



## Proactive Release

The following document has been proactively released by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC), on behalf of the Minister for COVID-19 Response, Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall:

### **COVID-19 Briefings - August 2022**

The following documents have been included in this release:

**Title of paper:** 01082022 Assurance of System readiness Work Underway to Respond to a Variant of Concern

**Title of paper:** 03082022 Insights from Recommendations across COVID-19 Response System Reviews

**Title of paper:** 05082022 Review of New Zealand's COVID-19 Protection Framework and self-isolation settings - 5 August

**Title of paper:** 05082022 Public awareness campaign to support people who are unable to wear masks

**Title of paper:** 08082022 Meeting with Strategic COVID-19 Public Health Advisory Group 10 August 2022

**Title of paper:** 12082022 Preparation for Release of Haumaruru Briefing

**Title of paper:** 25082022 Meeting with Prof. Michael Plank

**Title of paper:** 26082022 All of Government COVID-19 System Readiness Exercise

**Title of paper:** 30082022 COVID-19 Community Panel, Chair's Report

Some parts of this information release would not be appropriate to release and, if requested, would be withheld under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). Where this is the case, the relevant section of the Act that would apply has been identified. Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

### **Key to redaction codes:**

- Section 9(2)(a), to protect the privacy of individuals;
- Section 9(2)(f)(iv), to maintain the confidentiality of advice tendered by or to Ministers and officials;
- Section 9(2)(g)(i), to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the free and frank expression of opinion; and
- Section 9(2)(h), to maintain legal professional privilege.



# Aide-Mémoire

## ASSURANCE OF SYSTEM READINESS WORK UNDERWAY TO RESPOND TO A VARIANT OF CONCERN

<b>To:</b>	Minister for COVID-19 Response		
<b>From:</b>	Amber Bill Head of System Assurance & Continuous Improvement, COVID-19 Response	<b>Date:</b>	1/08/2022
<b>Briefing Number:</b>	DPMC-2021/22-2446	<b>Security Level:</b>	<del>IN CONFIDENCE</del>

### Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to give the Minister for COVID-19 Response visibility of work underway to ensure that the public sector is ready to respond to a new variant of concern.

### Background

2. Recent Cabinet papers (COVID-19: Confirming New Zealand's Approach to Variants of Concern [CAB-22-MIN-0223] and COVID-19: Strategy for post winter [CAB-22-MIN-0251/SWC-22-MIN-0118]) set out the Government's response to variants of concern that may arise in the future, the changes to our COVID-19 strategy post-winter, and the legal and institutional settings required to ensure our approach for managing COVID-19 is sustainable over the longer term.

**Throughout the pandemic our strategy has evolved to respond to changes in the virus.**

3. Cabinet recently signalled their intention to shift to a new strategy for managing COVID-19 once we were past the winter stage of the Omicron outbreak [CAB-22-MIN-0086].
4. That approach will be delivered using a set of baseline measures – those that will remain in place all the time and support us to maintain and build resilience and provide protection; and reserve measures, where the risk posed by COVID-19 escalates (eg, there is a new variant of concern) and more restrictive measures are justified.

**Our response system continues to move towards decentralisation of functions.**

5. Over time, our response system has moved away from a model of centralised decision making to a greater emphasis on responsibility lying with sectors and individuals, leveraging the capability of line agencies to deliver on the Government's COVID-19 strategy.
6. The new strategy proposes a further shift away from an emergency response-based operating model to a more enduring model, in which the Ministry of Health will be responsible for leading the all-of-government response.
7. At the same time as this transition, Aotearoa New Zealand's health and disability system is in the midst of significant structural reform. It is critical that Ministers are assured that the Government's response to COVID-19 will continue to be effectively managed.

**System readiness for a variant of concern**

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8. The National Management Plan (NMP) sets out high-level guidance for the all-of-government COVID-19 response system, should it need to be re-activated to manage future outbreaks or variants of concern.
9. The NMP outlines how Cabinet decisions are operationalised, how we intend to manage new variants, agencies' respective roles and responsibilities, and coordination arrangements. The NMP guides the system through the decision-making architecture.
10. The NMP has been updated quarterly since December 2020 as the virus and our strategy to manage it has evolved, and has sat alongside the Ministry of Health Manatū Hauora COVID-19 Management Plan.
11. The Cabinet paper COVID-19: Confirming New Zealand's Approach to Variants of Concern [CAB-22-MIN-0223] set out five hypothetical scenarios to variants of concern to inform high-level health and disability system response planning.
12. Undertaking preparedness activities guided by these scenarios enhances our readiness to effectively respond to new variants of concern.

**Assurance of system readiness**

13. To gain assurance that the COVID-19 response is prepared to respond to any future variant of concern, Cabinet has directed a range of report backs by various agencies.
14. The table below sets out the assurance content asked for, and the outputs that will deliver that assurance.

Table 1: Report-backs and readiness activities asked of agencies

s9(2)(g)(i)



15. As part of readiness assurance, we will provide you with updates on progress through the COVID-19 weekly report (see Attachment 1 for an example of the reporting).

## Progress on readiness activities

### *System readiness exercise*

16. DPMC is preparing to run a system readiness exercise in the week 8-12 August 2022.
17. Participants in the exercise will include representatives from National Response Group (NRG) members and representatives of new health entities.
18. The exercise will be strategy neutral and will determine if the system is ready to respond to Scenario Four - High clinical severity, High immune escape (the worst case) of the Variants of Concern plan.
19. The exercise will test:
  - the current response system architecture as set out in the National Management Plan;
  - that there is a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities across the system to respond to Scenario Four of the Variants of Concern plan (high clinical severity, high immune escape), including in respect of newly established health agencies' functions.
20. Following the exercise, DPMC will provide you and the Prime Minister with a report outlining areas of success and any identified barriers (and mitigations for these) by the end of August 2022 [CAB-22-MIN-0223 refers].

### *The National Management Plan and Catalogue of Measures*

21. The National Management Plan (NMP) sets out high-level guidance for the all-of-government COVID-19 response system. As described above, the NMP will guide the readiness exercise, and will be updated to capture the changes to the response or roles and responsibilities that occur as a result of the transition.
22. DPMC has been updating the NMP iteratively as our response adapts to variants of concern. The most recent iteration (May 2022) included a refresh of the tools and measures (including latent measures, such as international border closures) that have been used to respond to COVID-19.
23. As part of that update, a Catalogue of Measures has been developed as a companion resource that contains the operational details for each of the measures. This catalogue will be updated to reflect the baseline and response measures in line with the new post-winter strategy [CAB-22-MIN-0223 refers].
24. DPMC will be seeking Chief Executives' confirmation that they are aware of the baseline and reserve measures that they are responsible for, and that their agency is ready and able to activate that measure should it be required for a response to a variant of concern.


### *Public Sector Chief Executives to review and report on readiness*

25. Cabinet also agreed that Public Sector Chief Executives keep their variant readiness plans under review and fit-for-purpose across variant scenarios and provide to COVID-

- 19 Ministers regular updates on their variant of concern readiness [CAB-22-MIN-0223 refers].
- 26. We propose a light-touch method that could be adopted to support Chief Executives to satisfy these Cabinet requirements.
- 27. We propose that the lead agency for all-of-government coordination (i.e., Ministry of Health) establish regular exercises (e.g., twice annually) to provide assurance that the system's readiness is reviewed and informed by up-to-date understanding of current variants of concern. Participation in this exercise could satisfy the requirement to review readiness plans (paragraph 20, CAB-22-MIN-0223).
- 28. Following each exercise, a report could be provided to COVID-19 Ministers on behalf of Chief Executives. Specifically, that report should confirm system readiness to respond to a variant of concern and identify any vulnerabilities (and recommended mitigations).
- 29. This post-exercise report could serve as the regular report backs to COVID-19 Ministers on readiness, satisfying the requirements for regular reporting [paragraph 21, CAB-22-MIN-0223].

**Next steps**

- 30. As requested by your office, updates on progress will be provided through the COVID-19 weekly report (see Attachment A).



**Amber Bill**  
**Head of System Assurance and Continuous Improvement COVID-19**

1/08/2022



**Minister Verrall**  
**Minister for COVID-19 Response**

4.8.22

<b>Attachments:</b>	
<b>Attachment A:</b>	Attachment A – Example of Variant of Concern Readiness Progress Report <small>Withheld in full under section 9(2)(g)(i) of the Act</small>

Contact for telephone discussion		
Name	Position	Telephone
Amber Bill	Head of System Assurance & Continuous Improvement, COVID-19 Group	s9(2)(a)

**Attachment A: Example of Variant of Concern Readiness Progress Report**

Withheld in full under section 9(2)(g)(i) of the Act

