



Guidelines for horticulture businesses operating as an essential service

Version 1: 25 March 2020

Purpose

- These guidelines provide advice to horticulture businesses on the kinds of measures they ought to have in place, and to enforce, if they are to be granted and maintain “essential business” status under COVID-19 Alert Level 4.
- **This guidance is likely to change:** given the speed of developments, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) has **not** been able to review or confirm these guidelines. Check the HortNZ website for our latest guidance: <https://www.hortnz.co.nz/news-events-and-media/media-releases/covid-19-update-for-horticulture/>

“Essential business” exemption

- On 23 March 2020 the Prime Minister announced that New Zealand’s COVID-19 Alert Level will be raised to **Alert Level 4** on 25 March 2020 for a period of **at least four weeks**.
- Additional restrictions imposed in Alert Level 4 include:
 - People instructed to stay at home
 - Educational facilities closed
 - Rationing of supplies and requisitioning of facilities
 - Travel severely limited
 - Major reprioritisation of healthcare services
 - *Businesses closed except for essential services*

Horticulture business operations are classified as “essential businesses”

- The Government has confirmed that an essential business is:
 - Any entity involved in the packaging, production and processing of food and beverage products, whether for domestic consumption or export.
 - Any entity involved in relevant support services, such as food safety and verification, inspection or associated laboratory services and biosecurity functions.
 - Any entity providing veterinary services.
 - Any entity whose closure would jeopardise the maintenance of animal health or welfare standards.

- This means there are a range of horticulture businesses and related supply chain businesses that provide essential services to primary production that **may remain open as “essential businesses”**
- This is a privilege not given lightly and one where we have been tasked with operating within very strict rules and standards in order to continue to operate. These rules will be rigidly enforced with no latitude for deviation, any breach will likely result in that business being shut down.
- All exempted businesses must be accepted for registration with the Government, and will be expected to **prove that they can protect their workers and the public from COVID-19.**

Registering and operating as an “essential business”

MPI has launched the Register for Safe Practice which is available at this link.

<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/covid-19-essential-primary-sector-service-registration/>

There are a couple of simple questions operators can ask themselves to determine if they need to register as an essential business under including:

1. Do you have five or fewer people (including the owner) working at each business site?
2. Can you achieve social distancing measures between staff in your workplace, including travelling, to and from work? Production chains must achieve these limits of separation.

If you answer **YES** to both of those questions, then you do not need to fill in the form.

If you answered **NO** to either of these questions, you **MUST** fill in the form.

If in doubt, fill in the form.

HortNZ is actively developing questions and answers related to the essential services registration process. Please regularly check our website for this information at this link. <https://www.hortnz.co.nz/news-events-and-media/media-releases/covid-19-update-for-horticulture/>

Answering the MPI registration questions

To be registered, and maintain registration, essential businesses must respond satisfactorily to the following questions.

We have provided below **sample** responses that HortNZ considers would likely satisfy the requirements. **Not all of these measures will be applicable to all horticulture businesses**, and each business will need to adapt requirements to its own situation. They are indicative of the level of measures that we consider are likely to be required in order to minimise the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

You will need to respond to the questionnaire with honest answers of how your business meets the requirements. Please pass this information on to your suppliers/supply chain partners. They will be subject to the same rules, and will also have to close if they cannot answer the questions satisfactorily.

1. *How are you ensuring that your workers are observing social distancing at home, on the way to and from work, and while on breaks?*

- Management will have daily discussions with staff on the importance, and necessity, of full cooperation by all people in New Zealand to follow social distancing rules during and outside of works hours.
- Minimise travel in large groups when travelling to and from work. Limit the number of passengers in vehicles as much as possible. During the journey avoid or minimise all close contact and if possible, use hand sanitiser before entering, and after exiting the vehicle.
- Breaks at work are to be split up in teams (that remain the same) to reduce the amount of people in the lunchroom or on smoke breaks at one given time, and adhere to the 2-metre distancing rule.
- No socialising or congregating by employees between changing shifts. When clocking out, move quickly offsite or into their separate accommodation area.
- Break room table and chair surfaces are cleaned before and after each break. Cleaning times documented and audited.
- Management can allocate staff into teams/units of individuals who work together and or live together as well, keeping a group in a virtual 'bubble'

2. *How are you ensuring that your staff observe the stay at home rules at the end of each working day?*

- By stressing what is expected of every person in New Zealand under the current restrictions.
- Checklist at shift start that team members all obeyed the rules (peer pressure to comply for everyone benefits the whole team).
- When using work vehicles fitted with GPS units management can monitor staff movements to ensure they are going straight to work and straight home.

3. *What personal hygiene steps do you have in place with your staff?*

- Management will relentlessly champion a culture of absolute compliance, and violation of compliance rules will result in disciplinary procedures
- Each shift begins with a daily pre-shift (outdoors) briefing emphasising:
 - o Critical importance of personal hygiene (keep 2m distance; cover cough/sneezes; frequent handwashing and equipment sanitising; not touching your mouth, nose or eyes.)
 - o Reminder of the other workplace practices (described in this document) and of their critical importance to protect worker and community health
 - o "Essential business" operation is a privilege, and ours to lose. Mandatory compliance with all "essential business" rules are required; any non-compliance will be treated as a serious disciplinary matter. Staff in breach may be suspended and sent home immediately to self-isolate.
- Any meals provided to staff will be prepared and served under MoH guidelines. [Staff canteen has staggered meal service.][Each team has a designated table.] [Effective cleaning protocols are in place for cutlery and crockery]. [Microwavable, sealed prepared meals may be used if available]
- Sharing of tools is avoided wherever possible; where not possible shared tools are required to be sanitised after using a sanitiser spray, methylated spirits, anti-viral wipes, a fresh 0.5% hydrogen peroxide/water solution, or a bleach solution.
- Equipment and machinery (eg bins; trays; vehicle cabs, steering wheels and door handles) is regularly disinfected (frequency depends on use rate, but always when a different worker uses it) using a sanitizer spray, methylated spirits, anti-viral wipes or a bleach solution.

- Staff need to be instructed to keep washing their hands as much as they can. Use latex gloves provided and when disposing gloves fold them inside out and put them in the bins with lined rubbish bags provided.
- Where two drivers need to use the same vehicle whether it be a ute or a grape harvester, the cab will be sanitised between drivers. If the air-conditioning cannot be sanitised it will be disabled.
- Extra cleaning shifts to clean work spaces while staff are on breaks, after each break in communal spaces and at start and end of working day. Disinfect all surfaces in the lunchroom and also all taps and handbasins and door knobs in and out of the toilets. A checklist is in place with a schedule of when cleaning needs to occur and who is responsible.

4. *What personal protection equipment do you have available for staff?*

- Hand sanitizer and soap is easily accessible and available for all staff, including official Ministry of Health instructions on how and when to wash your hands.
- When readily available workers have their own individually named PPE (e.g. face masks, gloves, aprons and overalls)
- We are aware of the current shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves and masks. It is important that those who need to wear this protective equipment to minimise the spread of the virus have priority access to that PPE.
- If your workers can operate independently of others and maintain the 2-metre distancing rule, they need not necessarily wear masks or gloves during those tasks.
- If you cannot maintain the 2-metre rule at all times appropriate PPE and other intensive hygiene measures will be used.
- Document all of your steps to address the MPI registration questions, and they will let you know whether the steps you have taken are sufficient to minimising the spread of the virus.

5. *What steps have you taken to limit access to the workplace?*

- All side and roller doors stay closed and when open for pick up or delivery they will be supervised.
- Erect signs at the packhouse door and at the farm gate that state that no one can enter the workplace without making an appointment by phone or email.
- Only essential contractors who are recognised as essential business by the government will be granted permission to enter.
- To the extent possible, the timing of visit must be arranged to occur at a time when least risk to others is presented.
- Truck/ delivery drivers are not to use staff facilities, separate toilets are provided, and they cannot access tea/coffee/food.

6. *How are you isolating staff to contain the risk of spread (2m rule)?*

- Non-essential personnel have been required to stay home.
- Essential personnel have been split into separate teams with functions spread amongst teams.
 - o Each team wears a colour vest or other visible identifier (Red / Green / Blue) so they are immediately identifiable. COVID-19 Manager must avoid having contact with multiple teams.
 - o Each team's prime focus is on avoiding any member of a different team becoming a "close contact" so that if any individual were to become COVID-19 positive and the question were "who at work have you come into close contact with" the answer would only be "my Red team";
 - o Teams use separate vehicles, have breaks and lunch at different times from other teams, and in different places.

- Staff will be working in their own rows when they pick or do plant work and will have their own workstation in the packhouse.
- Each staff member will finish their own row or job and will not be helped to finish if this is breaking the 2-meter rule.
- They are also kept in their own section of the glasshouse and work by themselves in their own section.
- Team allocations should take into account any shared living arrangements. For preference, shared accommodation arrangements should match team isolation and eliminate staff from different shifts/teams living together). This may be difficult to arrange, given the diversity of workers' accommodation arrangements. If not possible, heightened separations at home should be encouraged.

7. *What processes do you have in place for staff to report illness or report potential exposure?*

- If any person becomes unwell (either at home or while at work) and develop symptoms of COVID-19 like a cough, fever, shortness of breath, sneezing or a runny nose, contact your doctor or the Healthline (0800 358 5453) and immediately self-isolate.
- Management are on site every morning to check numbers and wellbeing of staff.
- Management are checking with staff to ask if they're unwell, have been exposed to anyone that has been unwell
- Management are checking the mental wellbeing of staff each morning.
- Staff with children at home may need to reduce hours to make sure their families are ok.
- In the event of concern, we will contact Healthline immediately (and self-isolate those in the same team)
- Management will follow the government's (Ministry of Health) guidance for potential exposure to the virus available [here](#) and [here](#).

8. *What actions will you take in the event of a confirmed infection?*

- Send staff member home for self-isolation and tell them to contact Ministry of Health hotline 0800 358 5453.
- Isolate all close contacts
- Management will also notify MPI and the Ministry of Health.

9. *What steps have you taken to ensure that staff who are most at risk (i.e. over 70's) identify and isolate themselves?*

- Workers required to disclose any underlying health conditions that make them higher risk asked to self-identify and stay home.
- Other workers who fit into a category deemed by the government to be a higher risk should be asked to stay home (those over 70 years of age)
- Practice physical distancing as much as possible, and to ask friends or family and whānau to drop off anything they need, or order supplies online.