

26 January 2022

Kia ora koutou katoa,

As you will be aware we are working at pace to ensure staff safety, meet community demand and have as many people as possible vaccinated before Omicron affects our region.

Data supplied by the Ministry and modelling estimates that we have a couple of weeks before Omicron is widely circulating in Hawke's Bay.

This is a worrying time for us all working in health but we are pleased that with the support of our community partners we have achieved a solid and still increasing uptake of COVID-19 vaccinations.

We continue to work hard so we can get as many eligible people to have their booster to further protect them from COVID-19 before the expected wave of Omicron infection hits. A high vaccination uptake means we should see less people needing hospital care and even fewer requiring ICU care.

The emphasis will be on caring for people in the community, ensuring people know how to access care and especially ensuring our vulnerable; pregnant women, people over 60, Māori and Pasifika, people who are immune compromised and those with mental health conditions, to name a few, have clear care plans in place should they be needed. We are closely working with a broad group of social and clinical organisations including our primary care and iwi providers on this.

I will update you regularly as further information comes to hand.

Boosters

The Government announced on 21 December 2021 that COVID-19 booster vaccinations would be mandated for workforces covered by the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Vaccinations) Order 2021 (Vaccinations Order).

[COVID-19 Public Health Response Order](#) came into effect at 11.59pm 23 January 2022, meaning all Health and Disability workers, if eligible for a booster, are required to have this by 15 February. This covers every role within Hawke's Bay DHB.

If it's four or more months since you had your second dose, please prioritise getting a booster as soon as possible - don't leave it to the last minute as it takes a couple of weeks to take full effect.

If you're not yet eligible for your booster, you will need to receive a booster shot within six months – although we recommend anytime from four months.

To help staff meet this requirement a special booster walk-in clinic for staff will be held Monday 31 January from 13:00 -17:30 in the Education Centre.

International evidence shows that booster doses provide good protection against Omicron, and by achieving high levels of booster protection we will be able to reduce the spread and severity of Omicron.

Boosters can only be administered to people 18 years or older.

If you're eligible for your booster book an appointment at BookMyVaccine.nz or visit one of the local vaccination clinics. Full details on www.ourhealthhb.nz. Staff can also book a vaccine with Occupational Health, email amanda.friedner@hbdhb.govt.nz

Masks

All visitors to all DHB facilities are now required to wear a disposable surgical mask – as are all staff apart from those in clinical areas where the decision has been made that an N-95 mask is required.

These medical grade masks provide a higher level of protection than a fabric mask or cloth face covering, and it's a simple thing we can all do to keep patients, ourselves and others safe.

The current position statement for mask wearing exceptions continues to apply:

Mask wearing within Hawke's Bay Hospital

- Outpatients should be strongly encouraged to wear a surgical mask but will not be denied access to health care if this is not possible.
- ALL visitors must wear a surgical mask.
- Mask exemptions for visitors are not accepted in Hawke's Bay Hospital facilities.
- If a visitor refuses to wear a mask they are to be asked to leave the premises.
- **Exception:** The support person for a patient who requires advocacy, for example a child under 16 or a patient who is seriously unwell or of diminished capacity.

What will COVID-19 look like in Hawke's Bay?

Hawke's Bay DHB, like all DHBs, has been provided modelling data from TAS on what we can expect to see from an Omicron outbreak. Most DHBs are doing further modelling work and we are working in partnership with Waikato University to further develop this and expect to be in a position to update or confirm the data below by the end of this week.

The modelling we have received from TAS shows we can expect 18,668 COVID cases for Hawke's Bay over the next 12 months, with peak cases of 5,993 in March (1,922 from vaccinated population and 4,071 unvaccinated population). The modelling suggests Māori will be affected by Omicron substantially more than Pacific or other ethnicities. It also forecasts peak hospitalisations of 177 in March, with three additional ICU cases, rising to five ICU cases in April.

Being prepared – make a plan for home and work

If you don't already have a plan regarding how you and the people in your household will manage self-isolation at home, now's the time to kōrero! Please take the time now to prepare yourselves and others for catching COVID-19.

Make a plan for what you will do if you or someone in your household tests positive. Connect with whānau, friends and neighbours to build a support network for each other. Make sure you have what you need at home in the event you need to isolate for 14 days.

If one person in your household gets Omicron, you will all need to isolate. While 'shopping normally' now's the time to ensure your medicine cabinet has the basics, and the freezer, pantry and laundry are all well stocked with supplies.

We expect to receive more information on Rapid Antigen Testing including stand -down and isolation periods for essential workers, like healthcare workers in the coming days. We will update you as soon as we receive this.

Care in the community

As a health system our hospitals are prepared, and we are refining our plans for care in the community as for most people who are fully vaccinated (2 doses plus their booster dose) Omicron will be a mild to moderate illness and they will be able to safely isolate and recover at home.

As a system our focus will increasingly be on those who have underlying health conditions or disabilities that make them more vulnerable to serious illness.

The emphasis will be on deploying resources to support people isolating at home and recovering from COVID-19. We will continue to work closely with primary care – general practice and pharmacies, NGO providers, including Māori and Pacific Providers and Ministry of Social Development (MSD), who will be providing welfare and a range of support services.

Making the most of our people resources

When we're in the thick of the Omicron outbreak with rapidly growing numbers of cases, we will need to rationalise, which services we pause, and focus on what's essential.

Now's the time for teams to be thinking about priorities and how some services might be provided remotely via telephone or Zoom/teams – in previous outbreaks this has been a safe and effective way to carry out outpatient consultations. I'm pleased we can continue to carry out planned surgery and outpatient appointments at present, but this won't always be the case, so please plan with your teams now and decide what's essential to continue and how you could work differently to minimise disruption for our community.

Some essential services, like cancer care, will continue throughout with additional protective measures in place as deemed appropriate by clinical teams.

Kia kaha,
Keriana



Keriana Brooking
Chief Executive Officer