

# Office of the Prime Minister

## Prime Minister

Minister for National Security and Intelligence

Minister for Child Poverty Reduction

Minister Responsible for Ministerial Services

Associate Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage



Micky Turner

By email: [fyi-request-16545-e2214f39@requests.fyi.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-16545-e2214f39@requests.fyi.org.nz)

Ref: PMO 2021-201

Dear Micky Turner

### **Official Information Act request for a copy of the contingency plans should Alert Level 4 fail to eliminate COVID-19 in the community**

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request, received on 28 August 2021. You requested:

*"Your Contingency Plan if lockdowns fail to eliminate Covid 19 in the community"*

We also received your follow up email on the 22 September 2021 requesting this OIA response is released to you urgently.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) and the Ministry of Health (MoH) have worked together to guide New Zealand's strategic response to the COVID-19 pandemic. On 12 August 2021, MoH published the "COVID-19: Elimination strategy for Aotearoa New Zealand". This document outlines the four health response pillars for responding to COVID-19 in New Zealand. The elimination strategy can be found on MoH's website ([health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-response-planning/covid-19-elimination-strategy-aotearoa-new-zealand](https://health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-response-planning/covid-19-elimination-strategy-aotearoa-new-zealand)).

As our response to COVID-19 has continued, there have been a number of key shifts in our understanding of the virus and its impacts, including:

- the emergence of new variants of concern with higher transmissibility;
- new evidence about COVID-19 transmission;
- a complex and changeable global situation, including new waves of infection;
- experience from community outbreaks in New Zealand;
- rollout of vaccines in New Zealand and internationally;
- commencement of Quarantine Free Travel with selected partners; and
- emerging evidence around vaccine effectiveness against new variants of concern.

In response to these changes, the Elimination Strategy's four pillars – 'keep it out', 'prepare for it', 'stamp it out', and 'manage the impact' - have been updated to ensure the strategy remains fit for purpose as our response has evolved. Public health measures, such as preventing movement or congregation in particular high-risk areas or businesses, remain important tools to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 whether COVID-19 is eradicated in the short-term.

When considering your request we interpreted your request to be seeking documents setting out alternatives to the 'stamp it out' pillar on our elimination strategy. The 'Stamp It Out' Pillar encompasses contact tracing and case management to eliminate COVID-19 as quickly and efficiently as possible from the community, and the **activation of higher Alert Levels to contain the spread of any incursion**. The key components are:

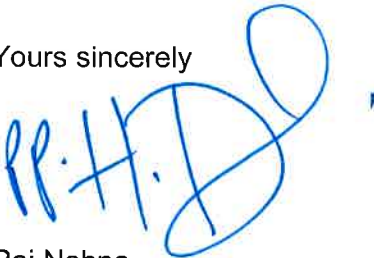
- robust case detection and surveillance allows us to identify new cases quickly and take appropriate action;
- a rapid investigation is undertaken with a confirmed case to identify where a person caught the infection and whom they may have passed it on to;
- genomic analysis is undertaken to link cases and help identify potential epidemiological connections;
- tracing identified people or businesses who may have been in contact to inform them of their possible exposure (e.g. close contacts or casual contacts), 'push' notifications such as reminders for app users and Bluetooth-enabled users;
- publication of locations of interest;
- a public health assessment contributes to a decision whether to move to a higher Alert Level, and where;
- quarantine of contacts and isolation of cases and testing;
- As part of case and contact management, measures are put in place to check in regularly on health, wellbeing and provide any additional support for confirmed case(s) and their close and casual contacts.

As the Director General of Health has stated "*the elimination approach focuses on a zero tolerance towards new cases, rather than a goal of no new cases.*" The 'stamp it out' framework the forms the basis of the elimination strategy is applicable in various scenarios, including COVID-19 remaining present in the community. In this sense to tools in the 'stamp it out' approach remain necessary whether a particular outbreak is eradicated.

Accordingly, we are refusing your request for the above documents under section 18(d) of the Act, as the information requested is publicly available. To the extent that you request documents containing strategies that do not sit within the 'stamp it out' framework your request is refused under section 18(e).

You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision under section 28(3) of the Act.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. Nahna', with a large, stylized flourish extending from the end of the signature.

Raj Nahna  
Chief of Staff