



The logo for the NZ Seafood Standards Council, consisting of a dark teal rectangular box containing the text "NZ SEAFOOD STANDARDS COUNCIL" in white, uppercase, sans-serif font. "NZ" is significantly larger than the other text.

Guidance for the Seafood Industry COVID-19 Protection Framework

Version 1 – 1st February 2022

For further information please don't hesitate to contact us at:

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Background

The COVID-19 Protection Framework has replaced the alert level system and provides for a flexible 3-tier approach to managing COVID-19.

This guide has been put together to provide specific advice to the seafood industry. It aligns to the advice and guidance provided by the Ministry for Primary Industries and the Ministry of Health and is what we believe to be current as at the 1st February 2022.

We emphasise this is guidance only. COVID-19 is continually evolving and as a result, Government policy and advice is also being revised regularly. You are obliged to meet all legal requirements relating to COVID-19 and to implement risk mitigation that is appropriate for your specific business.

Transmission

COVID-19 is primarily transmitted person-to-person by inhalation of airborne respiratory droplets and aerosols generated when an infected person breathes, speaks, coughs or sneezes. There is currently no evidence to suggest that COVID-19 is transmitted by food or its packaging.

Overseas evidence has shown the Omicron variant is more easily transmitted than some of the other COVID-19 variants and can spread 'out-of-control' very quickly. In addition, the following situations and settings are known to increase the risk of transmission:

- Enclosed spaces particularly with poor ventilation
- Close-contact settings where people are talking loudly, shouting, or singing
- Crowded places with many people near-by

The risk of transmission is highest is when one or more of these factors overlap: for example, in inside environments that are poorly ventilated with people talking loudly or being exposed to any of these conditions for long periods of time.

For those who work outside with fewer people, the risk of transmission is lower but is still a risk.

The Protection Framework

The COVID-19 Protection Framework, also known as the traffic light system, provides for 3-tiers based on the risk of COVID-19 in the community:

Tier	Risk Assessment	Base Requirements
Red	Action is needed to protect the health system and at-risk populations. The system is facing unsustainable hospitalisations.	Face masks are mandatory on flights, public transport, in taxis, retail, public facilities, and are recommended whenever leaving the house.
Orange	There is increasing community transmission with increasing pressure of the health system, while still manageable. There is increasing risk to the public.	Face masks are mandatory on flights, public transport, in taxis, retail, public facilities, and are encouraged elsewhere.

Green	There is limited COVID-19 in the community, hospitalisations are manageable and the health system is ready to respond.	Face coverings are mandatory on flights and encouraged indoors.
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High levels of vaccination will help to minimise the impact of the virus on New Zealand’s health system. A fully vaccinated workforce minimises the opportunity for spread of COVID-19 and minimises the severity of illness.

Testing, contact tracing and isolation, and vaccination remain the Government’s key tools in managing COVID-19.

The following guidance is aligned to MPI’s guidance on COVID-19 Protection Framework, Guidance for the Primary Sector:

<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/covid-19-protection-framework-primary-sector-businesses/>

Seafood Industry Protocols

All seafood industry businesses (including aquaculture, fishing, and processing operations) can continue to operate under any of the three Protection Framework settings (Red, Orange, and Green). Seafood businesses need to have a COVID-19 safety plan that sets out how they’ll operate under the Protection Framework.

COVID-19 Safety Plan

All businesses need to consider their operation and the risks specific to it. This risk assessment should consider the type of work being performed and the environment or setting in which it occurs and implement risk mitigation measures appropriate to minimise the risk of transmission and to keep their people safe.

When in the red setting there is likely to be a far higher risk of transmission between staff and stringent measures should be implemented to minimise the risk. However, risk mitigation should be considered at all levels of the framework.

Staff need to be provided with instruction and/or training to ensure they fully understand the workplace procedures they need to follow and what is expected of them.

Vaccination

It is strongly recommended that businesses mandate all staff and visitors to site to be fully vaccinated, including receiving boosters when eligible, and to provide proof of their vaccination status. If staff are not yet vaccinated, provide them with information, encouragement, and an opportunity for them to get vaccinated (i.e provide time off to do so).

In addition to the health and safety of your staff, the risks to market access and ensuring business continuity are factors that you should take into consideration when making this decision.

If you decide not to require all staff to be vaccinated then you should consider implementing a testing regime for unvaccinated staff, particularly if your workplace is a setting with an increased risk of

transmission (i.e working inside in processing rooms with poor ventilation or noisy environments so people have to talk loudly/shout). The nasopharyngeal swab/PCR test is the most sensitive and therefore recommended, however, if Omicron takes hold in New Zealand, it is likely that PCR testing will not be available for general surveillance purposes and the use of Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) may be used.

Contact Tracing

All workplaces must keep a record of everyone who enters their premises/comes on site. All businesses need to display a NZ COVID Tracer QR code in a prominent place at or near the main entrance. You also need to offer a way to manually sign in. You need to record:

- the entry and exit times for staff, visitors, and contractors
- the names of everyone on your premises or location
- their contact details.

It is important to ensure you keep your contact tracing records secure.

To make contact tracing easier and so you can effectively identify any close-contact staff (should you have a positive case on site), the more information you have about people movement in the workplace the better. You should, where possible:

- Record the areas of the site that each staff member accesses, along with the date for each day they are at work and the time on-site/left site. This is important for all staff members who access the site, including administration and management staff.
- For any contractors or on-site visitors, record their full name, and two forms of contact, e.g contact phone number, email address (consider taking a photo of their business card), the date, time on-site and time left site, and the areas they have or will work in.

Businesses should ensure they have effective means of communicating to all staff when they are not at work.

While in the red setting or at times of heightened risk of community transmission, businesses should consider limiting the number of visitors to the site.

Health

It is extremely important that all staff are advised of the symptoms of COVID-19 and not to come to work if they have any COVID-19 like symptoms, no matter how mild they are. Any staff who has symptoms must be instructed not come to work or to leave the site immediately and contact their GP or Health-line to seek advice regarding being tested for COVID-19 and they must act on that advice. If a test is required, they must get a test, must follow Ministry of Health directions, and must not enter the site until a negative test result is received.

The common symptoms of COVID-19 are one or more of the following:

- sore or scratchy throat
- runny nose
- cough
- sneezing
- fever (temperature of 38°C or higher)
- temporary loss of smell or altered sense of taste
- shortness of breath

Less common symptoms of COVID-19 include diarrhoea, headache, muscle aches, nausea, vomiting, malaise, chest pain, abdominal pain, joint pain, or confusion/irritability. These almost always occur with one or more of the common symptoms.

Health and wellness checks of all staff are to be carried out each day before they start work, and of all visitors/contractors on entry to the site, to check for any COVID-19 symptoms. Any person showing any signs of COVID-19 like symptoms is to be sent home immediately and be instructed to seek advice regarding being tested for COVID-19 and they must act on that advice. If a test is required, they must get a test, must follow Ministry of Health directions, and must not enter the site until a negative test result is received.

Employers should keep records of any staff that has been instructed to seek further advice, and a record of the outcome of that advice.

Employers also need to ensure staff are informed that if they are identified as a close contact or test positive for COVID-19, they need to notify their Manager/Supervisor (or other agreed company contact) as soon as practical after they become aware, by phone call, email or text or any other electronic form as agreed.

Temperature Checks

It is recommended that businesses implement temperature checks of staff at the entrance of the workplace, where possible. Any person who has a temperature of 38 °C or above, must avoid congregating with other staff and must not enter any production area or product storage area.

They must leave site and contact their GP or Health-line to seek advice regarding being tested for COVID-19 and must act on that advice. If a test is required, they must get a test, must follow Ministry of Health directions, and must not enter the site until a negative test result is received.

Note, there may be situations when staff come to work with an elevated temperature that is not due to illness, such as after biking to work. Your procedures may allow for a short waiting period and re-testing but this needs to be documented in your COVID-19 Safety Plan, for example, you could state:

If a staff member has a temperature of 38 °C or above they are to be separated from other staff (by at least 2 metres) and re-tested in 15 minutes, if their temperature is less than 38 °C they can proceed to work.

If their temperature remains at 38 °C or above they must leave the site and contact their GP or Health-line to seek advice regarding being tested for COVID-19 and must act on that advice.

Employers should keep records of any staff that has a temperature of 38 °C or above and has been instructed to seek further advice and keep a record of the outcome of that advice.

Note for China Listed Establishments:

Temperature checking is mandatory for those listed for China as per the China OMAR.

Facemasks

Facemasks are an important measure to minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19. Facemasks need to be of the mask type and not a face covering such as a bandana or scarf etc.

It is recommended to use disposable N95/P2 particulate respirators, however, the most important thing is that masks fit well and are worn correctly, covering both the nose and mouth. The use and type of masks is one of the factors taken into consideration when determining whether staff are close or casual contacts in a workplace.

The Ministry of Health's website contains more detailed information regarding facemasks:

<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/covid-19-use-masks-and-face-coverings-community>

The following is to be implemented, particularly if your workplace is a setting that increases the risk of transmission or where market access or business continuity risks are significant.

At Red:

- Staff in indoor processing environments are to wear facemasks
- Facemasks are to be worn in communal areas such as cafeterias, amenities (any place people gather or mingle), except when eating or drinking where facemasks can be removed for short periods of time.
- Non-processing staff using communal areas, such as cafeterias, that are also used by processing staff must wear facemasks (when in communal areas or when interacting with processing staff)
- Staff working outside who are not able to maintain a 1.5 metre distance from other staff are to wear facemasks
- Facemasks are to be worn by any visitor to the site

At Orange

- Staff in indoor processing environments, and those who interact with them (e.g cafeteria staff, cleaners, maintenance staff etc) who are not able to maintain to maintain a 2-metre distance from other staff are to wear facemasks
- Staff working outside who are not able to maintain a 1 metre distance from other staff are to wear facemasks
- Masks should be worn by all visitors to the site
- Masks are not required to be worn by those staff who work in offices providing they can maintain a 1 metre distance from others. However, masks must be worn when they interact with processing staff, or use communal areas, such as cafeterias that are also used by processing staff

Note for China Listed Establishments:

We understand that China expects all personnel who handle product, including packed product to wear facemasks, regardless of the level of the protection framework we are operating at.

Staff must be given instruction on the correct use of facemasks including how to put them on and take them off. Information can be found at the following links:

<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/covid-19-use-masks-and-face-coverings-community/covid-19-how-use-face-mask-safely>

Facemasks are to be replaced immediately if they become worn, damaged, wet, or contaminated. Single use masks must be disposed of after use. Reusable masks must be washed before reuse.

Visors alone cannot be used as substitutes for facemasks.

Workplace Groups and Distancing

The fewer the number of people who interact in close range in high-risk indoor settings, the fewer the number of people that will need to be stood down to isolate in the event of a positive case on-site. To minimise the number of potential close contacts the following should be implemented:

Identify, isolate, or group staff in small teams by activity or spatial area (e.g by process line, packing line, stores, cleaning teams etc), where practical. These staff should operate as their own group in terms of starting and finishing work and sitting together at breaks so they maintain their work bubble.

If possible, stagger shift start/finish times and meal breaks, to minimise the cross-over of work groups and the number of staff able to congregate in any one area. Have some time in between different groups using the communal areas, and ensure communal areas are well ventilated, where possible.

Implement distancing of staff and groups to the extent practical, physical distancing of 2 metres or more between staff, where this is reasonably achievable is recommended (noting that this is often not practical in seafood businesses).

Create 'walkways' for people when moving through and around their work area. If people need to pass each other in narrow passageways, they should pass "side-by-side" or "back-to-back", not facing each other when passing.

Ventilation

Overseas experience shows that poor ventilation increases the risk of transmission, particularly in systems that use recirculated air (rather than using fresh air intakes).

Operators should check, maintain, and enhance ventilation systems in indoor environments to ensure optimal operation (i.e maximise air flow and flow air away from workers where possible). The following guidance is provided:

- Use of fresh air intakes, rather than recirculated air
- Full air exchange in <10 minutes minimises the risk of transmission
- Use of air purifiers is effective but expensive
- CO₂ monitors can be a useful tool for monitoring ventilation (and optimal occupancy density)

Hygiene & Other PPPE

All staff are to follow their normal workplace hygiene and protective clothing routines including the following:

- All staff must use regular hand washing (wash with hand-soap and running water for a minimum of 20 seconds, dry thoroughly with disposable paper towels), and use hand-sanitiser, including:
 - After visiting the toilet
 - Before eating
 - After smoking/vaping
 - Before putting on and after removing protective clothing, including facemask and gloves
 - Before handling any product
 - Before and after cleaning, particularly after cleaning high contact surfaces.
- Staff must be reminded not to touch their face, eyes, and masks; and if they do, to wash hands as per the above

- Staff must be reminded to use the cough/sneeze etiquette (cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues, place in rubbish or cough/sneeze into elbow and then wash hands, as above)
- Gloves are recommended if common contact surfaces are used by adjacent workers
- Maintain rigorous cleaning and sanitation regimes in high touch/contact surface areas
- Hand-sanitiser must be made available for staff use in communal areas

Other Risk Mitigation Measures

Workplace and site-specific procedures need to be tailored to your type of operation but things to consider are:

- Implementing regular cleaning and sanitation protocols (these are additional to normal food production related cleaning procedures), for contact surfaces, particularly hand-contact surfaces in any communal, social or amenity areas, including doors, door handles, handrails, switches, bathroom fixtures, toilets. The frequency of cleaning will depend on your operation, considering the number of staff, allocation of work groups and how often these communal areas are used. However, as a recommendation, this should occur at a minimum of once per day but preferably after each work group's use
- Ensure staff conducting the cleaning of social spaces wear facemasks and other relevant PPE

Supervision and Checks

- Implement supervision and additional checks to confirm that the COVID-19 safety procedures are being followed. The frequency of these checks will depend on your operation, but it is important to make sure staff are following the procedures you have put in place, in particular, the correct use of facemasks, distancing, and handwashing and sanitising after touching high-touch contact areas

Outside the Workplace

Businesses should encourage staff to maintain good practices when out-side of work, including:

- to maintain their own contact tracing records (i.e using the NZ COVID Tracer app)
- to have plans in place to ensure their personal/house-hold readiness for dealing with illness and isolation
- to consider avoiding super-spreading events, such as large gatherings and to minimise close-contact situations with people they don't know
- to maintain physical distancing when outside their homes and in public spaces, to try and keep 2 metres apart where possible and to wear facemasks when in public
- to travel to work, either alone or only with others from their household or workplace group

Cases and Contacts

The Ministry of Health have defined two types of contacts, casual contacts, and close contacts, these are people who have (or may have) been exposed to a person who has COVID-19 during their infectious period.

Casual Contacts:

Are people who have been in the same place at the same time as someone infectious with COVID-19 but may not have been near the person.

Casual contacts don't need to isolate but need to self-monitor for any COVID-19 symptoms for 10 days (from the day of potential exposure) and if any symptoms develop, to get tested and to stay at home until a negative result is received.

Close Contacts:

Are people who live or work with or have been in the same place at the same time as someone infectious with COVID-19.

For workplace settings, these are generally considered as those that are working at <2 metres apart for longer than 15 minutes.

Infectious Period and Isolation:

Currently, the infectious period of a person who has COVID-19 is calculated as two (2) days before symptoms started, or two days before their positive test (if they did not have any symptoms) until ten (10) days after this date. A contacts isolation period is calculated from the day of the potential exposure.

Phased Management of Case & Contact Management

With the spread of Omicron in the community and the expectation of a significant number of cases, the Ministry of Health's approach to COVID-19 case management and contact tracing will continue to be updated to reflect the changing nature and transmission of COVID-19 variants. This includes the implementation of the 3-phased approach to case and contact management, with the following being expected to apply:

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Situation	There are some cases in the community and 'stamp it out' remains the approach	Cases have spread in the community, so we need to minimise and slow transmission to protect our vulnerable communities	There are thousands of cases per day. Most people will be able to look after themselves at home. Health and social services will focus on those who need the most help
Cases	Anyone with symptoms must isolate, get a nasopharyngeal/PCR test and if positive remain isolated for 14 days or until released for work by a health official.	Anyone with symptoms must isolate, get a nasopharyngeal/PCR test and if positive can self-release after 10 days isolation, providing they have been symptom free for the previous 3 days.	Anyone with symptoms must isolate, get a nasopharyngeal/PCR or RATs test and if positive can self-release after 10 days providing, they have been symptom free for the previous 3 days.
Contacts	Close contacts without symptoms must isolate for 10 days and get tested at day 5 and day 8.	Close contacts without symptoms must isolate for 7 days and get tested at day 5.	Close contacts without symptoms must isolate for 7 days.

The following applies at all Phases:

- All house-hold members of a case are considered close contacts and must isolate (and test) as required

- Those who are symptomatic but are not contacts of cases, who return a negative test can return to work
- Contacts who remain without symptoms and test negative (if testing required) can return to work once the required isolation period is completed
- Any contact who develops symptoms during isolation must continue to isolate and seek advice regarding testing (whether testing is required or not depends on the phase) and any further isolation requirements necessary

Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs)

Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs), as the name suggests provides COVID-19 testing results quickly (often within 15 minutes), however they often require a high level of virus to be present in the sample, meaning they can be less sensitive, especially in asymptomatic people or those who are early in their infectious period. Alternatively, they may also give false positive results.

For these reasons, the use of RATs for general non-targeted surveillance of asymptomatic workers has not been encouraged to date.

However, given the testing demand Omicron is likely to place on the health system, RATs are now considered a tool for businesses to use, particularly as part of the test-return-to work scheme. The Ministry of Health has developed a Rapid Antigen Testing guide for businesses (including details of potential suppliers), which can be found here:

https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/moh0011_rat_info_guide_v13.pdf

Test to Return to Work

Once Omicron is circulating in the community (and based on overseas experiences), it is anticipated that a significant number of staff will be required to isolate as they will either be a case or a close contact of case. Therefore, to ensure that there are enough staff available to maintain critical infrastructure, the government have introduced a 'test to return to work' scheme for critical workers which will allow asymptomatic people to return to work before completing their required isolation period.

This scheme will only be available in phase two and three of an outbreak. At this stage, it will only apply to those who are identified as critical industries and those who have registered critical workers.

Critical industries are defined as:

Business or organisation involved in one of the following basic needs areas:

- Food production
- Distribution and sales
- Health services including services provided for deceased persons

Critical workers are those staff who can only carry out their role in person at the workplace and who perform a role that is critical to keep the business operating (providing the basic needs function). Anyone who can work from home is not considered a critical worker.

Businesses wanting to use the 'test-to-return to work' option will need to register using the MBIE registration system and provide details of who they consider to be critical workers in their organisations.

The registration system is expected to be available soon through an on-line portal that will be like the Business Travel Register operated by MBIE during the alert level system. Further details on the test-to-return scheme can be found here:

www.business.govt.nz

It is important to note that businesses are not required to register to keep operating. Seafood businesses can continue to operate at all settings under the Protection Framework. Registration is only required if you wish to use the test-to-return scheme for critical workers.

The test-to-return scheme will allow critical workers who are close contacts to return to work (without isolating or prior to completing isolation) provided they are asymptomatic and return a negative Rapid Antigen Test (RATs) each day prior to starting work through their required isolation period.

It should be noted that RATs are less sensitive at detecting cases than a PCR test, so it is possible that your worker may have and be able to spread COVID-19, even if they return a negative RAT result. For this reason, businesses should allow workers to complete the required isolation requirements if possible. However, where it is deemed necessary to have critical workers at work or to bring them back from isolation early, the following safety protocols, as far as reasonably practical, will need to be implemented:

- Daily symptom checks, and a daily negative Rapid Antigen Test result, required prior to the worker commencing work for the day.
- Strict use of a medical mask, donned by the worker before entry to the workplace and changed as needed during the day
- Strict compliance with any infection prevention and control protocols at work.
- When the worker's mask is removed (e.g for eating and drinking) physical distancing must be maintained – the worker should eat alone in a well-ventilated space where possible.
- The worker should travel alone to and from and around work or between jobs, where possible.
- Ensure good ventilation when in small spaces and masks must be worn by everyone present.
- If symptoms develop at any stage, the worker will follow the public advice for close contacts with symptoms.

Workers under a test-to-return scheme should still isolate when they are not at work, until their isolation period ends. This means that they will only be able to go to work and go home and will not be able to do things such as meet with co-workers socially outside of work, or visit a café or restaurant.

Other Support

Further information, guidance, and resources regarding COVID-19 can be found:

Unite Against COVID-19 website: <https://covid19.govt.nz/>

Ministry of Health website: <https://www.health.govt.nz/>

MBIE (business support) website: <https://www.business.govt.nz/covid-19/>

There is also a range of financial support available to businesses affected by COVID-19, including the new Short Term Absence Payment and the Leave Support Scheme. These are design to assist employers and employees (including those self-employed) to support those who need to stay home while waiting for test results or to self-isolate.

More information regarding these schemes and other financial support available can be found here:

<https://www.business.govt.nz/covid-19/financial-support-for-businesses/>