



COVID-19 NewsBrief – 7 September 2021

Covid-19 alert levels are changing. Most of the country, apart from Auckland, moves to level 2 at midnight Tuesday meaning most businesses can function with a degree of normality.

However, this time we will see a new version of level 2 in response to the more infectious nature of the Delta outbreak.

There are greater requirements around masks and stricter limits on indoor and outdoor gatherings:

- Face masks are now mandatory inside public facilities, as well as on public transport and domestic flights.
- The maximum number of people allowed at indoor hospitality and event venues is 50. Outdoors it is 100.

Additionally, records must be kept of attendees at indoor and outdoor events and social distancing requirements at indoor events has been increased from 1 metre to 2 metres.

Shops, offices, factories and all other workplaces (including personal care businesses such as hairdressers) can reopen, but they must follow public health rules.

Physical distancing rules mean workers must keep 1 metre apart and retail customers 2 metres apart.

People who work indoors and in public-facing roles will have to wear a mask. Bus and taxi drivers must wear masks, as well as residential delivery drivers when they are out of their vehicle.

All businesses will have to display a QR code or provide an alternative contact tracing system, such as a signing in sheet. Record keeping will be a requirement for all people aged 12 and over at all alert levels at busy places and events.

Restaurants and cafés can reopen, but there will be extra safety measures in place. Diner numbers will be restricted to 50 people per venue with 1 metre distancing between tables.

Up to 100 customers are allowed at outdoor venues, and the three 'S' rules will still apply with diners needing to be

- seated,
- separated; and
- served by a single server where possible.

All staff and customers will be required to wear masks and signing in will be mandatory.

Bars and nightclubs can also open, but with seated service only. Dance floors are to remain closed.

A venue with people in both indoor and outdoor spaces must ensure that the two groups do not mix. That means separate entrances for shared areas, such as bathrooms or counters where people go up to order or pay.

For the avoidance of doubt, employees must wear a face covering if they interact with customers.

Offices need to ensure workers can keep 1 metre apart from their work colleagues and 2 metres apart from customers or visitors. The number of people allowed indoors is capped for gatherings, such as at hospitality or event venues, but a cap for workplaces is not mentioned.

The wage subsidy is still available even if your business is operating in Level 2 – provided revenue is down 40 per cent, you can claim the wage subsidy while any part of the country is in alert level 3 or 4 – it does not have to be your region.

Be ready and ensure that you are observing requirements. Below are a few ideas to assist you in getting back to normal:

- Have a QR code at your workplace for when people return to work as well as a manual register and hand sanitiser and masks available for visitors to your business premises.
- Ensure that all your employees are well briefed on the stricter health and safety protocols.
- Familiarise yourself with the requirements around employees' leave and sick leave entitlements and their rights if they are not able to work from home. Do you know your contractual obligations and any alternatives, such as reduced hours of work?
- Consider strategies to ensure that social distancing in the workplace can be implemented; for instance, consider splitting the workforce into teams that will work on alternate days.
- Some business premises might limit the number of people allowed on their premises to help maintain distancing.
- Consider, carefully, the impact of the current lockdown measures on your business and re-visit your forward projections and budgets.
- Where appropriate and where the criteria are met, claims for subsidies and assistance packages should be made as soon as possible but bear in mind that a claimant must be able to substantiate that they meet the criteria.
- If you have not already done so, communicate with your landlord regarding rent relief while you are not able to access the premises.
- Communicate with your bank to understand its position on COVID-19, access to funding and your obligations and current commitments
- Cashflow is the lifeblood of any business and if you have not already done so now is the time for you to revisit your cashflow projections and take steps to ensure that any cash flow deficiencies can be covered.
- Ensure that you have sound IT systems and processes in place and that all members of your team are aware that scam artists are very active in times of lockdown.

While the indications are that we are getting this latest outbreak of COVID-19 under control and the vaccine programme is gearing up, we cannot afford to become complacent. This virus is not going to go away in the near future and all businesses have to consider the effects on their operations and bottom lines going forward.

The events of the last 18 months have proven that we always need to plan ahead and that while we may hope for the best, we need to plan for the worst-case scenarios that may present themselves.

For those who are fortunate enough to be seeing greater freedoms and the ability to operate again, albeit under tighter restrictions, be safe and follow the rules. For those who are still in level 4, stay home, stay happy and stay safe.

At Ecovis KGA we have a dedicated team to help you through these times and are well placed to assist in exploring what options are available and other measures to help protect your business.