

**McGuinness Institute,
2023a**

COVID-19 NATION DATES

A timeline of significant events
in Aotearoa New Zealand's
COVID-19 pandemic

McGuinness Institute

1.0 Introduction

Although international events played their part and shaped our response, the focus of this book is on Aotearoa New Zealand's response to COVID-19, and what happened here – what we did and how we responded.

International context

Q. On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) was first notified about multiple cases of pneumonia from an unknown cause, circulating in Wuhan, China. On 11 January 2020, the first known death was confirmed. Nine days later, Thailand became the second country to record its first case of the coronavirus and, shortly afterwards, cases were recorded in Japan, South Korea and the United States. By 30 January 2020, over 10,000 cases had been reported globally and WHO declared a global health emergency. On 11 February 2020, WHO officially titled the coronavirus disease COVID-19. By 11 March 2020, there were over 118,000 recorded cases across 114 countries and WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic.

The WHO *Policy Brief: Gatherings in the context of COVID-19* (19 January 2023) notes that '[n]early three years since the first SARS-CoV-2 infections were reported, the COVID-19 pandemic remains an acute global emergency. At the present time, there continue to be millions of people infected each week and throughout 2022, more than one million people were reported to have died from COVID-19. With access and appropriate use of life-saving tools that exist, COVID-19 can become a manageable disease with significantly reduced morbidity and mortality.'

The WHO *Statement on the fourteenth meeting of the International Health Regulations (2005) Emergency Committee regarding the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic* (30 January 2023) made it clear that '[t]he WHO Director-General concurs with the advice offered by the Committee regarding the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and determines that the event continues to constitute a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC). [However] [t]he Director-General acknowledges the Committee's views that the COVID-19 pandemic is probably at a transition point and appreciates the advice of the Committee to navigate this transition carefully and mitigate the potential negative consequences.' The latest WHO *Weekly epidemiological update on COVID-19* (8 March 2023) noted that 'globally, nearly 4.5 million new cases and 32 000 deaths were reported in the last 28 days (6 February to 5 March 2023), a decrease of 58% and 65%, respectively, compared to the previous 28 days'.

New Zealand context

To summarise in terms of calendar years, 2020 was a year of lockdowns with a focus on eliminating COVID-19 through closing the border and tracking and tracing, while 2021 was a year of moving towards accepting that we will need to live with COVID-19. The focus changed to preventing surges, managing isolation, and rebuilding our health-care capability. In contrast, 2022 was a year of protests and legal challenges, with a focus on how we might rebuild the economy, resolve inequalities and get the country back to work.

4.0 Events by date

2020

23 Jan



Initial response by major political parties

National Party health spokesperson Michael Woodhouse announces on 23 January 2020 he considers that COVID-19 should be made a notifiable disease, that travellers from affected areas should be screened and that there should be 'heightened health surveillance at international airports'. Three days later Minister of Health David Clark announces public health staff will meet flights from China to 'actively look for signs of the novel coronavirus'. On 11 February 2020, the WHO officially names the coronavirus disease COVID-19 and the virus that causes the disease SARS-CoV-2. (Kenny, 2020; WHO, 2020a)

2020

28 Jan



National reserve supply composition updated

The composition of the national reserve supply is updated. It had last been updated on 20 June 2017, revealing that the current H5N1 pre-pandemic influenza vaccine in stock had expired in 2016. Four years earlier, on 5 December 2013, the Ministry of Health (MOH) released the *National Reserve Supplies Management and Usage Policies* and the revised *H5N1 Pre-Pandemic Vaccine Usage Policy*. See Appendix 1 for a full list of government epidemic and pandemic publications pre-1 January 2020. (MOH, 2013a; 2013b; 2017a; 2020a)

2020

29 Jan



WHO first provides advice on mask wearing

The WHO first releases advice on the use of masks 'in the community, during home care and in health care settings'. The WHO advises that, in public, wearing a mask is only necessary if an individual has respiratory symptoms. They advise health care workers and individuals with respiratory symptoms in health care facilities to wear masks. At this point, they state that 'no evidence is available on [masks'] usefulness to protect non-sick persons'. An update on 6 April 2020 continues to state that there is no evidence that they are useful to people who aren't sick. On 5 June 2020, the WHO extends its guidance, suggesting in areas of widespread transmission the general public should wear masks in situations where they are unable to maintain physical distancing. Over this period, the New Zealand government aligns its advice with that of WHO; on 28 February 2020, following the announcement of the first New Zealand case of the coronavirus, the government announces that mask wearing by healthy people is not necessary. When the second wave begins on 11 August 2020, the government realigns its advice and encourages mask wearing, before making mask-wearing mandatory on public transport on 31 August. (Daly, 2020; Murray, 2020; NZ Herald, 2020f; WHO, 2020d; 2020e; 2020f)

2020

2 Feb



Travel from China restricted

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announces a temporary ban on all foreign nationals travelling from China. Returning New Zealand citizens and residents, as well as their immediate family members, are still allowed to enter. (Ardern & Peters, 2020)

2020

23 Feb



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First case of COVID-19 arrives in New Zealand unidentified

An article from the *New Zealand Medical Journal* published on 26 March 2021 states that COVID-19 had arrived in New Zealand via a traveller who arrived from Lombardy, Italy, on 23 February 2020 and was told to self-isolate after presenting with flu-like symptoms on 25 February. This is five days prior to the original first reported case. The 23 February case is discovered in September 2020 through the identification of a historical infection from late February 2020 who was a close household contact of the traveller from Lombardy. Five other household contacts are identified as suspected cases. (Becker et al., 2021)

2020

28 Feb



First case identified and reported (first wave begins)

A person arriving in Auckland from Iran tests positive for the virus. The government places restrictions on people travelling from Iran to New Zealand. Importantly this is two months after COVID-19 is first identified in China, and almost a month after most countries in Europe and the United States confirm cases of COVID-19. New Zealand is given an important window of opportunity to learn from the experiences of other countries, and is able to consider a full lockdown. (Clark, 2020a; McGuinness Institute, 2020d; MOH, 2017b; 2020b)

2020

Feb



Influenza pandemic plan discussed

The 2017 *New Zealand Influenza Pandemic Plan: A framework for action* (IPP) is reviewed. It sets out a six-phase strategy: Plan For It (planning and preparedness), Keep It Out (border management), Stamp It Out (cluster control), Manage It (pandemic management), Manage It: Post-Peak and Recover From It (recovery). However, the new virus is not influenza but a coronavirus. As early as February 2020, epidemiologist Michael Baker suggests the IPP was 'a good plan for the wrong virus'. 'We had a mitigation approach when in fact the Chinese had shown us really very convincingly I think by the end of February that you could take a containment approach with a view towards elimination.' (Daalder, 2020a; 2020b; MOH, 2017b)

2020

2 Mar



COVID-19 Response (CVD) Ad Hoc Cabinet Committee established

Cabinet notes that the Prime Minister intends to establish the committee, and committee members meet for the first time later that week. Its role is to coordinate and direct the government response to the COVID-19 outbreak. (Cabinet Office, 2020; DPMC, pers. comm., 10 November 2020)

2020**18 Mar****First National Action Plan produced by NCMC**

The *National Action Plan* is published by the National Crisis Management Centre (NCMC). From March to June 2020, the All-of-Government Controller officially leads the all-of-government response through the NCMC. The centre is split between two locations, known as NCMC North and NCMC South. On 6 March 2020 NCMC North is activated and on 22 March 2020 the Operations Command Centre becomes NCMC South. The second and third National Action Plans are produced on 1 April 2020 and 22 April 2022.

(New Zealand Government, 2020b; 2020c; OAG, 2022)

2020**19 Mar****COVID-19 Ministerial Group replaces the CVD Cabinet Committee**

The COVID-19 Ministerial Group replaces the CVD Cabinet Committee, and reinforces decision-making flexibility to respond to the urgency of the matters facing ministers, supported by their public service advisors. The initial members include: Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Rt Hon Winston Peters, Hon Kelvin Davis, Hon Grant Robertson, Hon Dr David Clark, Hon Chris Hipkins, Hon Carmel Sepuloni and Hon James Shaw. Aside from Cabinet, the COVID-19 Ministerial Group remains the primary decision-maker in the country in regard to New Zealand's COVID-19 response until the end of New Zealand's first lockdown (see entry for 27 April 2020). After this date decisions are primarily taken by Cabinet and the Ministerial Group only meets when urgent decisions are needed during rapidly changing situations. The COVID-19 Ministerial Group then becomes the COVID-19 Group. The Group's policy and strategy coordination function is expected to remain at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) until its transition to the MOH, no later than 30 June 2023.

(DPMC, 2020a; 2022a; pers. comm., 10 November 2020)

2020**19 Mar****Borders close for first time**

The National Party calls for a complete border closure. Within hours, the Government emerges from an urgent Cabinet meeting and announces that at 11:59 pm that night the country's borders will close to everyone except New Zealand citizens and permanent residents and essential health-care workers, for the first time in New Zealand's history. There is a ban on indoor gatherings of more than 100 people, with exemptions for schools, workplaces, supermarkets and public transport. The same day, China reports zero cases for the first time since the disease's outbreak. Globally there have been over 190,000 confirmed cases and nearly 8000 deaths.

(Ardern, 2020c; Kenny, 2020; McCullough, 2020a; Strongman, n.d.)

2020**21 Mar****Alert level system released and move to Alert Level 2 announced**

The government introduces a four-tiered alert level system to help manage the spread of COVID-19, and announces that New Zealand will enter Alert Level 2. The staged alert system is intended to help New Zealanders understand the level of risk faced at any given time, and specifies what health and social measures must be taken to reduce transmission of COVID-19. See Appendix 2.

(Ardern, 2020d; New Zealand Government, 2020a)

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2020**23 Mar****Move up to Alert Level 3 announced**

The number of confirmed cases in New Zealand passes 100. The government announces the nation is to move to Alert Level 3 and 48 hours later to Alert Level 4 – a full lockdown. This gives New Zealanders a window of two days to relocate to their lockdown premises. Level 3 requires all non-essential businesses to close, as well as schools. Approximately 1,172,000 New Zealanders continue to go to work.

(Ardern, 2020e; MBIE, pers. comm., 3 June 2020; MOH, 2020c; New Zealand Government, 2020a)

2020**23 Mar****Police Commissioner Mike Bush leads the government's coronavirus taskforce**

Outgoing Police Commissioner Mike Bush becomes the leader of the government's operational taskforce for COVID-19. The taskforce has been set up to enforce compliance under the government's alert level system.

(Cooke, 2020)

2020**24 Mar****Six-month mortgage holiday for small and medium-sized businesses announced**

Government, retail banks and the Reserve Bank announce a financial support package. The package includes a six-month principal and interest payment holiday for mortgage holders and small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) customers. It also includes a \$6.25 billion Business Finance Guarantee Scheme which will underwrite 80% of individual bank loans to eligible SMEs, so that only 20% of losses in the event of a loan default will be borne by the banks. The mortgage holiday is then extended to 31 March 2021, allowing banks to continue offering temporary mortgage deferrals to customers without their loans treated as being in default.

(Hargreaves, 2020; RBNZ, 2020b; Rosanes, 2020)

2020**25 Mar****State of National Emergency declared**

A State of National Emergency is declared for the second time since the passing of the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002; the first was in response to the 2011 Canterbury earthquake (23 February to 30 April 2011). Also on 25 March 2020, the COVID-19 Ministerial Group passes the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990: COVID-19 Response (Urgent Measures) Legislation Bill.

(Civil Defence, n.d.)

2020**25 Mar****Parliament adjourned and Epidemic Response Committee established**

On 24 March 2020, Speaker Trevor Mallard advises the Government will move to adjourn Parliament for five weeks and it will not sit again until 28 April, regardless of the alert level status. On 25 March, a special sitting of the House votes on the adjournment motion. Mallard also announces that a new special committee, the Epidemic Response Committee, chaired by National Party leader Simon Bridges, has been set up and will have the power to interview those involved with the Government's COVID-19 response.

(New Zealand Parliament, 2020; Walls, 2020a)

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2020**Move up to Alert Level 4****25 Mar**

The country moves to Alert Level 4, implementing some of the strictest anti-COVID-19 measures in the world: all schools and non-essential business premises must close, all events and gatherings are cancelled, and physical socialising or interactions with anyone outside one's own household 'bubble' are prohibited, unless one is an 'essential worker'. This results in approximately 529,000 essential workers continuing to go out to work. The State of National Emergency expires seven days after the time and date on which the state of emergency comes into force unless it is extended (as per Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002, s 70). The State of National Emergency is subsequently extended seven times and lasts 56 days.

(Ardern, 2020f; MBE, pers. comm., 3 June 2020; New Zealand Government, 2020a; 2021a)

2020**Rent increase freeze applied****26 Mar**

A nationwide freeze on rent increases and limits on tenancy terminations are put in place. Landlords can give rent increase notices but they can only take effect on or after 26 September 2020. The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act 2020 is passed on 11 August 2020, putting in place further broad changes that will affect both tenants and landlords.

(MHUD, 2020)

2020**CDC report outbreaks on cruise ships worldwide****27 Mar**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report on an increasing number of cruise ship passengers being infected with COVID-19. A small number of New Zealanders are involved and a few become infected. The most notable case is the *Ruby Princess*, which visits New Zealand between 11 and 15 March 2020. 'The cruise ship cluster [in Australia] was linked to more than 20 coronavirus deaths and over 600 infections – 24 of which were located in Hawke's Bay'. Despite a number of cases confirmed on board, thousands are allowed to leave the ship on 19 March in Sydney. A Special Commission of Inquiry is undertaken by the Australian government.

(Brown, 2020; CDC, 2020; Special Commission of Inquiry into the Ruby Princess, 2020; Stuff, 2020b)

2020**First COVID-19 death confirmed****29 Mar**

New Zealand's first death linked to COVID-19 is a woman in her 70s from the West Coast. On 5 April 2020, the number of confirmed cases passes 1000.

(MOH, 2020d; Tyson, 2020)

2020**15 Apr****SME assistance package announced**

The government announces a package of new measures to provide relief for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). ‘Finance Minister Grant Robertson says while the Government has already acted swiftly in response to the crisis, with about \$20 billion in support already announced, it recognises that more is needed. The new measures include: \$3.1 billion tax loss carry-back scheme (estimated cost over the next two years), \$60 million estimated annual savings to business each year from changes to the tax loss continuity rules, \$25 million in the next 12 months for further business consultancy support, greater flexibility for affected businesses affected to meet their tax obligations, [and] measures to support commercial tenants and landlords.’

(Robertson et al., 2020)

2020**15 Apr****Health and Disability System Response Plan released**

The MOH publishes the COVID-19 Health and Disability System Response Plan. The plan establishes a framework for the national response for the health and disability sector.

(MOH, 2020g)

2020**16 Apr****COVID-19 Māori Response Action Plan released**

The plan develops a framework to protect the health and wellbeing of Māori.

(MOH, 2020h)

2020**20 Apr****Verrall report on contact tracing released**

The Rapid Audit of Contact Tracing for COVID-19 report is commissioned by the MOH. The author, Dr Ayesha Verrall, makes eight recommendations, including the need to explore ways ‘to rapidly scale case identification and contact tracing and regain control’. On 6 May 2020, the Contact Tracing Assurance Committee (CTAC) is established to review the extent to which the recommendations have been implemented; they find that they generally have been but ‘further optimisation is now the goal’.

(Roche et al., 2020; Verrall, 2020)

2020**20 Apr****Move down to Alert Level 3 announced**

After four weeks at Level 4, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announces that, from 28 April 2020, New Zealand will drop to Level 3 for at least two more weeks. This enables some businesses to open under strict physical distancing practices. New Zealand remains at Level 3 until 14 May.

(Ardern, 2020g; New Zealand Government, 2020a)

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2021

14 Feb



Trans-Tasman travel bubble suspended

In response to the changing alert levels and detection of community COVID-19 cases in Auckland, Australia reinstates mandatory hotel quarantine for travellers from New Zealand. The one-way trans-Tasman bubble is briefly fully restored from 21 February 2021, on the condition that travellers who have been in Auckland in the past 14 days provide a negative PCR test at check-in. On 24 February 2021, the Australian Chief Medical Officer designates Auckland as a ‘Commonwealth hotspot’ in response to new cases. Any travellers who had been in Auckland in the past 14 days are banned from travelling on ‘green flights’ (quarantine-free flights) to Australia. Other New Zealand travellers who have not been in Auckland in the past 14 days are permitted to travel on green flights. This is effective until 11:59 pm AEDT on 11 March 2021.

(AGDOH, 2021; Bucklow, 2021)

2021

17 Feb



Auckland moves down to Alert Level 2 and the rest of New Zealand to Alert Level 1

Auckland moves back to Level 2 at 11:59 pm, while the rest of New Zealand moves to Level 1.

(New Zealand Government, 2021a)

2021

17 Feb



New community case linked to Valentine’s Day outbreak

Two new cases linked to the existing Auckland Valentine’s Day cluster are identified. Both are students at Papatoetoe High School and are known as cases D and E. Case F, a household contact of D and E, is included in reporting figures on 18 February 2021 and is transferred alongside D and E to the Auckland quarantine facility. On 19 February, a further household contact of these cases tests positive for COVID-19. This new case (Case G) is moved to the Auckland quarantine facility, as is the one additional member of the existing household that has tested negative previously. On 22 February, this additional household member tests positive in quarantine and becomes Case H.

(MOH, 2021h; 2021i; 2021j; 2021k)

2021

19 Feb



First vaccination

The first COVID-19 vaccinations in New Zealand are given to frontline vaccinators. They receive the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, which so far is the only Medsafe-approved vaccine. The vaccine requires careful management, as it needs to be kept at -70°C.

(Bond, 2021)

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2021**29 Apr****250,000 vaccination courses donated to Fiji**

Associate Minister of Health and Foreign Affairs Aupito William Sio announces that New Zealand has offered Fiji enough doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine for 250,000 people, and Fiji has accepted. The AstraZeneca vaccine is part of New Zealand's domestic vaccine portfolio and has not yet received Medsafe approval, which it will require before it can be donated and used. This offer includes \$2 million in Official Development Assistance to support the vaccine roll-out in Fiji.

(Sio, 2021b)

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2021**30 Apr****Vaccination of border workers now mandatory**

At 11:59 pm the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Vaccinations) Order 2021 comes into force. The purpose of the order (under s 3) is to prevent, and limit the risk of, the outbreak or spread of COVID-19 by requiring certain work to be carried out by persons who are vaccinated. The Order establishes a vaccine mandate for all border workers and all government officials in high-risk border settings, requiring them to be vaccinated before carrying out any work. As a result of the order, nine Customs workers are fired for refusing the COVID-19 vaccine, as Customs is unable to find suitable alternative roles for them.

*(Block, 2021c; MOH, 2021cc; New Zealand Government, 2021f)***2021****2 May****Trans-Tasman bubble with Western Australia paused**

Flights from Western Australia to New Zealand are cancelled on the evening of 1 May 2021 due to a security guard working in a Perth managed isolation facility testing positive for COVID-19. After a rapid public health assessment, the MOH announces that flights between WA and New Zealand can resume from 3 May 2021.

*(Basagre, 2021; Vinall, 2021)***2021****3 May****Cook Islands travel bubble announced**

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announces that two-way quarantine- and testing-free travel will begin between NZ and the Cook Islands on 17 May 2021.

*(Ardern, 2021a)***2021****6 May****IP waiver for COVID-19 vaccines supported**

Trade Minister Damien O'Connor announces that New Zealand supports the announcement of the US Trade Representative to work for a waiver of intellectual property protections on COVID-19 vaccines at the World Trade Organization. The waiver removes barriers to vaccine access so countries can be ensured swift access to vaccines, especially for countries that are struggling with high levels of infection and death.

(O'Connor, 2021)

2021**11 Aug****Indonesia and Fiji classified as very high risk**

From midnight 15 August 2021, travel from Indonesia and Fiji is restricted to New Zealand citizens, their partners and children, and parents of dependent children who are New Zealand citizens following designation as very high risk countries. Pre-departure testing is also required for those travelling from Indonesia. All other travellers must spend 14 days outside of Indonesia before travelling to New Zealand. India, Brazil, Pakistan and Papua New Guinea are already considered very high risk countries.

*(RNZ, 2021j)***2021****12 Aug****Self-isolation pilot for business travellers announced**

The government announces a self-isolation pilot as part of preparation for safely resuming quarantine-free travel. The pilot will run between October and December 2021 and will involve businesses and organisations that need to send staff overseas for a short trip. Self-isolation must be for 14 days in a private dwelling with no shared ventilation system. The dwelling must have cellular coverage. Monitoring and testing over the self-isolation period will be mandatory. Participants are required to be New Zealand citizens or holders of a resident visa with a right to re-enter New Zealand, to be fully vaccinated in New Zealand with the Pfizer vaccine, and to not travel to or through very high-risk countries. Travel must be for business purposes which cannot be carried out from New Zealand.

*(Ardern, 2021b; Hipkins, 2021g)***2021****13 Aug****Bluetooth contact tracing card trial not progressed**

The MOH decides not to implement Bluetooth contact tracing cards (previously referred to as a 'CovidCard' when initially trialled in Nelson – see entry for 7 May 2020) nationally. The decision follows another trial of the cards in Rotorua in 2020. The Ministry notes privacy issues, the cost of the cards, and the need for everyone to be wearing one as some of the factors in the decision.

*(Garcia, 2021; Moir, 2020)***2021****13 Aug****National reserve supply composition updated**

The composition of the national reserve supply is updated. Despite calls to update it more regularly, this is the first update in just under a year (the last update being 26 August 2020). It has yet to be updated again as at 8 February 2023.

*(MOH, 2021ee)***2021****17 Aug****New Zealand moves to Alert Level 4**

One community case of the Delta variant is identified in Auckland. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announces that **from 11:59 pm, the whole of New Zealand will move to Alert Level 4**. Auckland and the Coromandel Peninsula will initially be at Alert Level 4 for seven days, while the rest of the country will be at Alert Level 4 for at least three days. **This is the second time New Zealand has moved into Alert Level 4.**

(MOH, 2021ff; MOJ, 2021; New Zealand Government, 2021a)

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2021 Upper Northland moves to Alert Level 3

2 Nov



Upper Northland moves to Alert Level 3. Parts of Waikato move from Step 1 of Alert Level 3 to Step 2 at 11:59 pm. At Step 2 retail will open its doors, with the usual measures of wearing face masks and physical distancing. Public facilities such as pools and zoos open, and the number of people who can meet outdoors increases to 25. Auckland remains at Step 1 of Alert Level 3. The rest of New Zealand remains at Alert Level 2.

(New Zealand Government, 2021a; 2021h)

2021 New Zealand found to be slow to negotiate vaccine agreements

2 Nov



Documents released under the Official Information Act show New Zealand has been slow to negotiate vaccine agreements. In May 2020 New Zealand’s vaccine taskforce (led by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment) was established. In August 2020, the group was given funding and a mandate from Cabinet to begin negotiating with international pharmaceutical companies. Between October and December 2020, New Zealand signed four vaccine agreements. The *New Zealand Herald* reports that ‘the public was fed a soothing version of events shaped by outside PR help’. In comparison, between May and August 2020, the EU, US, UK, Canada, Australia, Singapore, Japan and South Korea had all negotiated vaccine agreements.

(MacNamara, 2021)

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2021 Workers in the corrections sector required to be vaccinated

6 Nov



Under the COVID-19 Vaccinations Order, workers in the corrections sector are required to have their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine by 6 November 2021 and be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by 8 December 2021. This applies to all staff who work in prisons, including health care staff and professionals; psychologists working in prisons and the community; and many contracted providers and those who provide services in prisons.

(New Zealand Government, 2021i)

2021 Guest staying at MIQ facility dies

8 Nov



A guest who tested positive for COVID-19 dies at the Crowne Plaza Auckland MIQ facility. The person had arrived from overseas on 3 November 2021.

(NZ Herald, 2021m)

2021 High Court Judge holds that vaccine mandate on border workers is legal

8 Nov



Justice Cooke holds that requiring the vaccination of border workers under the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Vaccinations) Order 2021 is demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society. This makes the legislation compliant with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act, s 5.

(Four Aviation Security Service Employees v Minister of COVID-19 Response [2021])

2021

14 Nov



MIQ stay reduced

From 14 November 2021, the managed isolation period for international arrivals into New Zealand is reduced from 14 days to 7 days, followed by isolation at home until the result of a day 9 test has been received. Travellers will continue to undergo tests on day 0/1, day 3 and day 5/6 while in managed isolation. A low-risk indicator check and health check will be required before people can leave MIQ. This change will help provide more rooms for international arrivals, though not substantially, as modelling for the number of rooms needed for high-risk community cases is not yet conclusive enough. The fee for an individual in a room is reduced from \$3100 to \$1610.

(MBIE, 2021d)

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2021

15 Nov



Workers in the education sector and health and disability sector required to be vaccinated

Under the COVID-19 Vaccinations Order, certain roles in the education sector and all workers in the health and disability sector are required to have their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine by 15 November 2021 and be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by 1 January 2022. In the education sector this includes anyone who works, volunteers or does unpaid work in education and who may have contact with children or students while working, or will be at an education service when children or students are present. The order does not include tertiary institutions (or people that work within them) or certified playgroups (except for playgroups that operate on a school or early learning site or are run by a home-based childcare provider). All health practitioners and anyone who works closely with health practitioners (such as reception or cleaning staff) must be vaccinated. Care and support workers who go into people’s homes to provide services funded by the MOH, DHBs or ACC (including family members paid to provide support) must be vaccinated.

(New Zealand Government, 2021i)

2021

15 Nov



Booster vaccines administration plan

Minister of Health Chris Hipkins announces that vaccine booster shots will be rolled out from late November 2021. They are recommended for those who were vaccinated six or more months ago and are aged 18 or older. Everyone will receive the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, regardless of the previous type they received.

(Hipkins, 2021h)

2021

16 Nov



Parts of Waikato move to Alert Level 2

Parts of Waikato move to Alert Level 2; Auckland remains at Step 2 of Alert Level 3; and the rest of New Zealand remains at Alert Level 2.

(New Zealand Government, 2021a)

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2021**17 Nov****Government launches vaccine pass**

My Vaccine Pass is launched as an official record of a person's vaccination status. The pass will allow fully vaccinated people to access places that require proof of vaccination status under the traffic light system. These may include events, hospitality, retail, community, sport and faith-based gatherings. The pass displays a QR code, the vaccine holder's full name and date of birth, and the expiry date of the pass (six months from November 2021). It can be added to a smartphone 'wallet' or printed out. The pass states that photo ID may be required to accompany it and that it cannot be used for international travel. Concerns arise over the pass being an editable PDF, as someone could change the name or expiry date. However, MOH group manager national digital services Michael Dreyer affirms that '[t]he QR code is scanned to verify authenticity and this relies on encryption. Any changes to the QR code will invalidate the key check and therefore can be identified as fraudulent.' Te Pāti Māori releases its *Covid-19 Pandemic Response Plan*, demanding that 'the Government empower and resource a by Māori, for Māori response to lead the remaining Māori public health response and vaccination programme'. The plan includes proposals such as the transfer of 'all Māori targeted DHB vaccination programme funding to Māori health and iwi providers' and all vaccination data being shared with Māori health and iwi providers and vaccination teams.

(1News, 2021b; Keall, 2021; Māori Party, 2021)

2021**17 Nov****Government announces Auckland's boundary restrictions to be eased 15 December 2021**

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announces that the Auckland boundary will formally lift at 11:59 pm Tuesday 14 December 2021. This will be the first day since the August 2021 lockdown was announced that Aucklanders are able to leave Auckland. They will need to be fully vaccinated or have a negative test within 72 hours of departure to travel outside the Auckland boundary. This requirement is in place till 17 January 2022 and applies to anyone leaving Auckland but is not a requirement for entry. People breaking the rules will face an infringement fine of \$1000.

(Ardern, 2021e; Pearse, 2021d)

2021**17 Nov****Man dies from myocarditis two weeks after first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine**

A 26-year-old man received his first dose of the Pfizer vaccine on 5 November 2021. On 17 November 2021 he dies, and preliminary information from the post mortem examination identifies myocarditis as the probable cause of death. The COVID-19 Vaccine Independent Safety Monitoring Board believes the man's death is probably linked to the vaccine.

(NZ Herald, 2021o)

2021**25 Nov**

Government invests \$1.5 billion into testing and home isolation

The Minister of Health, Minister of Social Development and Associate Health Minister reveal information about the management of COVID-19 and of cases isolating at home. A person with COVID-19 isolating at home will receive a call within 24 hours from a health care provider and will receive a health pack tailored to their needs within 48 hours. Local health providers are to be involved earlier and on a greater scale for those who test positive. Welfare teams are set up in each region to facilitate tailored social support services for people isolating at home. Fully vaccinated people with COVID-19 must self-isolate for ten days; those who are unvaccinated must self-isolate for 14 days. Close contacts who are not linked by living in the same household are to isolate for seven days if fully vaccinated, and ten days if unvaccinated. Businesses will be able to source rapid antigen tests from 1 December 2021 and New Zealanders will be able to get their own rapid antigen tests from pharmacies from 15 December 2021. Test processing capacity at laboratories is to be boosted, from the current 16,000 PCR tests per day to 60,000 by early 2022. An additional 475 investigators will be trained by the end of November 2021 to aid contact tracing and case investigation efforts. \$300 million is invested in boosting national drug-buying agency Pharmac to purchase more medicines to treat COVID-19.

(Pearse, 2021e)

2021**26 Nov**

Report from independent advisory group released

A report by the COVID-19 Independent Continuous Review, Improvement and Advice Group, *Observations from the Recent Delta Outbreak and their Impact on Reconnecting New Zealanders* (dated 23 September 2021), is proactively released. The group provides advice to the Minister for the COVID-19 Response on specific areas of the response where improvements could be made, with the benefit of alternative and independent perspectives. The report identifies four key layers of defence and response: vaccination; border processes; public health measures; and health system safety net. Key points are that urgent action is required, and doing nothing is not an option; the Delta outbreak has significantly exposed issues with respect to New Zealand's preparedness for reconnecting. The report also notes the goodwill and tolerance of the general public to lockdowns and the closure of the borders is being challenged. The report is dated 23 September, and the government is criticised for not acting on its advice earlier.

(COVID-19 Independent Advice Group, 2021; Hosking, 2021; New Zealand Government, 2021j; Wade, 2021)

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2021**26 Nov**

Government announces workplace vaccination mandate will be extended to Police and Defence Force

All sworn members, recruits and authorised officers of the New Zealand Police and all New Zealand Defence Force staff are required to be vaccinated against COVID-19. They must have their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine by 17 January 2022, and be fully vaccinated by 1 March 2022.

(New Zealand Government, 2021i; Wood, 2021)

2021**29 Nov****AstraZeneca vaccine becomes available**

The AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine becomes available in New Zealand, as an alternative to the Pfizer vaccine. It is free and available for people aged 18 years and over who cannot receive the Pfizer vaccine, or for people who would like a different option. AstraZeneca requires two doses, with an interval of 4 to 12 weeks between doses. On 29 March 2022, the MOH reports 3500 people had received two doses of AstraZeneca.

(Andelane & Longley, 2021; Health Navigator NZ, 2021; RNZ, 2022a)

2021**1 Dec****COVID-19 Public Health Response (Vaccinations) Amendment Order (No 5) 2021 comes into force**

At 11:59 pm, the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Vaccinations) Amendment Order (No 5) 2021 comes into force. Clauses 9 and 10 came into force at 11:59 pm on 29 November 2021. The order amends the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Vaccinations) Order 2021. The amendments include replacing Schedules, changing 'a COVID-19 vaccine' to 'the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine', and replacing certain dates with later ones.

2021**2 Dec****Traffic light system implemented, replacing the alert level system**

All of New Zealand moves to the COVID-19 Protection Framework, also known as the traffic light system, at 11:59 pm. This marks the end of the COVID-19 Alert System. The framework has three settings: Red; Orange; and Green. At this time, 85% of eligible New Zealanders are fully vaccinated. Key components of the COVID-19 Protection Framework include vaccination; My Vaccine Pass; capacity limits; record keeping (QR codes); and localised protections and lockdowns. See detail in Appendix 3.

(Ardern, 2021f; New Zealand Government, 2021a; 2021k)



Red: Taking action to protect the vulnerable communities and NZ health system, for example, masks required in most indoor locations and venues have capacity limits and distancing requirements.

Orange: COVID-19 is in the community, with risks to vulnerable people and pressure on the health system. Face masks are required in fewer indoor locations and venues no longer have capacity limits and distancing requirements.

Green: There is limited community transmission, and our health system is ready to respond. There are no restrictions at this level.

2021**3 Dec****My Vaccine Pass mandate implemented**

As part of the traffic light system, it is now a legal requirement to provide My Vaccine Pass to enter places that have vaccination requirements in place under the traffic light system. This includes food and drink services (excluding businesses operating solely as takeaways), events, close proximity businesses and indoor exercise facilities. My Vaccine Pass is not required to access basic needs services, such as supermarkets, public transport and essential health care. If an establishment chooses not to follow My Vaccine Pass requirements, there will be limits on the number of people in a venue.

(MBIE, 2021e; New Zealand Government, 2021l)

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2021**3 Dec**

Workers covered by My Vaccine Pass mandate need to be vaccinated

All workers in businesses that must use My Vaccine Passes to operate or operate with fewer restrictions, at all levels of the COVID-19 Protection Framework, are required to have their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine by 3 December 2021 and be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by 17 January 2022. This mandate applies regardless of whether the business chooses not to require My Vaccine Passes from their customers or clients. The mandate applies to all workers, including both customer-facing and non-customer-facing workers. It also includes workers who access a site temporarily (such as cleaners and delivery drivers).

(MBIE, 2021e; New Zealand Government 2021h)

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2021**3 Dec**

Universities begin announcing vaccine mandates

Auckland University announces they will require all students and visitors to have a valid My Vaccine Pass in order to come onto campus from 4 January 2022. Over the following month, the University of Otago, Victoria University of Wellington, University of Waikato, Massey University and Lincoln University also announce vaccination will be required for students and staff accessing their campuses from dates between January and February 2022. The University of Canterbury and Auckland University of Technology require fewer people to be vaccinated, but still require My Vaccine Pass in some settings, such as residential halls. The My Vaccine Pass work vaccination mandate applies to the tertiary education sector only at the Red traffic light setting, allowing universities to make their own decisions regarding vaccine requirements.

(AUT, 2021; LU, n.d.; MBIE, 2021e; MU, 2021; UC, 2021; University of Auckland, 2021; University of Otago, 2021; UOW, 2021; VUW, 2021)

2021**6 Dec**

High Court upholds Māori health provider's review findings

In October 2021 the Māori health provider Te Pou Matakana/Whānau Ora Commissioning Agency (WOCA) sought a judicial review of the MOH decision not to provide individual data of unvaccinated Māori. In November 2021 the court upheld the review, finding that MOH erred in assessing the necessity of data disclosure; breached applicant rights through the consultation process; and acted inconsistently. The Court directed MOH to consider other data provision. However, MOH decided not to release individual data. In a sequel to this case in November 2021 WOCA challenged this again. They found, and the Court upheld on 6 December 2021, that MOH, despite expectations, did not make the decision in accordance with the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, informed by tikanga. MOH was directed to remake their decision. *(Te Pou Matakana Limited v Attorney-General [2021])*

2021**15 Dec****Youngest COVID-19 deaths in New Zealand reported**

Two of the youngest people to die of COVID-19 in New Zealand are reported within a week of each other. On 15 December 2021, the MOH confirms a person in their late 30s died the previous week, the youngest person to die of COVID-19 in New Zealand. On 17 December 2021, the death of a Māori boy aged 0–9 years is recorded on the MOH website. The child tested positive for COVID-19 after his death, and the cause of death is under investigation (it is reported as a COVID-19 death because he died while infected). Māori account for 32% of all COVID-19-related deaths in New Zealand, while making up 17.1% of the population. As of 20 December 2021, there are a total of 49 deaths of people with COVID-19 recorded in New Zealand.

(*Corlett, 2021; NZ Herald, 2021p; 2021q*)

2021**16 Dec****Traffic light system settings change announced**

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announces that Auckland and all other regions currently in the Red traffic light setting, except Northland, will move to Orange at 11:59 pm on 30 December 2021. Northland will stay in Red. These settings will be in place until they are reviewed by Cabinet on 17 January 2021.

(*Cooke, 2021c*)

2021**16 Dec****First Omicron case detected in New Zealand**

Whole genome sequencing detects New Zealand's first case of the Omicron variant in a recent international arrival who tested positive in a day 0/1 test at a Christchurch managed isolation facility. The case arrived in Auckland from Germany via Dubai on 10 December 2021 and flew to MIQ in Christchurch on an aircraft chartered for international arrivals. After testing positive, they are moved from the Crowne Plaza managed isolation facility to the Sudima Christchurch Airport dual-use managed isolation and quarantine facility. The case is fully vaccinated with two doses of the Pfizer vaccine. Director-General of Health Dr Ashley Bloomfield says that while the arrival of a new variant is concerning, New Zealand is well placed to manage Omicron cases (first detected in Botswana and South Africa, in late November 2021).

(*Katella, 2023; MOH, 2021kk*)

2021**16 Dec****Vaccination levels reach 90%**

The Government reports that 90% of people are fully vaccinated (two doses) and 94% have received one dose.

(*Hipkins, 2021i*)

2021**21 Dec****Government announces extension of MIQ stay**

From 11:59 pm on 23 December 2021, all stays in MIQ will be extended to ten days. This replaces the seven-day stay in MIQ followed by self-isolation at home for three days. These changes are in response to the Omicron variant.

(*New Zealand Government, 2021m*)

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2022

3 Feb



Government announces a five-step plan for travellers to enter New Zealand without MIQ

Each step of the five-step plan allows a particular group/s to enter New Zealand and self-isolate upon entry. Self-isolation is only available for fully vaccinated travellers and MIQ will remain for unvaccinated travellers. Step one (from 11:59 pm on 27 February 2022) will open the border to New Zealand citizens and residents travelling to New Zealand from Australia. Step two (from 11:59 pm on 13 March 2022) will allow New Zealand citizens and residents (as well as their partners and dependants), skilled workers, and travellers on a working holiday scheme, from anywhere in the world. Step three (from 11:59 pm on 12 April 2022) will allow current temporary work and student visa holders with a valid visa who can still meet their visa requirements, and up to 5000 international students for semester two. Step four (from July 2022) will allow all travellers from Australia, visitors from countries who do not need a visa, visitors from other countries who already hold a valid visitor visa, and travellers arriving under the Accredited Employer Work Visa categories. Step five (from October 2022) will allow all visa categories to reopen, including visitor and student visas.

(MBIE, 2022c; New Zealand Government, 2022d; 2022e)

2022

3 Feb



New face mask rules

In response to the rapid spread of Omicron new face mask rules are announced. They must be worn in all public spaces, and must not be T-shirts or scarves.

(New Zealand Government, 2022f)

P. **2022**

4 Feb



Canterbury University announces updated vaccine requirements

From 21 February 2022, all staff, students and visitors will be required to be fully vaccinated to enter Canterbury University campuses. Previously Canterbury had the least extensive university vaccine policy. The decision to implement the mandate was made after a risk assessment and consultation with staff and students; 83% of staff and 73% of student respondents supported the proposed policy.

(UC, 2021; 2022)

2022

7 Feb



COVID-19 enters school communities across New Zealand

On 7 February 2022, 188 new community cases of COVID-19 are identified, the seven-day rolling average of community cases is 170, and 14 cases are in hospital. Within the week, schools in Hamilton, Havelock North, Auckland, Dunedin, Wellington and Martinborough report cases of students and staff contracting COVID-19.

(Johnston, 2022; MOH, 2022c; ODT, 2022)

2022

24 Mar



IPCA to conduct review of policing of the occupation and protest at Parliament

The Independent Police Conduct Authority (IPCA) announces an independent review of the policing of the protest. It aims to provide the public, police, and other key stakeholders with an independent assessment of the ‘information Police had, the decisions Police took, the tactics used, and whether the approach taken to policing the Protest as it evolved was lawful, proportionate, and appropriate’. The expected report date is 31 March 2023.

(IPCA, 2022)

2022

25 Mar



Traffic light system settings change announced

All outdoor gathering limits are removed from the traffic light system, and indoor gathering limits increase from a maximum of 100 to 200 under the Red light setting. QR codes are no longer used to contact trace, with the exception of high-risk environments like aged care facilities or residential facilities for the vulnerable.

(RNZ, 2022i)

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2022

4 Apr



Vaccine mandates narrowed

At 11:59 pm, government vaccine mandates are removed for police, Defence Force staff, education and those covered by My Vaccine Pass.

The mandate remains in place for health and care workers, prison staff, and border workers. Workers still covered by the mandate include those who come into close contact with people who are likely to get seriously ill if they get COVID-19. Border workers, including those at MIQ, airports and maritime ports, must be vaccinated because they are likely to be exposed to new variants. Vaccines may still be mandated for certain roles within the police, Defence Force and Fire and Emergency if they work in an environment where vaccines are required, such as alongside paramedics or other health workers. Vaccine passes will no longer be required. On 30 March 2022, WorkSafe New Zealand issued guidance for employers stating that employer vaccination requirements should be used carefully, based on public health advice, and are not a suitable first response for managing COVID-19 in most workplaces. Employees who lost their jobs due to a requirement to get vaccinated will not have a right to get their job back.

(Employment New Zealand, 2022; Hipkins, 2022c; New Zealand Government, 2022p; NZ Herald, 2022f; WorkSafe New Zealand, 2022)

2022

7 Apr



Booster dose of Pfizer vaccine available for 16–17-year-olds

Following Medsafe’s provisional approval, young people aged 16 and 17 can receive a free booster dose of the Pfizer vaccine at least six months after completing their primary course. The booster is particularly recommended for those at higher risk of severe COVID-19 symptoms and hospitalisation. This includes those who are immunocompromised or living with an immunocompromised family member, and Māori and Pacific youth.

(Hipkins, 2022d)

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2022**Vaccine mandate for border and corrections is removed****2 Jul**

COVID-19 Response Minister Dr Ayesha Verrall announced on 28 June 2022 that the requirement for border workers and Corrections staff to be fully vaccinated would end on 2 July 2022 (as of 23 June 2022, 100% of Corrections staff in prisons and 97% of active border workers were fully vaccinated). The Vaccination Order remains in place for health and disability workers. From 7 July 2022, vaccine mandates end for some workers in the Defence Force, Fire and Emergency, and Police.

(New Zealand Government, 2022a; Verrall, 2022d)

2022**Medical certificate to prove employee tested positive no longer required****4 Jul**

As a result of winter illnesses putting pressure on primary care providers, MOH text messages are deemed reliable evidence of a COVID-19 infection. The MOH advises that employers can accept a text message sent to an employee (or their household contact) as evidence of testing positive for COVID-19 rather than a traditional GP medical certificate.

(New Zealand Government, 2022q)

2022**Experts suggest second wave of Omicron is starting****5 Jul**

A total of 9629 community cases are reported and various experts state that the next wave is starting, and some suggest reinstating previous COVID-19 protocols, such as moving to the Red traffic light setting.

(Daalder, 2022c; MOH, 2022s)

2022**Additional measures introduced for winter****14 Jul**

Due to increased Omicron cases and record levels of flu, COVID-19 Response Minister Ayesha Verrall announces expanded eligibility for antivirals; that COVID-19 medicines will be available in pharmacies (without the need for a prescription); a significant expansion of free access to RATs and masks; that schools will be provided with mask supplies and more support for ventilation and winter heating costs; and that a second COVID-19 booster is available to those over 50 years old.

(Verrall, 2022e)

2022**Emergent Omicron subvariant detected in community****19 Jul**

Two community cases of Omicron subvariant BA.2.75 are detected for the first time. Both cases are located in Auckland and are linked to known imported cases. This is in addition to the six BA.2.75 cases previously reported on 1 July 2022, which were associated with recent travel overseas.

(MOH, 2022t)

2022**DPMC's review of traffic light settings presented to Cabinet****22 Jul**

DPMC presents *COVID-19 Protection Framework: Review of the settings under Orange and Red* to Cabinet. The review acknowledges MOH's concerns that the Red setting was not significantly reducing the burden on the health system, as it was established prior to widespread community transmission.

(DPMC, 2022b; 2022c)

2022
25 Jul



National death toll exceeds 2000, and change to reporting of COVID-19-related deaths

The national COVID-19 death toll reaches 2006. In addition, there are currently 836 COVID-19 cases in hospital (169 of which are in Christchurch Hospital – its highest number since the pandemic began). The following day, MOH revises the definition of COVID-19 deaths from deaths within 28 days of testing positive for COVID-19 to deaths attributed to COVID-19.

(MOH, 2022u; 2022v; RNZ, 2022n)

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2022
31 Jul



Border reopens and 2021 Resident Visa applications close

Minister of Immigration Hon Stuart Nash announces that at 11:59 pm the international border opens to all visitors and students. This is hoped to bring significant economic contributions. On 31 July 2022, applications for the 2021 Resident Visa close. The temporary one-off work visa was established by the previous Minister of Immigration Hon Kris Faafoi on 30 September 2021.

(Faafoi, 2021; Nash & Wood, 2022; New Zealand Immigration, n.d.)

2022
9 Aug



Traffic light system settings to continue

Hospitalisations are still high due to winter and the health system is still pressured. This setting will be reviewed in September 2022.

(New Zealand Government, 2022r)

2022
16 Aug



Court concludes that COVID-19 Protection Framework was lawful

Two churches separately claimed the COVID-19 vaccination restrictions were a breach of the human right to practise religion. The judge determined that while their rights were restricted, it was justified.

(Orewa Community Church v Minister for Covid-19 Response [2022])

2022
17 Aug



Omicron cases lower than expected

COVID-19 cases from the second wave have already peaked and overall cases and hospitalisations are tracking lower than expected. 496 people are in hospital and 13 in a high dependency unit.

(New Zealand Government, 2022s; RNZ, 2022o)

2022
25 Aug



New clinical code for Long COVID

The MOH updates its clinical codes for patients with ‘ongoing symptomatic COVID-19’ and ‘Post COVID-19 Syndrome’. These new definitions will enable the Ministry to better track those impacted, including the people most vulnerable to its effects. Jenene Crossan, Long COVID patient and advocate, shared her observations at a University of Otago symposium on Long COVID on 25 May 2022: ‘For a long time there, as the daily 1pm pressers were held by the ministry, we would hear that little word [recovered] used to describe those who were no longer infectious. It became an affront [sic] over time, nine little letters causing great upset amongst my peers ... It didn’t make room for what our experience was, it was the beginning of what for many felt like years of gas lighting. It left no room or made no space for those who simply hadn’t done what was being suggested. We had not recovered.’

(Daalder, 2022d; MOH, 2022w; University of Otago, 2022)