

## FAQs on Essential Services

<https://covid19.govt.nz/government-actions/covid-19-alert-level/essential-businesses/>

### Questions for Employers

#### How are essential services defined?

Essential services are any the Government has decided can continue operating at their premises, under Alert Level 4. All essential services will still need to operate in a way that limits the risk of the spread and transmission of COVID-19.

If your business is on the essential services list:

- if your staff can work from home, they must.
- if they need to come to work so that you can carry out an essential service, you must ensure all appropriate measures are taken to minimise the transmission of COVID-19.
- you must only operate what is essential during the Alert Level 4 period.
- Businesses operating non-essential services must shut down their premises. These businesses can continue to operate with staff working from their own homes. If this is not possible, these businesses must close their operations.

What is considered an essential service may change over time. Some activities that are not essential now may become essential if New Zealand remains at alert level 4 for a sustained period.

If you are unsure if your business is an essential service, you can ring 0800 22 66 57 or email [essential@mbie.govt.nz](mailto:essential@mbie.govt.nz).

You can also contact the BusinessNZ family for advice at:

- Upper North Island (EMA): 0800 300 362
- Central Region (Business Central): 0800 800 362
- Canterbury Employers' Chamber of Commerce: 0800 50 50 96
- Otago Southland Employers' Association: 0508 656 757

#### How can businesses find out if they are essential?

A list of essential services is covered in guidance document 08 Essential Services

The list may be updated by the Government.

If you have any queries around essential services, you can get in touch with our team at 0800 22 66 57 or email [essential@mbie.govt.nz](mailto:essential@mbie.govt.nz).

#### **My business provides services or products to both essential and non-essential businesses, what do I do?**

If your business is part of the supply chain for essential businesses, it may continue to supply those critical products and services to essential businesses only.

You may continue to operate, as long as it is done in a way that limits public health risks by taking the following measures:

- minimise, or eliminate if possible, physical interactions amongst staff and with and between customers
- ensure appropriate health, hygiene and safety measures are in place
- restrict activity to only what is essential while we're at Alert Level 4.

### **Do I need to shut my business if it isn't on the list of essential services?**

Yes, at Alert Level 4, you must close your premises, but you may operate your business remotely (eg with workers working from home) if you are able to do so.

### **My business is an essential service – what do I need to do to keep people safe?**

If you provide an essential service, your business can continue to work from business premises at Alert Level 4, as long as the work is done in a way that limits or eliminates the risk of spreading COVID-19.

Businesses should:

- minimise, or eliminate if possible, physical interactions amongst staff and with and between customers
- ensure appropriate health, hygiene and safety measures are in place
- restrict activity to only what is essential during the Alert Level 4 period.

It is for an industry or business to decide how to best do this. We would expect practices to include the likes of:

- working from home as far as possible
- limiting, or eliminating if possible, physical interaction between staff, eg through physical distancing, split shifts, staggered meal breaks, and flexible working arrangements.
- limiting, or eliminating if possible, physical interaction with and between customers e.g. through online or phone orders, contactless delivery, or managed entry (while also avoiding crowding outside) and physical distancing both inside and outside the premises.
- hygiene basics of hand washing and sanitisers.
- frequent cleaning of premises, especially counters and EFTPOS terminals, and other high-touch surfaces (cleaning advice is available on the Ministry of Health website).
- protective equipment for staff as appropriate.

If you are unsure you are able to operate in a manner that minimises the risk of transmission of COVID-19, we ask you to close while you put in place appropriate measures.

There is guidance and advice on how to manage risks in your workplace on WorkSafe's website: <https://worksafe.govt.nz/managing-health-and-safety/managing-risks/how-to-manage-work-risks/>

### **What should I do if I think my business should be an essential service, but isn't on the list?**

There are designated lead government agencies in each sector who are responsible for deciding whether specific activities count as essential services. The list of essential services may be amended by government over time as our response to COVID-19 evolves.

If you think your business should be an essential service, ring 0800 22 66 57 or email [essential@mbie.govt.nz](mailto:essential@mbie.govt.nz).

### **Can I get accreditation for my essential business?**

There is not a formal accreditation for essential businesses or their employees.

If you wish, you as an employer can provide letters to your staff to detail the specific essential functions, they are undertaking with references to the essential services outlined above.

If you provide an essential service within the primary industries, including critical support goods and services, you are required you to register with the Ministry for Primary Industries and answer 11 questions about how you intend to stop any spread of COVID-19.

Businesses with 5 or fewer people (including the owner) working at each business site that can achieve physical distancing are exempt.

Primary sector businesses can contact MPI for more information at 0800 00 83 33 or [info@mpi.govt.nz](mailto:info@mpi.govt.nz) or visit the MPI website: <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/covid-19-essential-primary-sector-service-registration/>

### **What does the 'supply chain' mean?**

The 'supply chain' for a particular good or service refers to all the inputs and processes involved in its creation and distribution. When something is an essential service, this also includes critical components in its supply chain. For example, because food distribution is an essential service, this means the growing of food is also considered essential.

### **My business is a part of an essential supply chain. What is expected?**

If you are a business that is a part of a supply chain delivering an essential service, you must only provide critical products or services necessary to maintain the essential service while we're at Alert Level 4. You cannot operate other parts of your business during this time.

### **What are 'fast-moving consumer goods'?**

These are generally the kinds of things you buy at supermarkets. They are affordable, in high demand, and sold quickly.

These would typically include:

- food,
- beverages
- toiletries and personal care items
- cleaning products
- baby products, eg formula and nappies
- pet food
- over-the-counter medicines
- alcohol, tobacco and vaping products
- stationery.

### **Primary Industries Businesses Register for Safe Practice**

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A list of key essential services can be found on the MPI website:

## **Questions and answers for workers**

### **What does it mean if I work in an essential service?**

Each essential business needs to plan for how they continue their operations: they will need to meet appropriate public health measures or arrange for essential work to be done from home. You should work from home if you can, but your employer will tell you about the specific arrangements for your workplace.

### **I'm an essential worker – what do I need to do to keep safe?**

Workers need to take reasonable care of their own health and safety, and the health and safety of others, while working. This means following and cooperating with any reasonable health and safety instructions, policies and procedures that you're given, to stay safe and to make sure you don't risk the health and safety of others that you come in contact with through your work. Work with your employer to help develop any new ways of working that are needed to keep you and others safe.

### **What essential transport services can be used during Level 4?**

If you carry out work in the transport sector, you may have an exemption when travel is required for essential work or when essential work is being undertaken. At all other times, workers must avoid all non-essential travel and follow the guidance for Alert Level 4.

Public transport used to transport people working in essential services includes domestic aircraft, ferries, buses and trains.

Essential workers may be asked, while travelling, to show who they work for. We encourage essential workers to carry some form of identification to show who they are, who they work for, and their role e.g. business card, letter from their employer or work ID.

### **What do I do if I work for a business that is not an essential service but my employer requests I come into work?**

The government will work with businesses to make sure they are complying with the Alert Level 4 restrictions.

If a business chooses to ignore official advice and continues to trade, there will be actions taken to stop this.

If you are unsure if you should be working, you can contact your union or email [essential@mbie.govt.nz](mailto:essential@mbie.govt.nz).

### **What if I'm not sure whether I work in an essential service?**

In the first instance, contact your employer. If you are still unsure, you can email [essential@mbie.govt.nz](mailto:essential@mbie.govt.nz).

## **Questions and answers for consumers**

### **Can I still shop at my dairy?**

Yes, dairies can choose to stay open but must have a 'one in, one out' rule, and cannot sell food prepared on the premises.

### **Are food delivery services (eg subscription food boxes and takeaways) considered essential services?**

Takeaway operations and premises, as well as cooked food delivery services, must shut down at Alert Level 4. We cannot guarantee physical distancing in every kitchen or that everyone who works in a kitchen is well.

Meals on Wheels has been granted an exception to this restriction due to the social service it provides.

Subscription food boxes are considered an essential service.

Whole food delivery services (eg subscription food boxes) and supermarket delivery services can continue to operate but must use non-contact delivery measures ie online and phone orders and contactless delivery.

### **Can I still courier or post parcels and packages?**

You should only post or courier items that are essential to the provision of the necessities of life.

During this period, our postal and courier service will be busy helping our society receive items and goods that are essential. Adding additional pressure and burden to that service may impact on society's wider ability to get through this period, and to stop the virus in its tracks.

### **Will public transport continue to run? Will taxis and rideshare drivers continue to work?**

At Alert Level 4 there will likely be reduced public transport service levels. Public transport will be focused on allowing essential workers to travel between their homes and workplaces; and to allow the public to access food and medical care.

Taxis and rideshare drivers can continue to work at Alert Levels 3 and 4 but will need to meet the appropriate health measures. Similar to public transport, there will likely be reduced service levels.

If you have neighbours who are reliant on public transport to go to the supermarket, you could offer to do their grocery shopping (while taking all necessary health measures).

### **Is animal welfare covered?**

Yes. Veterinary and animal health/welfare services are essential services, and pet food is a fast-moving consumer good. Pet food is available at supermarkets and vets.

Travel to look after animals is allowed, as long as you take the necessary health measures, and comply with any region-specific travel measures.

### **Can I buy alcohol?**

Alcohol is available to be purchased in supermarkets, and Licensing Trust liquor stores (open liquor store premises in a Licensing Trust Areas can only operate with a one-in-one-out rule).

All other liquor stores must be closed to the public.

The online sale and contactless delivery of alcohol (including spirits) is permitted under the following conditions:

- You must hold an off license with an endorsement for remote sales under the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act. You must comply with requirements of your license
- The agreed quantity for spirits purchased must be no more than the customs/duty free allowance which is 3 bottles (or other containers) of spirits or liqueur (each bottle or container can hold a maximum of 1.125 litres) per order.

### **Why is alcohol considered essential?**

Closing all alcohol outlets could lead to people living in Licensing Trust Areas travelling outside of their communities to purchase alcohol. That would mean they are breaking self-isolation and impacting our ability to contain transmission.

### **Can I still go to hardware stores?**

Hardware stores will only be open to tradespeople, who need supplies in order to provide an essential service. They will not be open to the public.

### **Can I get a trade person to come and do essential maintenance at my house?**

Yes, if this is immediately essential to maintain the necessities of life or critical to safety. This includes electricians, plumbers and builders.

Read more at the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment's building and construction information page: <https://www.building.govt.nz/covid-19>

**Please note that this is general advice only and will vary for each specific situation. In addition, this continues to be an evolving situation. For specific and current advice relating to your unique situation, please get in touch with an expert from our employment team.**