



## New ways of living and working with Covid-19

As we all reach the end of four weeks at Level 4, we have become very familiar with a new way of living and working. Our lives are now focused on living in 'bubbles', social distancing, and the daily updates from Jacinda Ardern and Ashley Bloomfield.

Jill and Caroline, along with the other health union leaders, have daily Zoom meetings with key people in the DHBs to ensure the appropriate support has been put in place to support health workers to remain safe whilst they provide the essential care needed in our health services. Information and advice from the DHBs and MoH continues to be updated and is likely to continue being updated as we move to Level 3.

### **MERAS website a source of information**

The MERAS website is being updated daily to ensure that the latest information from the Ministry of Health is easily available to you. We are also including some of the good information that is being provided by DHBs.

We are looking for video clips from you as to how you are managing the 'new normal' for our website and fb page. Photos are always much appreciated.

We have also been running Zoom Q&A sessions for MERAS members where the main focus was on PPE.

### **Staying safe at work**

The most important things you can do to keep you and other colleagues safe when working are:

- screen women for Covid risk before providing care
- frequent hand hygiene
- cleaning work surfaces & computer keyboards
- social distancing in the office, corridor and shared workspaces
- wear appropriate PPE

### **Screening for Covid-19 risk**

The criteria for screening has been broadened. Questions to ask are:

\*are you unwell or have any of your family bubble had cold or flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, breathless) or has been unwell.

\*have you had contact with someone who is a probable or confirmed Covid-19 + case in the last 14 days

\* have you been overseas in the last 14 days

If the answer to all these questions is NO, then the risk of transmission of Covid is low. If the answer to any of these questions is YES, then immediately put a mask on the woman (or her partner) and isolate from others. Implement your employer's potential Covid response measures.

### **Personal protective equipment (PPE)**

One of the most important issues has been advice about appropriate PPE and the availability of it for health workers. There is guidance from the MoH about appropriate PPE in maternity settings (see MERAS website). You should all have access to masks, gloves, eye protection and gowns in your workplaces.

Inappropriate use of PPE can create a false sense of security and increase risk. For example, wearing gloves in the workplace for long periods instead of doing frequent hand washing can increase the risk of contact contamination (touching door handles, keyboards, etc with dirty gloves).

### **Vulnerable workers risk to be revisited**

Occupational health specialists are revisiting the MoH assessment guidelines for 'vulnerable workers' in light of the move to Alert Level 3. The guidelines identify risk factors for staff (such as pregnancy and health conditions) and define whether the worker should work from home or in 'Covid-free' areas. The updated guidelines may mean some staff can return to work.

If you have not already completed a self- assessment form, you should do so and send to Occ Health. You do not need a medical certificate as you are fit to work. The vulnerable worker assessment is about reducing your risk of contact with Covid-19 patients.

### **Special Leave may be available**

If you meet the criteria of a 'vulnerable worker' and you are not sick, you should be offered 'special leave' which does not impact on your annual or sick leave balances.

If you have questions about this, talk to your line manager in the first instance and if you are not satisfied, contact [caroline.conroy@meras.co.nz](mailto:caroline.conroy@meras.co.nz).

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