

Communicating Health Advice

Guidance and support for team leaders and managers

Tena koutou katoa colleagues,

The world is still learning and adjusting with the COVID-19 virus and its variations. The Omicron variant is now set disrupts our lives for a little longer.

We have learnt a lot and have good systems in place; being assured by our experience of case tracing, scanning protocols, the use of face masks, social distancing and the successful uptake of vaccines and now boosters. We have had extensive advice and updates provided by the Ministry of Health (MOH) and we have pivoted to a less restrictive protection framework or 'traffic light system'.

Best available advice is that if someone feels unwell with cold/ flu-like symptoms, or if they have potentially been exposed to the virus, that they should contact Healthline (0800 611 116), go and get tested through our many covid testing sites or if visiting their GP, they should call ahead first.

The virus is most likely to spread from person to person through:

direct contact with a person while they are infectious

contact with air molecules from an infectious person.

We are still asked to protect ourselves and limit the spread of disease, through good hygiene practices and self-isolating where applicable. Everyone is encouraged to plan ahead to ensure that if they can't go out, that someone else can get the all important basics.

Staff will be experiencing the news of the spread of the disease in varying ways depending on the quality of the information being heard and discussed, past experiences and personalities. It important to ensure that the facts are being used when communications are being presented so as not to heighten alarm.

The Role of the Manager

A response from the workplace in delivering messages is an important and necessary process for any employee(s). How your organisation responds to potential risk and threat will affect the way your employees will gauge their own work safety and their personal options should the virus spread rapidly in New Zealand. Ignoring potential risk will not comfort staff. Clear and consistent information on your protocols over a definite period of time will instil confidence.

Asking how staff are doing is helpful and sending clear messages about it being ok to seek help will make a difference.

Your key role or job as a manager is to create an environment where work can safely progress as your employees consider the practicalities of the plans that you have signalled would be put in place.

Your warmth, support and professionalism can set an example that will last long after the threat is passed and is one of the most conducive elements to supporting the wellbeing of your team.

Tips for managers at the worksite

- Keep yourself informed through the MOH website – the site is being updated on a regular basis <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-novel-coronavirus-health-advice-general-public> and keep the Healthline number available for staff – 0800 611 116
- Be visible (even if virtual) in the workplace – where appropriate. Let your presence be known and seen. Talk with the staff. One of the biggest factors



when *life* works better,
business works better

Pai ake te oranga, pai ake te pakihī

If you need some support or are feeling overwhelmed by anxiety you can contact a Vitae Clinician by phoning 0508 664 981 or email The Vitae Team

to helping a workplace prepare for possible risk is to demonstrate that they understand the employees may be affected and the implications if this is so. Acknowledgment and expression of this awareness along with a well thought-through plan significantly reduces the chance of further distress over time. It matters that “the company cares” about the employee as a person.

- Let your staff know that you know their work may still be affected. Ask what they need.
- Be tolerant of a wide range of individual responses among the employees.
- Be family/whanau focussed in your approach with your team. Many with young children or with elderly parents they support will be concerned about how they might manage possible isolation and whether they have sufficient affordable supplies should this be required.
- Access Vitae’s Manager helpline service - Ring and talk to us if you have concerns and want some guidance – you do not have to work out scenarios/situations in isolation and we are available 24/7 just ring in and ask for the manager/duty manager
- Keep a staff contact list with you with different means of communication - Ensure that you can contact your people

Sharing information with your team / employees

Employees will have many questions and they need answers. As more information develops about the spread of the disease and its likely impact, you will be able to refine your thinking. It is important to continue to provide updates of information to the workforce. Best practice is to communicate that you will provide updated information and include how and when. Review your usual methods of communication – what worked before may not be what is needed at the moment.

In summary

- Take care of your own people first within your organisation.
- Send clear messages backed up by reliable information to alleviate unnecessary panic, as well as your possible contingency plans
- Modify office rules and procedures to ensure adaptability if needed
- Give staff information about how you might approach working remotely where possible, reminding them of what might happen if people feel unwell and have the need to self-isolate or when a return to work if possible, and give information about pay/wages/ financial support for those who may not be at work
- Take steps to maintain a workplace with healthy hygiene habits
- Support staff with children and significant others to have contingency plans in place
- Make it clear that this is a difficult period, and it’s okay to share feelings of anxiety or frustration when we don’t know all the information.
- Acknowledge the value of accessing support services including professional counselling and encourage your employees to get whatever help they need.
- Provide opportunities for employees to talk about their concerns.
- Take steps to reduce unnecessary stress. Provide information on how your team can access support by ringing in themselves to us at Vitae on 0508 664 981 24/7 or Healthline on 0800 611 116 if they have concern about their physical wellbeing.
- Don’t underestimate the impact of stress on yourself as an individual. Take care of yourself and your family too
- Contact Vitae for further material such as wallet cards and pamphlets
- Update your intranet with information on how to access support

Sincerely,

Vitae colleagues



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