

MEDIA RELEASE

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Strengthening the Coronavirus response with community-based assessment centres

Nelson Marlborough Health (NMH) has partnered with the Nelson Bays Primary Health Organisation, the Marlborough Primary Health Organisation and regional emergency management groups to establish community based assessment centres (CBACs) to support people with Coronavirus symptoms.

When and how to use a community-based assessment centre

1. People with Coronavirus symptoms should phone Healthline (0800 358 5453) or their GP first. The Healthline advisor or GP will ask questions to determine their advice and people are asked to cooperate with this process.
2. The Healthline advisor or GP will confirm if someone requires assessment and testing for COVID-19 at a CBAC.

NMH General Manager of Strategy, Primary and Community Cathy O'Malley says that the purpose of CBACs is to help limit the spread of Coronavirus by separately 'streaming' people who may have Coronavirus from other people.

"CBACs are a part of district health boards' pandemic plans nationwide and their effectiveness has been proven in previous outbreaks of infectious disease.

"The centres have been established as a matter of urgency, in preparation for a potential community outbreak in the region.

"While we don't have a confirmed case in the region, we are ready to respond to greater numbers of people needing assessment – and testing – for Coronavirus symptoms. They aim to take some of the load off general practices that are already very busy and that will get busier now that the flu immunisation is available. They also reduce the exposure risk for healthcare workers at a time when we need to protect our health professional workforce from getting sick."

Mrs O'Malley says that the centres are all in locations where there is lots of space around them.

"These sites allow for physical distancing. This is important as the need for people to put distance between each other, to prevent catching and spreading the virus, is increasingly necessary."

Three CBACs will be open to the public over the next week.

The locations are:

1. Blenheim: Art the old netball courts off Horton Park, off Redwood St. 9am until 6pm.
2. Motueka: Bridge club room on Tudor Street. 8.30am – 5.30pm
3. Nelson: The former Suburban Club building, 168 Tahunanui Drive. 9am until 6pm.

In smaller communities there are also solutions being implemented to separate suspect cases from well patients accessing healthcare services. These are not the same as CBACs and are not intended as 'walk-in' centres.

- In Golden Bay and Picton, cabins are being placed outside the health centres to allow the safe assessment of people with symptoms, away from other patients in waiting rooms.
- In Murchison, there is a separate entrance to a negative pressure room, separate to other parts of the hospital and health centre.

Mrs O'Malley says that plans are also underway to reach vulnerable communities. A special advisory group has been established, comprising expertise from marae leaders and refugee and RSE workers.

What happens at a CBAC?

People who present to the centres will be assessed by healthcare workers wearing protective masks and other personal protective equipment.

Masks will also be provided to people who present to the centres, as required. People will be assessed and swabs will be taken and sent to laboratories for testing, as determined by CBAC staff. People will be seen at CBACs free of charge.

How to find out when the CBACs are open?

Anyone worried about Covid-19 symptoms should call Healthline (0800 358 5453) or their GP in the first instance. The locations and operating hours for all CBACs will be kept up to date on the NMH website.

NMH will also use social media and community newspaper advertising to inform the public about CBAC locations. People may also be redirected to CBACs by their GP, proactive nurse, or urgent care centre staff.

What if people need assessment outside of the CBAC working hours?

People seeking assessment outside of these hours are asked to stay at home – away from school and work and other populated places. They should call Healthline or their GP for advice.

In urgent situations, they can attend an urgent care centre in Nelson or Blenheim. In emergencies only, they can phone 111 or attend a hospital emergency department (ED). Any person visiting an urgent care centre or ED with Coronavirus symptoms is asked to wait at the front door and signal for attention). They should also distance themselves – by at least two metres – from other people who may be present.

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