

16 December 2021

C142193

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Tēnā koe Alice

Thank you for your email of 1 October 2021, requesting information about COVID-19 Alert Level 2 restrictions in prisons and volunteer visits. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA). I apologise for the delay in responding to your request.

You requested:

- 1) *What restrictions are in place for non-Corrections staff running programmes in prison during COVID-19 Alert Level 2?*

Corrections' top priorities are safety and wellbeing – of the public, our staff, visitors to our sites and the people we are managing in prisons and the community. Since March 2020 we have put in place extensive plans to manage any risk to our staff or the people we manage and our wider communities. We have continued to refine these plans to do everything we can to keep people safe from COVID-19.

All prisons are currently operating with controls in place to minimise risks relating to the transmission of COVID-19. We are not prepared to take any risks with COVID-19 in our environment. As we have seen in prisons internationally, the impact can be devastating. We have a duty of care to the people we manage, and to our staff, and everything we have put in place to manage the threat of COVID-19 has been based on prioritising their safety and wellbeing.

The protocols in place for non-Corrections staff entering prisons in Alert Level 2 are designed to ensure the safety of staff and people in prison. Face-to-face individual rehabilitation and reintegration and contracted rehabilitation programmes resume under Alert Level 2 with strict controls, including physical distancing, staff and people in prison wearing PPE, hand hygiene being observed, and no attendance by any person with symptoms of COVID-19. Contracted providers must also adhere to entry and exit procedures such as thermal camera screening. They are advised of these health and safety protocols before entering the site.

These individuals are now covered by the mandatory vaccination requirements under the Public Health Response (Vaccinations) Order 2021, and must be fully vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine to enter prison.

*2) Please provide me with the total number of “approved volunteer” visits to prisons, per week, since January 1, 2019, broken down by prison. Please provide me with this information in an Excel spreadsheet file.*

Volunteers in prisons seek to engage in specified, unpaid activities for the benefit of people in prison, their whānau and the wider community. The primary function of volunteering is to meet the rehabilitative and re-integrative needs of people we manage to reduce reoffending. People in prison come from, and return to, communities. Volunteers play a key role in keeping those community links and relationships active to support them upon their return to their communities. Volunteering may be done individually or with volunteer groups and organisations.

The first spreadsheet within the attached Excel document provides the number of visits to prisons by approved volunteers between 31 December 2018 and 31 May 2020, broken down by prison and week.

The data is further broken down by type of volunteer:

- Kaiwhakamana - an authorised kaumātua, kuia or tohonga volunteer who has been endorsed by Iwi to support prisoners to understand their whakapapa and reconnect with their extended whānau.
- Fautua Pasefika - Pacific Community elders or leaders who have been given this mandate from other distinguished Pacific Community Leaders.
- Assistant Chaplain – Corrections supports people in prison to have access to religious and spiritual services through Chaplaincy services. Prison Chaplaincy Service of Aotearoa New Zealand (PCSANZ) is contracted by Corrections to provide religious and spiritual support to people in prison. The role of PCSANZ is to ensure pastoral care is available for people of all religious denominations, and beliefs.
- Volunteer – all other volunteers to prisons.

Corrections’ Authorised Provider Prison Entry (APPE) was an electronic system that recorded people entering and exiting prisons. APPE was active until 31 May 2020 and recorded the number of individuals entering prison, including approved volunteers. However, after this date APPE was replaced by Who’s on Location, which captures data in a different manner than APPE, and does not centrally record volunteer visits on a weekly basis, but rather on a monthly basis. Accordingly, the part of your request for the number of approved volunteer visits to prisons since 1 July 2020, broken down weekly, is declined under section 18(g) of the OIA, as the information requested is not held by Corrections, and we have no grounds for believing that it is held by another agency or more closely connected with the functions of another agency.

However, the second spreadsheet within the attached Excel document provides the number of visits to prisons by approved volunteers between July 2020 and October 2021 on a monthly basis, broken down by prison. This information is further broken down by whether the visit was by Kaiwhakamana, Fautua Pasefika or any other volunteer.

Not all sites register volunteer entries and exits in an electronic manner, with some prison sites use paper-based systems for visitor entry which is not captured in

Corrections' centralised system. Accordingly, the data provided does not accurately capture all visits to prisons by volunteers, but is provided to the best of Corrections' ability.

As you will appreciate, COVID-19 has impacted the number of volunteers entering prisons. During Alert Levels 3 and 4, prisons temporarily suspend volunteer visits in accordance with COVID-19 guidelines, therefore reducing the number of volunteer visits over the last two years.

The data provided from 1 July 2020 onwards does not reflect the number of Kaiwhakamana and Fautua Pasefika registered as active volunteers in Corrections' system. It only identifies the number of Kaiwhakamana and Fautua Pasefika who have visited since 1 July 2020 in those prisons that use electronic systems of recoding volunteers. As noted, during this time we have had a number of sites closed to visitors due to COVID-19, and a large number of Kaiwhakamana and Fautua Pasefika are elderly and have therefore not wanted to risk entering prisons during the periods that they have been accessible to visitors.

In line with Corrections' Hokai Rangi strategy, a review is being undertaken of our Kaiwhakamana Policy to help support, appropriately resource and treat respectfully Kaiwhakamana. The intended outcomes of the policy review include:

- We are able to recruit and retain those in the Kaiwhakamana role, due to the importance of the position;
- Kaiwhakamana having a more positive experience volunteering with Corrections;
- Kaiwhakamana will feel that Corrections values and respects Kaiwhakamana for what they do; and,
- Corrections staff see the value of the role and want to facilitate Kaiwhakamana visits to the best of their abilities.

Once the Kaiwhakamana Policy review has been implemented there is an intention to undertake a similar review of Fautua Pasefika.

Please note that this response may be published on Corrections' website. Typically, responses are published quarterly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

I trust the information provided is of assistance. Should you have any concerns with this response, I would encourage you to raise them with Corrections. Alternatively, you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Ngā mihi

PS  
  
L. Marsh on behalf  
of Rachel Leota.

Rachel Leota  
National Commissioner