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Govt strengthens COVID-19 preparedness



HON DR SHANE RETI(/MINISTER/HON-DR-SHANE-RETI)

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Health Minister Dr Shane Reti says additional supplies of COVID-19 rapid antigen tests (RATs) will enable New Zealanders to continue testing this winter.

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“In January, we announced an extension of public access to free RATs until the end of June,” Dr Reti says.

“I’m pleased to confirm that Health New Zealand will purchase a further 9.25 million RATs which will now see free public access to RATs continue until 30 September 2024.

“RAT testing is still an important method to support eligible people to access antiviral medications and reduce the impact of COVID-19 on hospital admission rates.

“Many other countries have ceased the distribution of free RATs, however this approach ensures New Zealand has a good supply of tests available through to the end of winter.”

Costs for the purchase of the new RATS are being met using existing funding for COVID-19 services.

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“With a recent spike in case numbers, the Government remains focused on ensuring New Zealanders stay safe this winter and funding confirmed through the Budget helps provide that assurance,” says Dr Reti.

Health New Zealand received \$231.152 million over four years from a Budget 2024 allocation to support ongoing COVID-19 preparedness, with \$192.912 million for delivery of vaccines and PCR processing.

“Our Government is committed to ensuring on-going timely access to COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics for people who are at greater risk of serious illness.

“COVID-19 vaccines are free for everyone aged 5 and over. They are also available to tamariki from 6 months who are at greater risk of severe illness if they were to get COVID-19. COVID-19 antivirals also remain free and available for people with a higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

“Additionally, this Budget provides an allocation of \$38.240 million to maintain pandemic surveillance, such as wastewater testing and whole genome sequencing.

“With this range of measures, New Zealanders can feel confident that the Government continues to support them in keeping safe from COVID-19,” Dr Reti says.



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