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Isolation period reduced from 10 to 7 days; third vaccine becomes available

HON CHRIS HIPKINS(/MINISTER/HON-CHRIS-HIPKINS)

COVID-19 Response (/portfolio/labour-2020-2023/covid-19-response)

- COVID-19 cases and household contacts to isolate for a week
- Two negative rapid antigen tests required for household contacts
- 250,000 Novavax vaccines here, people can book from tomorrow

The isolation period for COVID-19 cases and their household contacts will be reduced from 10 to seven days, Minister for COVID-19 Response Chris Hipkins announced today.

"We remain committed to reducing the spread of Omicron to protect our health system and each other. However high case numbers and household contacts, and the current 10 day isolation requirement, is having a wider impact on many parts of our lives," Chris Hipkins said.

"There needs to be a balance between effectively controlling the outbreak and the flow-on effect for business and essential goods and services such as transport and food supply.

"The most up to date public health advice is that there is a decline in infectiousness of Omicron over time, and that in most cases transmission occurs within seven days.

"Our primary objective is to stop the chain of transmission as much as possible to manage the spread of Omicron. Seven days isolation will break the vast majority of potential transmissions, while ensuring people can get back to work quicker and therefore reducing the impact on business operations."

The change will come into effect from 11:59pm Friday 11 March.

Household contacts will need to have a rapid antigen test at day 3 and day 7 of their isolation period. If they become symptomatic they should also get a test, and if the result is positive, they are required to isolate for seven days from that point.

If a person is isolating and still has symptoms after seven days, they are advised to stay home until 24 hours after symptoms resolve.

"I urge everyone to make sure they report their rapid antigen test result on My Covid Record, even if it is negative, so we can understand transmission within households and how the outbreak is spreading through communities," Chris Hipkins said.

"The reduction in the isolation period follows similar changes overseas and increasing evidence that people are most likely to transmit the virus earlier in their infectious period. This evidence also shows that the risk of reinfection within the first three months after someone has Omicron is very low.

"For this reason, recovered cases will no longer need to self-isolate if they become a household contact within 90 days after having the virus. This is an increase from the current 28 days.

"Under the Red setting of the COVID-19 Protection Framework there are additional public health measures in place that reduce the risk of onwards infection. These include limits on the sizes of gatherings, wearing face masks and physically distancing. I urge people to follow these guidelines to continue to protect our vulnerable friends and whānau," Chris Hipkins said.

Novavax available to book from tomorrow

"New Zealanders awaiting the arrival of Novavax to get vaccinated against COVID-19 will be able to make an appointment online or by phone from tomorrow," Chris Hipkins said.

"A shipment of more than 250,000 Novavax COVID-19 vaccines (Nuvaxovid) has arrived in New Zealand and preparations are well advanced for some vaccination centres to be able to offer it next week.

"Novavax will be available for people aged over 18. It requires two doses, with a three week gap. It has not been approved as a booster dose.

"While the Pfizer vaccine remains the preferred COVID-19 vaccine in New Zealand, Novavax is now available for those people who would prefer, or require, an alternative," Chris Hipkins said.

People are able to book a Novavax vaccine through BookMyVaccine.nz or by calling Healthline from Thursday 10 March, with the first vaccine appointments available at a limited number of sites from Monday 14 March. For more information: https://www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccines-getting-novavax (https://www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccines-getting-novavax)