

Close Contact Exemption Scheme

From tomorrow, workers at registered critical services who are vaccinated and asymptomatic close contacts of a COVID-19 case will be able to continue to work, provided they return a negative rapid antigen test prior to each day/ shift they are at work during the isolation period, and follow specific health protocols. They will only be allowed to go to work, not anywhere else.

Businesses can self-assess whether they meet the criteria for being critical. If they deem they are, they can register online now.

Critical services included in the exemption scheme

Critical services include:

- Food production and its supply chain
- Key public services like health and emergency services
- Lifeline utilities such as power and water supplies
- Transport
- Critical financial services
- News media
- Social welfare
- Human and animal health and welfare

If the business considers they are critical, they can register a self-declaration online now, on the Close Contact Exemption Scheme Critical Services Register

at business.govt.nz. These declarations can be checked.

The business would be issued with a letter that will enable workers to either use Rapid Antigen Tests that their employer may hold, or collect them from a collection site.

How the exemption scheme works

If a business needed to use the scheme for a close contact worker to return to work, the business would provide that worker with the appropriate documentation they will need. The business would refer to the Ministry of Health website for the process for ordering, collecting and undertaking a Rapid Antigen Test.

Workers will get enough testing kits to cover the period they would have been isolating. Workers will be expected to remain in isolation outside of work hours.

As Rapid Antigen Tests are only 80% reliable, businesses should consider the following things before using the scheme:

- Can the worker work remotely?
- Does the worker have key skills, or are they needed onsite to maintain minimum operations/ capacity?
- Can the worker self-isolate or be in a 'bubble of one'?
- What other appropriate steps can be taken to limit the risk of transmission if a worker returns onsite?
- Can the Health and Safety Act requirements be met to maintain a safe operating environment in the workplace whilst there is a close contact onsite?
- Does the business have continuity plans in place for if a close contact worker tests positive and needs to isolate?

Close Contact Exemption Scheme (Continued)

Want to know more?

If you have any questions about the Close Contact Exemption Scheme, please contact our specialist [Employment Team](#).