

Service access

Key message bank

28th May 2025

This document provides key messages to inform and guide people on how to access healthcare services throughout the year. They are designed to be adaptable for a range of needs and to engage with different audiences and communities.

The aim is to provide the public with clear guidance on the appropriate pathways for accessing healthcare information and services. This is a “living document” and will be reviewed regularly.

Our focus is to help people by reminding them:

- Where to find support for themselves and their whānau from the right healthcare providers, when they need care
- To protect themselves and others by keeping up healthy habits
- To plan for colder months, including getting prescriptions in advance from their local pharmacy so they have enough medication to keep taking it as directed

Our key public-facing information channels to promote in our comms include:

- Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora Health Information and Services – info.health.nz
- Healthline – **0800 611 116** – info.health.nz/healthline
- General Practice, including services delivered over-the-phone or online – click [here](#) for phone or online appointments
- Ka Ora – **0800 252 672** – after-hours video and over-the-phone health service for rural communities – [Ka Ora Telecare](#)
- Urgent Care Clinics – click [here](#) for locations and details
- Healthpoint – <https://healthpoint.co.nz> – for a directory of local services and their operating hours
- [Book My Vaccine](#)

Overall key messages

- Health support is always available
- There are many ways to get help for your health, whatever the time of day or night, for you and your whānau

Key messages – service overview

If you feel sick:

1. **Stay home** to rest up and prevent spreading germs to others, drink lots of water and tell other people you are at home. For online advice go to info.health.nz and click on “I need health advice”.
2. **Call Healthline** the free over-the-phone health service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week – you can call Healthline on **0800 611 116** or request a call back by going to healthy.org.nz
3. Your **local pharmacy** can give you advice on medicines and common health problems like coughs and colds, they can recommend treatments, fill prescriptions, and some provide immunisations.
4. **Call your General Practice (GP)** to get support for you and your whānau from a doctor, nurse practitioner, nurse or another healthcare professional, depending on your need.
5. **Wear a mask**, if you can, when visiting health services to protect other people using the services.
6. Use **telehealth services**, including:
 - a. **Phone or video GP appointment**, a good option if you don't have or can't visit one. To find an online or over-the-phone appointment with a doctor visit [Online and Phone Doctor Appointments](#)
 - b. **Call Ka Ora**, an after-hours video and phone service for people in rural communities – call **0800 252 672** or book online – click [here](#)
7. For **mental wellbeing call/text 1737 Need to talk?** for free any time for support from a trained counsellor. Resources also available at 1737.org.nz
8. For urgent medical help call your GP to ask if an urgent appointment is available or go to a local **after-hours Medical Centre or Urgent Care Clinic**. A list of these is on [Healthpoint](#).
9. In the event of a **life-threatening emergency**:
 - a. Phone **111**
 - b. Or go to your nearest hospital emergency department (ED)

Key messages –service access

Healthline

Healthline is a free over-the-phone health service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week – you can call Healthline on **0800 611 116**.

If you are unsure about your health, or someone in your family is unwell, call Healthline and speak to an experienced nurse or paramedic for health advice and information about what to do next.

The team is happy to help, even with small concerns. Don't wait for things to get worse.

Call Healthline:

- If you are worried or unsure about your health or someone else's health
- For advice about your concern and what to do next
- If you do not have a General Practice or cannot get to one
- If you need advice about your medicine.

When you call:

- You can use your mobile to share images and video – to help the team help you
- You can choose to speak with a Māori clinician if calling between 8am and 8pm
- Interpreters are available if you would like to talk in your own language
- NZ Relay support is available for callers who are Deaf, hearing impaired, Deafblind or speech impaired.

If you don't need help or advice straight away, rather than calling Healthline, you can ask Healthline to call you. To do that, go to [healthy.org.nz](https://www.healthline.org.nz), click 'request a call back', enter a few details, and a Healthline nurse or paramedic will call you back.

Disability Helpline

- The Disability Helpline Team supports members of the disability community with help and information about vaccines, testing, managing COVID at home, and advice for any general health concerns
- Call **0800 11 12 13** or text **8988**
- A person with experience or knowledge of disability will answer your call from 8.30am–5.00pm Monday–Friday
- Outside these hours, calls are answered by a member of the Healthline team
- If you need assistance, you can access the Disability Helpline using the NZ Relay Service www.nzrelay.co.nz

Ka Ora rural telecare after-hours

Ka Ora is an after-hours video and over-the-phone service that supports the health of people living in or visiting rural communities.

You will be greeted by a Kaiāwhina or a Nurse, who will assess your health needs for free. You can then either see a clinician directly or you may also choose to schedule an appointment later in the evening.

All appointments are free for tamariki under 14 years old. If you are 14 years old or older and need to speak with a nurse practitioner or doctor, there will be a charge – details of these are on the [Ka Ora website](#)

You can speak with the Ka Ora service by calling **0800 252 672**.

Ka Ora is open:

- Weekdays overnight from 5pm – 8am
- Weekends and public holidays – 24 hours

Mental wellbeing throughout the year and where to get support

It is important to look after your health, wairua (spirit), hinengaro (mind), relationships, and overall wellbeing. Developing and maintaining routines or habits can help you now and into the future:

- There are simple things you can do daily to support your mental wellbeing:
 - Stay connected with friends, whānau and people in your community
 - Stick to a schedule or routine as best you can
 - Move your body daily by going for a walk or doing other exercise
 - Get outside and spend time in nature
 - Limit your time online and the amount of news you follow
 - Notice and appreciate small moments of joy

If you need support, helplines are available:

- 1737 Need to talk? **Call/text 1737** for free any time for support from a trained counsellor. Resources are available at [1737.org.nz](https://www.1737.org.nz)
- Youthline **0800 376 633**
- Visit depression.org.nz for help and support
- Visit www.thelowdown.co.nz for help and support for young people
- Alcohol Drug Helpline **0800 787 797**

- There are also free digital mental wellbeing apps you can download to help you and others you know to manage mental wellbeing, such as [Groov](#)
- **In the event of a life-threatening emergency:**
 - Phone **111**
 - Or go to your nearest hospital emergency department (ED)

Community pharmacy

At your local pharmacy you can get advice on medicines and common health issues like coughs and colds, bladder or eye infections, minor cuts and grazes, and emergency birth control. Pharmacies can recommend treatments, fill prescriptions, and some provide immunisations.

Some also offer blood pressure measurement and monitoring, blood glucose and blood cholesterol tests, that may come with a charge. Some pharmacies can provide COVID-19 antiviral medicines without a prescription – see [here](#) for a list.

If you're unwell, it is important to call first. They may be able to give you advice on the phone or organise a convenient and safe place, and a time for you to be seen. Some pharmacies can arrange for medicines to be delivered to your home.

When you arrive, please follow the pharmacy's directions, and if you have symptoms such as coughing, sneezing or a fever, please wear a mask, if you can.

If you have a long-term condition like diabetes, heart disease or a lung condition, pharmacies can help you manage your medicines, which is especially helpful if you take many different medicines.

Plan ahead so you don't run out of medicines. Organise prescriptions from your health professional and pharmacy in plenty of time to avoid this. If you run out of your medicines and cannot get a new prescription, in some cases your pharmacy can provide an emergency supply of up to three days. Talk to your pharmacist. There will be a charge for this.

Some pharmacies can help with other needs such as nicotine replacement therapy, incontinence, erectile dysfunction and disposal of unwanted medicines and needles. Charges may apply for some of these services.

You can also ask to talk to a pharmacist in private about a specific issue. Most have private consultation areas.

You pay a contribution to the cost of the medicines that have been prescribed for you – currently this is up to \$5 for most items. If your medicine is not fully subsidised, or from a private prescriber, you might have to pay more.

For details of pharmacies and the services they offer go to the [Healthpoint](#) website and search for pharmacy. A pharmacy may advise you to get help from another healthcare provider, such as a General Practice or Urgent Care Clinic, if they are unable to help you with your specific health care need.

For more information about possible costs for prescriptions and other medicines visit – info.health.nz

Once a person or family has collected 20 prescription items in a year, they can get a Prescription Subsidy Card. This means they will not have to pay for fully funded medicines again until the next 1 February.

General Practice (GP), your local health team

Signing up, or enrolling, with a General Practice means you can get help with all health needs for you and your whānau. Being enrolled with a GP means that your healthcare will cost you less and, in most cases, will be free for children under 14 years old.

General Practice has a team of health professionals including doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses, health coaches, health improvement practitioners and paramedics. The number of roles will differ between practices.

You may not always need to see a doctor and can be helped by another member of the team, depending on your needs.

General Practice teams can:

- Provide advice and treatment when you are unwell or managing a long-term condition
- Treat injuries – if you need urgent medical help call your GP to ask if an urgent appointment is available
- Help with wellbeing and mental health conditions
- Prescribe medicines and provide immunisations
- Perform minor surgery
- Refer you to other health professionals when needed, and work with them to look after you
- Give lifestyle advice to help keep you well

General Practice teams can also include:

- Nurse specialists in areas such as diabetes, who can prescribe some medicines
- Counsellors and social workers, health improvement practitioners and health coaches, and extended care paramedics
- Health professionals such as dietitians and occupational therapists, physiotherapists and pharmacists.

If you are unwell, please call before visiting as it may be better to give you advice by phone or video call or arrange a safe place and time for your visit.

When you arrive, please follow the practice's directions, and if you have symptoms such as coughing, sneezing or a fever, please wear a mask, if safe and practical to do so.

Register with your General Practice's patient portal, a secure online resource for you to see your health records (test results, hospital and specialist letters, immunisations, screening test results) and book appointments. This helps you to be more involved in understanding and managing both your health and that of your family/whānau.

To find a General Practice in your area visit the [Healthpoint](#) website and search for General Practice. You can filter your search based on their hours, location, services and if they are enrolling new patients. Many also have after-hours services.

Over-the-phone and online General Practice (GP) care

Instead of visiting a GP, you can often have an appointment over-the-phone or by video online with a doctor or nurse practitioner. This could be with your own General Practice team, if they offer this service, or with another online doctor. This is a good option if you don't have your own GP. Note that some GP care is not able to be done by video or online.

If you have several health conditions or long-term conditions, it's best to talk to your own GP team, if you can, because they are familiar with you, your health history and your medicines.

Online services can provide prescriptions for medicine to collect from your local pharmacy.

Everyone in Aotearoa New Zealand can use these services, including visitors. To find an online doctor visit info.health.nz/online-phone-appointments

Hauora Māori Provider

Hauora Māori provider services are whānau-centred and take a Kaupapa Māori approach. Providers support you to access and choose culturally relevant approaches to support your wellbeing. The services Kaupapa Māori providers offer may include:

- Whānau Ora (family health)
- Well Child Tamariki Ora (child health)
- General Practice services
- Māori community nursing
- Rangatahi (youth health services)
- Mental health
- Disability support services
- Health promotion and education.

To find a Māori health provider, and the services they offer near to your home, go to the [Healthpoint](#) website and search for Kaupapa Māori.

Pacific Health Provider

Pacific Health Provider services are centred around the needs of family or āiga/famili/kāiga/kāinga/kōpū tangata/magafaoa/matavuvale/wantoks and weave in a Pacific specific approach. Providers support you to access and choose culturally relevant approaches to support your wellbeing. The services Pacific providers offer may include:

- Family Health – Whānau Ora
- Child Health – Well Child Tamariki Ora
- GP (General Practice) services
- Pacific community nursing
- Young people's health services
- Mental health
- Disability | Tagata Sa'ilimālō support services
- Health promotion and education.

To find a Pacific health provider, and the services they offer near to your home, go to the [Healthpoint](#) website and search for **Pacific People**.

After Hours Medical Centres and Urgent Care Clinics

When you need urgent medical help, and your own doctor isn't available or you don't have one, After Hours Medical Centres and Urgent Care Clinics can help you with:

- Bad cuts, sprains or broken bones
- Injuries such as minor burns and head knocks
- When you are feeling really sick.

You will see a nurse, doctor, nurse practitioner or paramedic, and you don't need an appointment, but you might have to wait. For Tamariki under 14 years old, services are usually free. Many have lower fees for community service card holders.

You can find where centres are located, and their charges, on the [Healthpoint](#) website.

Emergency Department (ED)

Emergency Departments treat people who have a **serious illness or injury and need urgent care**. Major emergency departments are open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

In any critical or life-threatening emergency call **111** for an ambulance. If you are near the hospital and the situation is serious but not life threatening, you may choose to get there without an ambulance.

If you are not sure if your condition requires ED call Healthline on **0800 611 116** for free advice and they will be able to direct you to the most appropriate place.

Emergency Departments are for illnesses or injuries such as:

- heavy bleeding
- broken major bones
- bad burns
- chest pain
- issues breathing or staying conscious
- mental health emergencies
- severe allergic reactions
- injuries after a serious accident like a car crash.

Anyone in Aotearoa New Zealand can go to the emergency department of a hospital for urgent care.

Some people may be referred to an emergency department by their healthcare provider or the ambulance service.

To find out more visit info.health.nz/emergency-department

Community physiotherapy

Physiotherapists work with patients to improve their physical function and mobility by assessing and treating injuries such as sprains to limbs and back problems, and in many cases the cost is largely subsidised by ACC. You can visit a community physiotherapist without a referral from another healthcare professional. To find your local physiotherapist clinic go to [Healthpoint](#).

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Winter 2025

Key message bank

28th May 2025

Immunisation

- Being immunised is the best way to avoid preventable diseases.
- Please check immunisations for yourself and your whānau for:
 - Flu
 - Whooping cough (pertussis)
 - COVID-19
 - Measles
 - Routine immunisations for babies and children as part of the [National Immunisation Schedule](#).

To book a vaccination, go to [bookmyvaccine](#) or call the Vaccination Helpline **0800 28 29 26** (Monday to Friday 8:30am to 5.00pm) for information, advice, and support. Calls are free, callers can speak with a Māori clinician and interpreters are available.

- You can also contact your General Practice, pharmacy, usual healthcare provider or local medical clinic.
- For more information about COVID-19 vaccines visit info.health.nz/covid19-vaccines
- Making sure your baby or child is immunised is one of the best ways to set them up for a healthy future. It's important children are kept up to date with all their childhood immunisations to provide the best early protection against potentially serious illnesses.
- With the current whooping cough (pertussis) epidemic, it's important to check if your child is immunised against whooping cough.
- Adults at the age of 45, and again at 65, are also eligible for a free whooping cough vaccination.
- It's also important to make sure all the younger and older adults in your whānau are up to date with immunisations. This protects them from some serious preventable diseases, reduces the risk of hospitalisation, permanent disability and sometimes fatal illness.
- Catching up on missed immunisations is straightforward. Please speak to your healthcare provider or check [Immunisations – Health Information and Services](#) for help and advice.

Get ready and think about what you may need

Be prepared if you or one of your whānau have an ongoing or underlying chronic health condition:

- Check the supply of your regular medicines and arrange your next prescription in advance from your local pharmacy so you have enough medication to continue to take it as directed.
- Support older whānau with their prescriptions to make sure they have enough medication for their needs.
- Contact your doctor, nurse, or pharmacy for any health needs in case you need to stay home for a while.
- Discuss with your whānau or healthcare provider what your action plan is if you become unwell.
- Check you have everything you need to stay well, especially if you're in a remote or rural area. Talk to your local General Practice about registering on its patient portal so you can book online appointments, order repeat prescriptions, and see your health records, from a computer, tablet or phone.
- It's recommended to keep some Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) at home to test for COVID-19 if you or anyone in your household develop symptoms. You can buy RATs from community pharmacies and retail stores such as supermarkets.
- Keep some masks at home, in your car, and at work in case you need to protect yourself or others from getting sick.
- Find out more [here](#) about whether you are eligible for Covid-19 antiviral medicine.
- For more information about COVID-19 visit [here](#)

Protect yourself and your whānau over winter

- Cooler winter weather means more people are likely to get sick with colds, flu, COVID-19, and other respiratory illnesses, such as whooping cough. This increases the risk of these illnesses being brought into your home, workplace or school.
- The more layers of protection you have, the harder it is for infections to spread.
- There are many things you can do to keep yourself, and others, well:
 - Stay home if you're sick to rest up and prevent others from getting sick too – advice to help you decide whether your child is well enough to go to school can be found [here](#)
 - When you are sick, it is especially important to stay away from people who could get very sick from winter illnesses, including babies, those who are pregnant, people aged over 65 years and others with a weak immune system. This includes avoiding visiting friends and family in hospital or rest homes until you are well again.

- If you test positive for COVID-19, it is recommended to isolate for at least 5 days, even if you only have mild symptoms, starting at Day 0, the day symptoms started or when you first tested positive, whichever came first.
- If you are unwell and need to see a doctor or healthcare provider, book an appointment and wear a mask during your visit, if you can. Let them know your symptoms when you book so they can help to keep you and others safe.
- Face masks remain a way we can protect ourselves and others from the spread of respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19 and flu. It is recommended you always wear a mask when visiting healthcare services and it is also encouraged you wear one when in closed, crowded and confined spaces, with poor ventilation. You should wear a mask around others if you have symptoms such as a runny or blocked nose, cough, sneezing or sore throat.
- By keeping your hands clean, you can prevent the spread of germs and viruses. Regularly wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based sanitiser. This is especially important if you are visiting people who are more likely to get sick.
- To further reduce the spread of infectious illnesses through the air or on surfaces that are touched regularly by different people:
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, then put the tissue in a bin and clean your hands.
 - Clean frequently touched surfaces, such as light switches and door handles, with household cleaner, regularly.
 - Let fresh air inside by opening windows and doors several times a day. If you're in a building with a ventilation system, check it is filtering or cleaning the air efficiently.
 - Wear a mask to lower the risk of spreading infectious illness through the air.

Healthy Homes Initiative (HHI)

Cold, damp, crowded homes can increase the risk of respiratory issues and other preventable health conditions, such as rheumatic fever and skin infections. There is strong evidence that warm, dry and healthy homes can improve your health and reduce hospitalisations.

The Healthy Homes Initiative (HHI) supports eligible families to help make their homes warmer, drier, and healthier by providing education and housing related interventions such as curtains, carpet and minor repairs as needed. Visit www.hhi.org.nz to find a local provider and to see if you are eligible.

You may qualify for a subsidy to have your home insulated and/or an efficient form of heating installed in your main living area. To find out, visit eeca.govt.nz

Advice about making your home healthier includes:

- Remove mould from ceilings and walls with warm water and household soap, and dry well.
- Open your curtains during the day and close them at night.
- Open your windows for at least a few minutes each day and close them again.
- Dry your washing outside or in the garage or carport.
- Let steam out of the kitchen and bathroom by opening windows and doors.
- Wipe off any water that has collected on walls and on the inside of windows.
- Stop cold air getting into your home by stopping draughts around doors, windows, and fireplaces.

If you are travelling overseas

- Make sure you have enough medication for the whole trip. Check to see if you have any medications that need to be declared in the countries where you are travelling.
- Get vaccinated against measles if you haven't received two doses of the MMR vaccines or are not sure if you are immune. Outbreaks of measles are occurring in countries New Zealanders travel to including the USA and those in Southeast Asia and Europe.
- If you're travelling to a Pacific country, it's important to ensure you are up-to-date with vaccinations.
- Talk to your healthcare provider about which vaccinations you need before you travel. Some countries have disease outbreaks such as, polio, hepatitis, typhoid and others.
- Tetanus shots after injury can be harder to get overseas, so it is important to get this vaccination before you travel if you are not up-to-date. It takes a few weeks for vaccinations to take effect, so do this as soon as possible before leaving.
- Check the Safe Travel website for any advice related to your destination safetravel.govt.nz/

Condition specific messages

1.0 Influenza (flu)

Flu2025 campaign resources including posters, flyers, social media tiles, email signatures, and key messages can found in the [Flu2025 dropbox folder](#).

Pacific and Te Reo translations of the Flu2025 resources, including A3 posters and DL flyers, are also available.

2.0 Pertussis (whooping cough)

The [Pertussis \(whooping cough\) dropbox folder](#) contains links to posters, flyers, social media tiles and key messages that can be used to raise awareness about whooping cough.

3.0 Measles

The [Measles Toolkit](#) contains links to posters, flyers, social media tiles, and key messages about measles.

4.0 COVID-19

Overall message

- COVID-19 is still in our communities and it is a serious disease that can make people very unwell.
- Immunisation is the best protection against COVID-19.

Key messages

- COVID-19 immunisations are free for everyone aged 5 and over. They are also available to tamariki from 6 months who are at greater risk of severe illness if they were to get COVID-19. Please see [here](#) for eligibility detail.
- Take a rapid antigen test (RAT) if you or someone you live with has cold, flu or any other COVID-19 symptoms.
- You can buy RATs from pharmacies and retail stores, such as supermarkets.
- It is recommended that you keep some RATs at home for testing in case you or anyone in your household develops symptoms.
- You can leave your home to get a COVID-19 test while you are completing your recommended 5-day isolation. If you need to leave home to get a test, it is recommended that you wear a face mask.
- Your healthcare provider may offer COVID-19 tests. Call them to find out and follow their advice. There may be a charge.
- If you test positive for COVID-19, it's recommended you isolate for 5 days, even if you only have mild symptoms. Start your isolation at Day 0, the day your symptoms started or when you tested positive, whichever came first.
- Where possible avoid contact with people in your household.
- Sleep by yourself, if you can, and limit the time you spend in shared spaces.
- If you cannot avoid contact in your house, try to stay at least 2 metres apart and wear a face mask that covers your nose and mouth when near others.

- Get deliveries, such as food and medicine from whānau and friends, or by ordering online and identify a safe drop-off point outside the house to leave supplies.
- After completing your 5 days of recommended isolation, if your symptoms have resolved and you feel well, you can return to your normal activities.
- Up until 10 days after your symptoms started or you tested positive, we recommend you wear a mask when:
 - visiting a healthcare facility, or an aged residential care facility
 - with anyone at risk of getting seriously unwell with COVID-19.
- This is because some people are infectious for up to 10 days.

COVID-19 symptoms

- Common symptoms of COVID-19 can include one or more of the following:
 - a new or worsening cough
 - sneezing and runny nose
 - a fever
 - temporary loss of smell, or altered sense of taste
 - sore throat
 - shortness of breath (also a sign of possible pneumonia and requiring urgent attention)
 - fatigue or feeling tired
- Other less common symptoms include: runny poo (diarrhoea), headache, body ache, muscle pain, nausea and vomiting, general feeling of discomfort, illness or unease, chest, stomach and joint pain, and confusion and irritability. These symptoms usually occur with one more common symptom.
- Worsening COVID-19 symptoms can include:
 - new or worse trouble with breathing
 - severe dehydration such as a very dry mouth, not peeing very much, feeling lightheaded or dizzy
 - severe headache.
- If symptoms get worse or you need advice on how to manage them, call your:
 - General practice and talk to one of the team
 - Usual healthcare provider
 - Healthline on **0800 611 116**, free and available 24/7
- Severe COVID-19 symptoms:
 - Call **111** immediately if you or the person you are caring for has severe symptoms. These include:
 - finding it difficult to breathe
 - feeling faint, passing out, or finding it very difficult to wake up
 - being blue around the mouth, or very pale and cold
 - having severe chest pain.

Household contacts

- You are considered a household contact if you live with someone who has COVID-19, or you have spent at least 8 hours with them in the same home while the person was infectious.
- If you are a household contact of a positive COVID-19 case and you develop one or more COVID-19 symptom, you are recommended to stay at home and test for COVID-19 using a RAT.
- If you test negative but your COVID-19 symptoms persist, continue to stay at home and take another RAT test in 24 and 48 hours.
- If at any point you test positive for COVID-19, it is recommended that you isolate for at least 5 days, even if you only have mild symptoms, starting at Day 0, and follow relevant guidance.
- For more information go to – [if you have COVID-19](#)
- If you do not develop symptoms within 10 days of the first COVID-19 positive household member leaving recommended isolation, you are no longer considered a household contact.
- When someone you are living with has COVID-19 – follow these steps to keep yourself healthy, as well as others in your household and community:
 - Where possible avoid contact with the person who has COVID-19.
 - Wash your hands regularly with soap and water or use hand sanitiser.
 - Open windows to increase fresh air flow inside. The risk of spreading COVID-19 is highest in crowded and poorly ventilated spaces.

Antiviral medicines to treat COVID-19

Some people with a higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19 are eligible for treatment with COVID-19 antiviral medicines. This reduces the amount of virus in your body, so you do not get as sick, and you are less likely to go to hospital.

You can get free antiviral medicine if both of these apply to you:

- You have COVID-19 symptoms or you are a household contact with symptoms
- You became sick within the last 5 days.

And you must also have one or more of these risk factors for becoming very sick from COVID-19:

- You are a Māori or Pacific person aged 50 or over
- You are aged 50 or over, and have not had at least 2 COVID-19 vaccines
- You are aged 65 or over
- You have Down syndrome

- You have sickle cell disease
- You've had critical or high dependency hospital care for COVID-19
- You receive Disability Support Services funded by Ministry of Social Development (MSD), or need direct family, whānau or external disability care most days
- You have frailty or vulnerability due to one or more severe health conditions
- You have a weakened immune system
- You have 3 or more risk factors or medical conditions (see list below)
- Talk to your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, healthcare provider or Hauora provider if you think that you, or a member of your whānau, may be eligible for antiviral medicines. Also visit info.health.nz/antiviral-medicines for information.
- People eligible for free antiviral medicines include those with high-risk medical conditions.
- If you are at risk of serious illness, but do not have COVID-19 symptoms, you may be able to get a prescription for antivirals before you get COVID-19. This means you will have the antiviral medicine ready to use if you become unwell.

If you have three or more of the following conditions you are eligible for **free** antiviral medicine, even if you do not fit into the other eligible groups:

- Chronic lung or airways disease
- Serious heart conditions such as congestive heart failure, coronary artery disease, rheumatic heart disease, and congenital heart disease
- Poorly controlled hypertension
- Chronic neurological or neuromuscular disease
- Diabetes
- Chronic kidney disease
- Severe liver disease such as cirrhosis
- Severe blood (haematological) disorders
- Severe mental illness such as schizophrenia, major depressive disorder, bipolar or schizoaffective disorder
- Active cancer
- Morbid obesity (BMI greater than 35).

You can get a prescription for antivirals from your General Practice, healthcare provider, or hauora provider. Some pharmacies can supply antivirals without a prescription. To find these pharmacies visit [Healthpoint](https://www.healthpoint.govt.nz/).

Face masks protect yourself and others

- Wearing a face mask helps prevent the spread of COVID-19 in two ways:
 - They reduce the number of virus particles that can be spread by someone with a respiratory illness.

- They prevent you from inhaling respiratory virus particles.
- If you are unwell with COVID-19, have recently finished your recommended isolation, or you are a household contact of someone with COVID-19, even if you've tested negative, wearing a face mask helps protect others around you, especially people who are at higher risk of getting very sick.
- This includes older people, those with lower immunity and disabled people.
- Health and aged residential care facilities may continue to require all staff and visitors to wear masks
- The best protection is if there is a risk of spreading infection, wear a face mask.

5.0 Respiratory illness in young children this winter

- Winter is always a time when there is an increase in respiratory (breathing) illnesses in children.
- If you have a sick child with breathing difficulties, call your local General Practice urgently. You can also call Healthline on **0800 611 116** for free health advice and information anytime 24/7. If it's an emergency call **111**, immediately.
- A baby who has difficulty breathing could have flu, whooping cough or another illness, which can make them sick very quickly.
- Symptoms can also include fever, cough (can turn into a coughing attack, with vomiting and sometimes has a whoop sound) and a runny nose. Please seek medical advice if you are concerned about your child with any of the above symptoms or if they have had a cough that is not improving after two weeks.
- Please keep your child home if sick or awaiting whooping cough test results.
- Please don't visit young babies if you are sick this winter. Flu and whooping cough are very infectious, and babies can get very sick from them quickly.
- Washing your hands, covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze, and staying home if you are sick also help reduce the spread of winter illness.

6.0 Asthma

Asthma is a common condition affecting the airways in the lungs. People with asthma have swollen (inflamed) airways that react to triggers such as:

- Weather changes, such as cold dry air
- Cold and flu symptoms
- Allergens including house dust, mites, cats and pollen
- Some medicines, physical activities, smoke, chemicals or gases

If you, or someone you look after, has been prescribed an asthma reliever, it should always be taken as prescribed.

When asthma is triggered, airways:

- Tighten or partially close up
- Swell inside
- Make more mucus.

This makes it hard to breathe in – and even harder to breathe out. Symptoms include:

- Wheezing (a whistling noise when breathing out)
- Persistent dry cough that might get worse at night, in the morning or with exercise
- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness
- Difficulty speaking.

Call **111** if your child is floppy, tired or less responsive, finding it very difficult to breath or not breathing, or has blue lips and tongue.

Asthma attacks can be mild, moderate or severe.

With a mild attack the person can speak normally and may have a slight wheeze or mild cough. This can usually be treated with a reliever asthma inhaler.

Someone experiencing a moderate asthma attack will speak in half sentences, have difficulty breathing, wheeze and have a persistent cough.

A person with a severe asthma attack may:

- Be unable to speak in more than a few words at a time
- Breathe rapidly
- Struggle to breathe
- Have the muscles between their ribs sucking in (in-drawing)
- Sound quiet – because of reduced air movement there may be no wheeze
- Feel like their chest is tight
- Look pale or have blueness around their lips
- Not respond or be floppy.

To help people having a moderate or severe attack, get them to sit upright and lean forward to allow the chest to expand and use a reliever asthma inhaler following the instructions given by their healthcare provider. If unsure of the dose take 6 puffs of reliever inhaler (ideally through a spacer, if one is available), take 6 breaths after each puff and if needed wait for 6 minutes before repeating.

If there is no improvement in symptoms, go to a doctor, an Urgent Care Clinic or ED, immediately. Continue to give 6 puffs every 6 minutes until you get medical help. In an emergency call **111** and continue with your puffer until help arrives. If you or someone you are with has symptoms that you are worried about:

- Call or visit your healthcare provider
- Call Healthline for free advice **0800 611 116** anytime 24/7

For severe asthma attacks or significant breathing issues, call **111** for an ambulance.

7.0 Rheumatic Fever

Rheumatic fever is a serious but preventable illness that often starts with a Strep A sore throat infection, which is followed by a reaction in the body, usually in children and young adults, which is called acute rheumatic fever.

Rheumatic fever may permanently and severely damage the heart, which is called rheumatic heart disease

Rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease affects Pacific peoples and Māori much more than people of any other ethnic group in NZ, which is why sore throat testing for Strep A and treatment is focussed on Pacific People and Māori.

Rheumatic fever usually starts 1–5 weeks after tamariki/rangatahi have had strep throat.

If they have any of the following symptoms, take them to your healthcare provider as soon as possible:

- Sore joints are the most common symptom of rheumatic fever. This includes the hip, knees, elbows, ankles and wrists. Different joints may be sore on different days. Sore joints may cause a limp or difficulty walking due to pain.
- Joints may be red, swollen and feel hot.
- Shortness of breath — they may feel short of breath more easily than usual when they are active.
- A rash.
- Small painless lumps under the skin over the elbows, wrists, knees, ankles or spine.
- Unusual jerky movements of their hands, feet, tongue and face. This can look like fidgeting or being unable to sit still and can affect their handwriting. The movements stop during sleep.

Tamariki and rangatahi may also have:

- Tummy pains
- Weight loss
- Extreme tiredness
- An ongoing fever at or greater than 38° C that lasts a few days.

People who are at a higher risk of rheumatic fever include:

- Māori or Pacific ethnicity aged 3–35 years, with emphasis on children and young people (4–19 yrs)
- Those with a personal or family history of rheumatic fever or rheumatic heart disease

People in either of these groups should have every sore throat checked.

Sore throat checks for people at higher risk of rheumatic fever

There are many places to have a sore throat checked:

- You can call or go to your General Practice and let them know your tamariki or rangatahi has a sore throat so they can be prioritised for appropriate care. You may have to pay a fee, phone ahead to check.
- Pharmacies in some communities can do sore throat checks and treatment for children and young adults at higher risk of rheumatic fever. Contact your pharmacy to find out.
- Your child's school may have a free sore throat checking programme. Contact the school to find out.

If you have immediate concerns about your child's sore throat, you can also call Healthline on **0800 611 116**, free and available 24/7.

Try to keep your home warm and dry. Create as much space as possible to spread out around your home – rather than having to crowd in the same room.

Having more warm rooms and sleeping spaces available means germs like strep throat are less likely to spread.

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