



Updated: 4 September, 2021

COVID-19 DELTA Variant - advice for cancer patients, their whānau, household members and supporters/kai manaaki.

Kia ora e te whānau,

We understand you and your whānau may feel unsettled by the news we have COVID-19 Delta variant cases in Aotearoa.

Changes to our alert levels across the motu can make the waka feel a bit unsteady. It is OK to be worried, but please know that cancer treatment and services are prepared and will continue delivering essential cancer services.

This is a comprehensive resource to help you navigate your cancer journey during this pandemic.

This resource includes advice for the following:

1. What is COVID-19 (Coronavirus) and why is it so serious
2. What is the DELTA variant and why is it different?
3. What are the symptoms
4. Ngā tikanga haumaruru - how to keep everyone well at this time
5. What does lockdown mean for your cancer care?
6. The COVID vaccination
7. What to do if you feel unwell with flu like symptoms
8. What to do if you feel unwell with other symptoms
9. What to do if you have cancer and someone in your whare is unwell
10. What to do if you need to go out
11. Looking after your wairua and hinengaro

1. What is COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS) and WHY is it so serious?

COVID-19 is a new virus that belongs to the coronavirus whānau. COVID-19 is serious because our body and immune system have never been exposed to it before. For most whānau, their body and immune system will be able to cope. But for some, infection with the COVID-19 virus could cause a severe illness. If your body's immune system has been weakened by cancer or cancer treatment (current and past) the risk of you having a serious infection is higher. It is important for whānau living with cancer to take extra care to stay well and prevent getting infected with COVID-19.

2. What is the DELTA variant and what makes this different?

COVID-19 has mutated over time as it adapts to humans, leading to the development of new variants of the virus. One of these new variants, the Delta variant, is swiftly becoming the dominant variant around the world.

It is the most transmissible variant, spreading a lot more easily than the original version of the COVID-19 virus and other variants.

How Delta is different from earlier variants

There are numerous differences with Delta. These differences mean that the Delta variant is a greater threat to the health of individuals who contract the infection and a greater challenge to contain the spread of the virus in an outbreak. For example:

- Delta can cause people to develop more serious COVID-19 illness than other variants of the virus
- People with a Delta infection are at higher risk of needing hospitalisation.
- The chance of infecting others such as within your household or other contacts is very high because Delta is so transmissible. It is estimated that on average, one person infected with Delta may infect 5 or 6 other people. This is how Delta outbreaks in places overseas have grown so rapidly.
- People with Delta infections seem to carry much more virus (have a higher viral load) and for a longer period of time than those infected with the original virus or other variants.

- The time from exposure to the virus until first symptoms is shorter for the Delta variant. Some people may have no symptoms (asymptomatic) when infectious.

3. What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can range from having none at all, to having a cough, high temperature, shortness of breath, loss of smell and body aches. People don't know if they have the virus until they get symptoms and are tested.

The symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- **Coughing**
- **Sore throat**
- **Shortness of breath**
- **Headache**
- **Loss of smell**
- **Feeling tired and having sore muscles**
- **Fever** - You may feel flushed and hot, or get hot and cold sweats (If you are taking your temperature at home, a fever is over 37.6 degrees celsius)

If you or a whānau member have symptoms or think you could have been exposed to the virus phone your doctor, the healthline team on 0800-358-5453 or your healthcare provider.

If you are experiencing symptoms and have a scheduled treatment appointment - call ahead and let them know. You will be advised of what action to take at that point.

4. Ngā tikanga haumaruru - how to keep everyone well

Keeping your bubble small, staying home, keeping a safe distance from others, washing your hands regularly and no hongis, kihi and awhi will be more important than ever.

This is especially important if you share a bubble with whānau who are essential workers and leave the whare frequently. It will seem unusual at first however it is the best way to keep you safe.

It is also important to remember that you don't always know if you have the virus. Whānau can feel well and still be spreading the virus. That is why it is important for everyone in your whare to follow these 5 basic steps of infection prevention.

Wash hands with soap for 20 seconds and then dry hands thoroughly. Repeat often,

- especially before eating or handling kai
- after using the wharepaku
- after touching your face, mouth or nose
- after coughing or sneezing
- after blowing your nose
- after wiping children's noses
- after caring for sick people

Refrain from touching your eyes, nose or mouth

Keep at least 2 metres away from other people. This is going to feel really abnormal and unnatural. Please remember this is one of the key ways to stop infection spread in your whānau and it will not be this way forever.

Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects, such as doorknobs, rails and phones and don't share towels, hand towels, cutlery and cups.

Ventilate your whare often, open up windows and let fresh air in.

5. What does COVID-19 lockdown mean for your cancer care?

Hospital appointments

Cancer care centres and hospitals are working hard to try and keep cancer services running. To do this some of the tikanga for appointments and

treatments may change. Some appointments will continue to be kanohi ki te kanohi and some will be over the phone or online.

Key tips:

- Continue to attend your appointments, your cancer care team will contact you to let you know when and where your appointments are.
- If you are being supported by kaiawhina or community providers keep them updated with any changes to your appointments or treatments.
- If you have any difficulties with transport or accommodation, ask your cancer care team what support is available
- When travelling take your ID, a copy of your appointment letter or ask your cancer care team to send confirmation to your phone

Medications

- Carry on taking your cancer medicines. Your cancer care team will contact you if there are any changes to your treatment plan.
- Your specialist can fax or scan a prescription for medication to a pharmacy and you can pick it up from there.

Blood tests

There may be changes to where and how you get your blood tests

- Ask your cancer care team where to go for blood tests.
- Your cancer care team will let you know if you can have less blood tests.

6. The Covid vaccination:

The COVID vaccination is now available for most people in Aotearoa. Ask your cancer care team or cancer specialist when is the best time to get the vaccination. Key points:

- Cancer patients should get the COVID vaccine
- Everyone in your mirumiru should get the COVID vaccine

For up-to-date information about the vaccine and cancer patients go to:
<https://teaho.govt.nz/cancer/covid19>

7. What to do if you have cancer or a low immune system and feel unwell with flu symptoms

If you have a COVID symptoms like a temperature, cough, breathlessness

- Call your cancer care team, your GP or Healthline.
- PLEASE do not go straight to your GP or hospital – RING FIRST.

8. What to do if you have cancer and feel unwell with other symptoms

You may still become unwell with an illness that is not related to Coronavirus

- Call your cancer care team, your GP or Healthline.
- Call 111 if you are experiencing chest pain, abdominal (puku) pain, severe or abnormal bleeding or stroke symptoms.

9. What to do if you have cancer and someone in your whare is unwell

If members of your household become unwell with a cough, fever or breathlessness

- ring your cancer care team or the healthline as soon as possible. They will advise you what to do next.
- In the meantime, the sick person should stay isolated away from the main living areas to limit the possibility of infecting others in the household
- if others in your whare want to clean your room, ask them to wear a mask, and gloves and wash their hands for 20 seconds before and afterwards.
- Carry on following the **5 basic infection prevention steps above.**

10. What to do if you need to go out of the whare

Staying at home as much as possible is best. However, if you need to leave your whare for work, to go to the supermarket, service station or pharmacy and no one else can do this for you, to keep yourself safe, you should:

- Always wear a mask
- Wash your hands before you go
- Keep a safe distance (at least 2 metres) from others at all times
- Avoid touching surfaces and your face while you are out.
- Use sanitiser and wash hands if possible while you are out and then wash your hands when you get home

11. Tiaki wairua, Tiaki hinengaro

Whilst staying at home is best for you, we also know that this can sometimes cause anxiety or stress. Caring for your wairua and hinengaro will be important going forward. If your mauri is low and you feel anxious, stressed out and need someone else to talk to free call or text 1737 which is available 24 hours a day.

Other tips for maintaining mauri ora are listening to or composing waiata, having regular karakia, skypeing and keeping in touch with whānau, journalling, doing mahi toi or raranga.

Hei Āhuru Mōwai is committed to providing Māori cancer leadership in Aotearoa and we hope you have found this information useful. If there be any further changes we will update our website accordingly.

For any further general advice please go to: www.heiahurumowai.org.nz, www.teaho.govt.nz or <https://covid19.govt.nz>

