



The Right Honourable Dame Helen Winkelmann Chief Justice of New Zealand Te Tumu Whakawā o Aotearoa

13 March 2020

Members of the profession

Planning for possible effects of a COVID-19 outbreak on court business

Heads of all court benches and senior Ministry of Justice officials have met to discuss how courts business will continue in the event of local or widespread outbreaks of COVID-19.

Matters discussed included arrangements for keeping court participants safe during court attendances, planning for the delivery of essential court business and services, options for remote hearings, relaxed or modified filing deadlines, communication strategies and the like. The Ministry is also undertaking a range of scenario planning exercises.

Judges, the Ministry and representatives of the profession will work together on a wide range of matters including agreement of a set of essential services, consideration of health and safety arrangements and a communications strategy.

The courts and the Ministry will be guided by Ministry of Health advice. As of 12 March, the Ministry of Health was not recommending changes to arrangements for large gatherings beyond advising people to follow good hygiene practices and that they should not attend if:

- they are unwell,
- have been in China, Iran, Italy or the Republic of Korea in the last 14 days, or
- have been in close contact with someone with a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the last 14 days.

We urge all court participants to follow Health advice to wash hands thoroughly and regularly, practice cough and sneeze etiquette and not come to court if unwell. Participants may also wish to consider “social distancing” (avoiding handshakes, hongi and kissing). Courts will have hand sanitiser readily available.

The judiciary and Ministry are currently addressing how all courts can communicate most effectively with the profession about court sittings, and any special arrangements that are necessary. I hope to come back to you with that information shortly.

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In the meantime we ask you

- To keep in touch with clients and witnesses about their health prior to any court appearances

- To seek approval for phone attendances should you be unwell - all courts will support this to the extent possible.
- To advise the registry promptly should your health or that of your client mean you are unable to attend.

Hei konā mai i roto i aku mihi,

Helen Winkelmann

Chief Justice/Te Tumu Whakawā