



Omicron Preparedness: Some key things to think about for Social Service Providers 02 February 2022

Background

Omicron, the highly transmissible variant of COVID-19 is now in the community in many places around the motu and the whole of New Zealand is at the Red Light Setting under the COVID-19 Protection Framework. On 26 January, [the Government announced a three phase Omicron plan](#). Modelling shows that the Omicron outbreak is likely to peak through February-April in Aotearoa. It's important that social service providers, like any service-based organisations and businesses, get prepared for the potential impact of Omicron. SSPA has put together a few suggestions below of things that social service providers can be thinking about now, to get prepared.

Please note: This is not intended to be definitive or exhaustive guidance. It is provided as a suggested start place to assist SSPA members and social service providers in their preparedness planning. **All social service providers are strongly encouraged to continue to keep a watching brief for all official guidance from Government over the coming weeks in relation to Omicron, and to take steps to implement all official advice and guidance.**

Some things you can do now to get prepared:

Your kaimahi

Planning for how Omicron might impact your staff, and taking steps to minimise Omicron transmission is important. Things to think about in relation to your kaimahi:

1. *Planning for potential Omicron transmission or the need to self-isolate:* If staff become unwell or need to isolate, they may need to be off work for a considerable amount of time. Make sure your plans for working from home are in place and ready to activate if necessary. Think about the impacts for the whānau of staff, too.
2. *Working from home where appropriate:* Under the Red Light setting, it may be appropriate for some of your kaimahi to be working from home, to reduce risk of transmission.
3. *Scanning in, physically distancing, wearing masks:* Encourage your staff to scan in on the COVID-19 tracer app wherever appropriate in the course of their work, and observe physical distance. Alongside vaccination, masks are proven to give some of the best protection against Omicron transmission. So make sure staff know they are welcome and encouraged to wear masks at and in the course of their mahi.

4. *Vaccination:* Encouraging staff to get boosted when they are eligible, and supporting them to do this during work time where necessary.
5. *Holistic hauora:* The uncertainty and stress of the pandemic will have a different impact on individuals and their whānau. Make sure that you proactively let your kaimahi know that there is holistic hauora support available to them, and how to access this. Maintain open communication about wellbeing – including mental health.

Take some time to familiarise yourself with the information [here](#) about workplaces at the Red Light setting. You can find the COVID-19 Protection Framework Guidance for Social Service Providers [here](#). Remember, all the latest provider newsletters from MSD can be read [here](#).

Your services

Under the Red Light setting, businesses and workplaces keep running, but you might need to make some changes to how you deliver your services, to reduce risk of Omicron transmission. Some changes might be needed to be prepared to be able to keep delivering your services to children, rangatahi, families and whānau.

1. *Have a plan for service continuity:* Now is a good time to make sure you have a business continuity and contingency plan in place. If you already have one, review and update it in light of Omicron, to be prepared and plan ahead. There is some really helpful information on business.govt.nz [here](#) about planning for Omicron.
2. *Consider running a dual roster/two team approach:* Splitting your workforce onto a dual roster or two team approach may be appropriate, to prevent a situation where a large number/proportion of staff have to isolate at the same time.
3. *Check your PPE stocks:* Check to make sure you have the PPE you need, and ensure staff are trained to use this (see the MSD guidance [here](#)).
4. *Non-essential travel:* Take a look at any travel plans for moving around the country, and see if non-essential travel can be postponed.

Your communities

It's likely that all communities around Aotearoa will be impacted by Omicron. Social service providers have had an incredible positive impact in their communities throughout Aotearoa during the pandemic, and communities will continue to seek support from providers during Omicron.

1. *Make sure the children, rangatahi, families and whānau you work with know how you'll be there for them during Omicron:* Let them know that you are planning for the impact of Omicron, and if there will be any changes to how they will access/experience your services.