
Joint Media Release

Contact Tracing Process

18 August 2021

With New Zealand now in Alert Level 4 lockdown after the re-emergence of COVID-19 in their community and the Cook Islands at Alert Level 2 in response, health ministry Te Marae Ora (TMO) and CookSafe facilitator the Cook Islands Chamber of Commerce would like to remind the general public of the importance of using our COVID-19 contact tracing tools CookSafe and CookSafe+.

To a large extent the contact tracing process relies on the cooperation of everyone in the Cook Islands and how diligent each individual is in correctly using our CookSafe QR cards and the CookSafe+ app. These two contact tracing tools work in conjunction with each other and both are necessary for fully effective contact tracing.

“By actively using both of these tools, you are enabling Te Marae Ora to quickly and securely contact trace should the need arise,” says CookSafe Contact Tracing Supervisor Peka Fisher.

“And when I say actively, I mean making a habit of tagging in with your CookSafe card and having the CookSafe+ app installed on your phone with Bluetooth and location services enabled. This is crucial in ensuring that any potential spread of COVID-19 is swiftly contained.”

In the event of an outbreak, TMO will use data provided by CookSafe card tag-ins and the CookSafe+ app to help trace both the locations a COVID-19 case has visited and the people they have been in close contact with over a given period of time.

To help you remember how these two contact tracing tools work together, you can think of it like this – CookSafe card for the places you’ve been, CookSafe+ app for the people you’ve seen.

Should an outbreak occur, TMO will also use other contact tracing techniques in addition to the CookSafe and CookSafe+ contact tracing tools so as to obtain as full a picture as possible of where someone who tests positive for COVID-19 has been and who they might have been in contact with.

When a positive COVID-19 case is first identified, that person will be immediately isolated and TMO’s Health Intelligence Unit will be mobilised to commence contact tracing protocol.

Any details already available on the patient’s suspected close contacts will be acted upon, followed by the extraction of CookSafe data from TMO’s secure database to determine any possible locations of interest.

The patient will also be advised to enter a Bluetooth tracing code into their CookSafe+ app, which will upload the anonymous codes generated by their phone over the previous two weeks so exposure notifications can be quickly sent to other CookSafe+ Bluetooth users who may have been in close contact during that time, informing them of the need to self-isolate and arrange for a COVID-19 test.

If the patient is a visitor to the Cook Islands, flight information and accommodation details will be obtained and their accommodation provider alerted.

As all of the above information is being gathered, Health Information Systems staff will be provided with the names and details of potential close contacts.

If you are identified as a potential close contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, TMO staff will contact you by phone, confirm your personal details and inform you of the reason for the call. A series of pre-approved questions will be asked and the information provided by you in response will be recorded.

Once you have been made aware of the potential risk from COVID-19, you will be instructed to self-isolate and undergo a COVID-19 test. The Director of Public Health or the Public Health Specialist will deploy public health officers to the physical addresses of potential close contacts to conduct the COVID-19 swab test.

Depending on the results of your test, you may be asked to self-isolate for up to 14 days. Close contacts will be released from isolation once permission is given by the Director of Public Health, the Public Health Specialist or the Director of Hospital Health Services.

“Remember, best prepared is best protected,” says Secretary of Health Bob Williams. “While the best-case scenario is that we will never have to instigate these measures, it is vital that we are all aware of what is required should an active case of COVID-19 be identified in the Cook Islands.”

“Our CookSafe QR cards and the CookSafe+ app have been specifically designed to best facilitate the COVID-19 contact tracing process here in the Cook Islands, to help identify potential close contacts as soon as possible, and to help limit the potential spread of COVID-19 in our community.

“Once again, I cannot stress enough the importance of using our CookSafe cards and the CookSafe+ app. I urge everyone in the Cook Islands, both residents and visitors, to make use of these tools. Please play your part in helping keep the Cook Islands safe from COVID-19.”

ENDS

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