wet or contaminated. Used masks must not be put back on. Single use masks must be disposed of after doffing. Reusable masks must be washed before reuse.
- Staff should be instructed in correct use of masks. (<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-information-specific-audiences/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-workers>) .
- Sanitation;
  - 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.
  - All shared vehicles including forklifts and trolleys need to be well cleaned and sanitised regularly and always after each operator finishes before the new operator uses the vehicle.
- 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
  - Use guidance material from the Covid-19 website or Ministry of Health website (links below).
  - Reinforce messages around respiratory and hand hygiene and the correct use of PPE including masks.
  - Remind staff that they should avoid touching their face 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. If one of the team gets sick, quarantine the whole team off-site (if they are considered close contacts), contact the DHB and follow the instructions of that government agency regarding further actions.
- **Seek to maintain a 2m distance (head-to-head) between all staff at all times including:**
  - Break times
    - Have workers or “bubbles” take breaks either at different times 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, or 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 workstations.
- **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 (Bubbles) that may interact closer than 2m. Minimise the number of people in these groups.
  - 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:
    - masks and gloves
    - regular cleaning of surfaces
    - additional verification by supervisors
- **In exceptional circumstances where there is no alternative to workstations spaced less than 1 metre apart:**
  - Masks to always be worn by staff.
  - 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 one 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 1m, considering 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 (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 workstations.
  - 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: If appropriate PPE is used, ensure staff are trained how to use and dispose of PPE – this includes masks.**

### **3. Manage an incidence of Covid-19**

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

- Immediate notification of the DHB
- 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

**Click on the links below for additional guidance:**

**HortNZ website, for up-to-date grower information:**

<https://www.hortnz.co.nz/covid19/>

**Ministry for Primary Industries, Alert Level 4 guidance:**

<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/46585-MPI-generic-guidance-on-COVID-19-safety-requirements-for-primary-industry-businesses-at-Alert-Level-4>

**United Fresh, business continuity guide Level 4:**

<https://www.unitedfresh.co.nz/assets/COVID-19/United-Fresh-Guide-to-Business-Continuity-at-COVID-LEVEL-4--August-2021.pdf>

**Alert Level 3 industry guidance:**

<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/41938-MPI-safety-guidance-for-COVID-19-in-primary-industry-General-AL3-28-Aug-20.pdf>

<https://www.unitedfresh.co.nz/assets/COVID-19/United-Fresh-Guide-to-Business-Continuity---ALERT-LEVEL-3--August-2021.pdf>

**Alert Level 2 industry guidance:**

<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/41941-MPI-safety-guidance-for-COVID-19-in-primary-industry-General-AL2-28-Aug-20.pdf>

**Government guidance on the alert levels:**

<https://covid19.govt.nz/alert-levels-and-updates/>

**Testing locations:**

<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/assessment-and-testing-covid-19#where>

**Covid-19 Public Health Response (Alert Level Requirements) Order (No 9) August 2021:**

<https://www.legislation.govt.nz/regulation/public/2021/0210/latest/LMS536652.html>

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