

## COVID-19 Testing for Māori and Pacific People within Healthcare Settings Guidance

### Context

The focus of this guidance is to support healthcare providers with COVID-19 testing services, in relation to Māori and Pacific people. There is a need to continue to ensure there is access to testing for priority people, throughout the healthcare sector, to provide the community with the support they need.

### Priority access to COVID-19 Testing

People who experience the highest level of inequity and/or greatest risk of harm or poor health outcomes are identified in the priority groups for access to COVID-19 Testing.

The Plan prioritises people who have higher rates of morbidity, hospitalisation and length of stay, mortality, and hardship due to COVID-19. Expedited access to testing and accurate early identification of infection in these groups allows early intervention of treatment and support to reduce the burden of disease for individuals and their whānau.

**Priority people**are defined as those who are inequitably impacted by COVID-19. People in this group are eligible for targeted assessments regarding additional clinical and social support. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequities for specific groups, including:

* **Māori** who experience greater inequity and disadvantage due to COVID 19 resulting in poorer outcomes.
* **Pacific People** who have had the highest age-standardised hospitalisation rates for COVID-19, and experienced age-standardised mortality rates 2.4 times greater than European and other population groups.

Other priority groups within our population who may also experience inequity due to poorer health or social outcomes and/or barriers to accessing testing include:

* **Elderly (65 years and over)** experience inequity as this age group collectively has the highest rate of poor outcomes including total numbers hospitalised, average length of stay and/or death from COVID-19. Māori and Pacific people are overrepresented in case numbers for the 65 years and over age group as well as other age groups.
* **Disabled people** including tāngata whaikaha Māori and Pacific disabled people who experience inequities due to greater barriers to access, and for some increased susceptibility to COVID-19 infection and/or complications.
* **People with** **severe mental health and addiction**.
* **Other inequitably impacted populations** including refugee and asylum seekers, remote and rural[[1]](#footnote-1) people, rough sleepers and those in transitional housing, and other groups experiencing disadvantage.

The following group are those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 **(vulnerable people)**:

* **People with high-risk medical conditions (long-term health conditions and/or immunocompromised) are** [inequitably impacted due to increased susceptibility to COVID-19 infection and/or complications](https://covid19.govt.nz/prepare-and-stay-safe/people-at-higher-risk-of-severe-illness-from-covid-19/)
* **Pregnant people**

Note this group includes Māori, Pacific people and the elderly over 65.

### [**Medicines to treat COVID-19**](https://covid19.govt.nz/testing-and-isolation/if-you-have-covid-19/medicines-to-treat-covid-19/)

People with a high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 are eligible for treatment with COVID-19 antiviral medicines. These medicines reduce the amount of virus in your body, so you do not get as sick, and you are less likely to go to hospital.

Māori or Pacific people aged 50 or over are eligible to get free antiviral medicines if:

* you have COVID-19 and symptoms, or you are a Household Contact and have symptoms, and
* you became sick within the last 5 days,

Link for: [Access criteria for anti-virals](https://aus01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fpharmac.govt.nz%2Fnews-and-resources%2Fcovid19%2Faccess-criteria-for-covid-19-medicines%2Fcovid-antivirals%2Faccess-criteria-assessment-tool%2F&data=05%7C01%7CVanessa.Coull%40health.govt.nz%7C650d9dc8a0f14c6a360b08db50dc10d0%7C23cec7246d204bd19fe9dc4447edd1fa%7C0%7C0%7C638192678322650072%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=UyMY8OXC5Wkjqe2jDizshfIdd86hGi7RU1C%2FUi05%2FTQ%3D&reserved=0)

### Testing

The following table outlines the recommended testing for Māori and Pacific people within healthcare settings.

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| --- | --- |
| Symptomology | Recommended testing |
| **Māori and Pacific People with COVID-19- symptoms** | **SELF-TEST RAT****If unable to self-test - ASSISTED RAT** (Community Provider or GP)**If RAT is negative, and COVID-19 symptoms persist, repeat RAT in 24 and 48 hours****PCR where a result can influence treatment options** |
| **Māori and Pacific People with known exposure to COVID-19 (Asymptomatic Household contacts)** | Recommended to test daily for five days from the day when the first case in the household tested positive or developed symptoms (whichever is earliest).**Household contacts**: for definition, testing, and management [see here](https://www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-information-health-professionals/covid-19-advice-all-health-professionals#commcasescontacts) |

People with COVID-19 compatible symptoms have a higher probability of testing positive for COVID-19 than those with no COVID-19 compatible symptoms. Their risk of transmitting COVID-19 to others may also be higher.

The purpose of testing people in this group is early detection of cases and improving COVID-19-related health outcomes by supporting timely:

* Access to antiviral therapeutics for those eligible; and
* Recommended isolation to reduce the likelihood of onward virus transmission in communities and to those at highest risk of inequitable outcomes.

During winter and with the re-emergence of a range of pathogens that cause similar symptoms to COVID-19, consideration of alternative diagnoses is particularly important especially for Māori, Pacific people and those at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, if it will result in a change of management (for example, for those at risk of rheumatic fever). Note that people can be co-infected with more than one pathogen.

### Community Providers - Assisted RATs within the community

The focus of community providers is to support access for all people to testing services by enabling expanded access to, and acceptability of, COVID-19 testing services within Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly, those in difficult to reach areas (such as isolated or rural communities).

Community providers also play an important role for Māori and Pacific people in identifying positive cases and connecting them with the appropriate health and welfare services within their community.

Community providers supply RAT kits and services for those who are unable to complete a test themselves and they also can upload the RAT results and provide advice on next steps

The names and locations of community providers and collection sites for RATs, can be found on [Healthpoint](https://www.healthpoint.co.nz/covid-19). For information on obtaining RATs, follow this link [How to get RATs](https://www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/covid-19-testing/covid-19-testing-priority-groups#household).

### Community settings and gatherings

Community testing strategies may be incorporated into a localised response to protect Māori, Pacific, and other priority population and their whanau, including those at a higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 (vulnerable people).

Community groups and event planners should consider the following, as this may help to reduce the chance of significant spread at the event:

* Provision of masks at the event
* Provision of RAT kits at the event
* Public health messaging before the event:
* Stay at home if unwell
* conduct a self-test RAT or if unable get an assisted RAT from one of the community providers within your area see here for list: [How to use a RAT | Unite against COVID-19 (covid19.govt.nz)](https://covid19.govt.nz/testing-and-isolation/covid-19-testing/how-to-use-a-rat/)
* Encouraging COVID-19 vaccination and boosters – [COVID-19 vaccine boosters | Unite against COVID-19 (covid19.govt.nz)](https://covid19.govt.nz/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccine-boosters/)

### Support Services available

* Assisted channel
* Live call answering with call screening - providing an option for reporting RAT results
* Call centre hours are aligned to currently contracted contact tracing and Assisted Channel hours (0800-2000).
* Travellers with positive test results should be provided with the current standard community advice.
* Support for whānau
* Whānau Ora helps whānau access health and welfare services, and meet basic needs for food, accommodation, heating, internet connectivity, water and sewerage.
* You can contact Whānau Ora on:
* 0800 929 282 if you are in the North Island.
* 0800 187 689 if you are in the South Island.
1. ’Rural’ is defined according to the [Geographic Classification of Healthcare](https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/da035e374dbb4ea0ae3b31b6777924ad), based on the location of the patients home address, in defined regions R2 and R3. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)