

Messages from MidCentral DHB

Take care of yourself as we deal with Covid-19

These are unprecedented times as we are all being asked to stay at home and stop interactions with others outside of our household “bubble”. Please be assured that health services are still operating (although some things are being done differently) and for any medical emergencies, please still call 111.

Staying physically active is important

While in self-isolation you may go for a walk and enjoy nature in your local neighbourhood. Walking is a great way to maintain your general fitness. If you use a walking frame or stick make sure to take it with you. Take a cell phone or tell someone in your bubble when you are due back. Avoid other people when out walking and keep a 2-metre distance from people at all times.

When walking keep your shoulders relaxed and let your arms swing (if you’re not using a walking aid), look ahead not down, start with a warm up and warm down of marching on the spot for a few minutes.

If you are staying at home, one great way to get some exercise is doing ‘sit to stands’. When watching TV, every ad break try to stand up from your chair and sit back down slowly. Repeat five times. If you are able to, try not to use your hands to push off with.

If you would like a list of other seated and standing exercises that are safe for older people to do at home then please email: Planning4health@midcentraldhb.govt.nz.

Staying mentally healthy

Your emotional and mental wellbeing is important. It is normal to feel stressed or lonely when self-isolating, but there are some things you can do to feel better.

Reach out to your usual support people over the phone or online – family and whānau and friends. Sharing how we feel and offering support to others is important.

We also recommend sticking to a routine, such as having regular mealtimes, bedtimes and exercising.

If you feel you are not coping, it is important to talk with a health professional. For support with grief, anxiety, distress or mental wellbeing, you can **call or text 1737** – free, anytime, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week – to talk with a trained counsellor.

Welfare Helpline

A dedicated regional welfare helpline has been set up to assist people who need help to access household goods and services such as food, water, clothing and bedding.

The Freephone number, **0800 725 678**, will be available from **7am until 7pm, seven days a week**, and is a service for people not able to make arrangements through their own support networks.

People are encouraged to review the COVID-19.govt.nz website's help and advice pages to find out what welfare, financial and health services are available first. If you are still unable to find answers to your questions, or if you need access to a local Horowhenua, Tararua, Manawatu or Palmerston North service, call the 0800 number.

Testing for Covid-19

If you are feeling unwell, there are two ways to be referred to a testing site within our MidCentral DHB area:

- Call the dedicated COVID-19 Healthline number on: **0800 358 5453**
- contact your GP by phone. General Practice Teams will be able to refer patients to these sites, if required.

There are five designated testing sites across the MidCentral District's localities of Palmerston North City, Horowhenua District, Ōtaki, Manawatu District and Tararua District to provide assessment and swabbing for suspected cases of COVID-19. There is also a mobile testing unit available to support people who cannot access the testing sites.

Hospital Services

Some changes to hospital services have been put in place because of COVID-19. Many appointments are now being done via phone or video consult (where appropriate) to minimise the need for people to travel to the hospital and some non-urgent appointments have been postponed. If you have an upcoming appointment or elective surgery at any MidCentral DHB facility, and you're not sure if you should attend, please call our dedicated phonenumber 0800 256 963 to check. Note: this number is operational between 8am and 5pm Monday to Friday.

If you have any symptoms of COVID-19, including cough, fever or shortness of breath, then please do not attend or visit us.

It's important that we keep our patients and staff safe and we really appreciate your help with this. If you think you may have COVID-19, please call Healthline on 0800 358 5453.

Visiting patients in the hospital

While in COVID-19 Alert Level Four, we are implementing a stricter policy regarding visitors to Palmerston North Hospital and the Horowhenua Health Centre.

To keep patients, whānau and staff safe, members of the public will be unable to visit patients at MDHB sites.

In some cases, exceptions to this policy will be made on essential and compassionate grounds - for example a parent/guardian who is supporting a child, or a nominated person supporting a terminal patient.

The decision will be made by a lead clinician and the visitor will undergo screening before they enter.

Shuttle services

Health Shuttle services which usually operate to support patient travel to Palmerston North Hospital are currently unable to continue due to a lack of driver capacity, as many volunteer drivers are in the vulnerable population groups. The DHB is working with Horowhenua Health Shuttle Service and St John's to sustain services. We have been working to recruit additional volunteer drivers and we are grateful to have on loan the shuttle vans from Horowhenua and St John's to continue providing this vital transport service to our communities. Whilst establishing the service we have sustained patient travel through a paid taxi service.

We encourage anybody who still needs to travel to hospital for critical health procedures/appointments to arrange somebody within their household "bubble" to drive them where ever possible. This is the safest way to travel and helps us continue to break the chain and reduce unnecessary person to person contact. If you live alone, or have no vehicle or family that can provide transport for you, then please call Palmerston North Hospital at least a week before your appointment and ask to be put through to the Patient Travel Service who will endeavor to help make arrangements for you.

General Practice Health Services

Our General Practice staff are crucial to our national response to COVID-19 and are committed to keeping you well. General Practices will continue to operate as essential services. Below are details of how their services are changing to look after your health and the health of your whānau.

Face-to-face consultations

General Practices will still be open to see people face-to-face. Please call or email your General Practice and your GP or nurse practitioner will advise you whether you need to visit them in person. Please listen to their instructions about what to do. You may be greeted at the door and asked questions before coming into the practice – or you may be asked to go to a different entrance rather than the one you usually go to.

Your GP and Nurse Practitioner will be doing fewer face-to-face consultations. Instead they may offer different 'non-contact' ways to communicate with them, such as telephone or video consultations.

Your General Practice may have charges for their new phone, video and email consultation services. They will share this information with you – however if you are unsure, please do ask.

Connecting through your patient portal

Many General Practices offer a patient portal. These provide safe and secure ways to communicate with your General Practice. If you are already connected to your own General Practice portal through the ManageMyHealth app or *myIndici* app, this is a great way to keep in touch.

Your General Practice team might add handy resources to your profile to help you find out more about and better manage your health. Take this time to get familiar about what you can do in your portal.

Community Pharmacy Services

Our Community Pharmacy teams are also committed to keeping you well. Community Pharmacies will continue to work as essential services during the COVID-19 lock down.

Community Pharmacies will be available for essential services only. This includes providing prescriptions, other medicines and advice. Pharmacies will not be available for casual shopping.

Going to your pharmacy in person

From now on, Community Pharmacies will have a limited entry policy. When arriving at a pharmacy, people will be asked basic health questions before entering the premises. If unwell, you will be asked to wait in your car or outside.

People will not be permitted to wait inside for prescriptions. If waiting outside, please do not congregate with other people. Please keep social distancing of two metres at all times.

If you are unwell, please do not come into the Pharmacy. Ask a healthy person to pick up your prescription. They may need to bring ID and could be asked some questions by the pharmacy team.

Getting your prescription filled

There may be a 24-hour delay for pharmacies to complete *non-urgent* prescriptions. Your pharmacy may ask you to return at a specific time or contact you when the medicine is ready. Please continue to order your repeat scripts as usual. Please do not order repeat prescriptions early.

Delivery options

If you are unable to come to a pharmacy AND you do not have someone who can pick up your prescription, you will still be able to get your medicines. Please ask the pharmacy about their delivery options.

Changes to Home and Community Support Services in response to COVID-19

The way Home and Community Support Services (HCSS) are provided in the MidCentral District has had to undergo some changes in response to COVID-19. These are the services provided by support workers in homes, and may include helping with showering and dressing, medication oversight, and domestic assistance (e.g. cleaning).

MidCentral Health DHB has asked our HSCC providers to prioritise services in order to care for our most vulnerable people. This means some services will be limited to allow support to be redirected to those who need it most. Please be assured that our providers will carefully monitor anyone who may be put at risk because of any changes. The health and wellbeing of our clients and the community are our top priorities and MidCentral DHB and providers will endeavour to do welfare checks via phone for any clients whose services may have been put on hold. If you have any questions or concerns, particularly if you feel you or someone you know will be put at risk if services change, please contact the service provider.