

MEDIA RELEASE

21 March 2020

First COVID-19 cases confirmed for the Nelson Marlborough region

As was announced by the Director-General of the Ministry of Health on 21 March two people in the Nelson Marlborough region have tested positive for COVID-19.

These are the first two positive cases of COVID-19 in the Nelson Marlborough district. The cases are both travel-related and not indicative of a local community outbreak.

Case details

1. A 20 year-old woman in her 20s is in self-isolation at her home in Nelson.

- She returned to NZ from the US via Auckland. The international travel was not undertaken during the timeframe the woman would be infectious.
- She then travelled on a domestic flight from Auckland to Nelson. The flight details are on the MoH website. Any air travel contacts are followed-up through the national contact tracing service: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-current-cases>
- The risk to the Nelson Marlborough community is very low because she went immediately into isolation upon her return to Nelson.

2. A 67 year-old woman has been in isolation at Wairau Hospital in Blenheim and will be discharged soon to complete her isolation at home

- The Nelson Marlborough Public Health Service (NMPHS) has established her movements
- Contract tracing has been mostly completed. Many of those contacts are already in self-isolation. There are further people to contact, jointly between the NMPHS and the national close contact tracing service.

Nelson Marlborough Health (NMH) Director of Public Health Dr Stephen Bridgman thanks and commends the families of the two cases who have worked with the NMPHS to complete contact tracing and risk assessment. He also thanks everyone in the region who is in self-isolation, for being proactive, responsible and protecting their communities.

NMH Chief Executive Peter Bramley says NMH has been preparing for the arrival of a case in the Nelson Marlborough region since late January.

He thanks all NMH staff, regional healthcare providers, regional emergency management teams and other community partners for their contribution to the pandemic planning.

“Our public health service is now undertaking contact tracing and requesting close contacts stay in self isolation for 14 days from the date of potential exposure. People will be supported in isolation by the public health service and Healthline.

“The Nelson Marlborough community can be assured that NMH is doing everything it should be to care for the two people with confirmed cases and to prevent and limit the spread of further cases.

“Our thoughts are with the two people who have tested positive. NMH will not disclose any further information about these people. Thank you for respecting their privacy.”

Mr Bramley emphasises that these are the first, but unlikely to be the last, cases of COVID-19 in the region.

He urges everyone in the region to work together and unite against COVID-19.

“Now is the time for increased vigilance and – if you are not already doing so – to follow the advice from the Ministry of Health.”

Advice from Dr Nick Baker, Chief Medical Officer, Nelson Marlborough Health

“Do everything to you possibly can to make it hard for the virus to spread across our community. Everyone has a part of play to slow the spread.”

“Think of the virus as an unwelcome hitchhiker – don’t make it easy for it to get on board and spread to others.”

Dr Baker’s top tips are:

Hygiene is essential

- Cough or sneeze into your elbow or by covering your mouth and nose with tissues.
- Put used tissues in the bin or a bag immediately.
- Wash your hands with soap and water often (for at least 20 seconds).
- Try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell.
- Don’t touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean.
- Avoid non-essential personal contact. Avoid sharing cups or food with other people.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects, such as doorknobs.
- Stay home if you feel unwell.
- Practice low-touch shopping. Do not handle things you are not buying, keep your distance, be aware of how you are touching things like bank cards, money, ATMs and Eftpos machines. Wash your hands after touching things like this as soon as you can.
- If you are a business or provide a service: Increase your cleaning routine in between customers.
- People living in communal spaces must be especially careful with distancing, cleaning and general hygiene.

Physical distancing is essential

- Try to put physical distance (two metres) between yourself and other people in public places such as supermarkets
- Be kind to others: Make it easy for them to keep 2m from you – eg, keep a 2m space in front of you in a supermarket queue, and stay 2m back from counters and reception desks

Staying at home if you are unwell is essential

- Do not go into any public places if you are feeling unwell and minimise close contact even in your home – ring ahead if you need a service
- Call Healthline on 0800 358 5453 if you have any symptoms and have undertaken any overseas travel in the past 14 days, or have been in close contact with someone confirmed with COVID-19. Please do not go directly to a pharmacy, GP clinic, urgent care centre or emergency department.

ENDS

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