

Essential services: public-facing Q&As for the COVID website

Business Q&A

How are essential services defined?

Essential services those ones that the Government has decided can continue operating at premises under Alert Level 4. All essential services will still need to operate in a way that limits the risk of the spread and transmission of COVID-19.

If your business is on the essential services list:

- Your staff should work from home where possible,
- If they need to come to work so that you can carry out an essential service, you must ensure all appropriate measures are taken to minimise the transmission of COVID-19.

Businesses operating non-essential services must shut down their premises. These businesses can continue to operate with staff working from their own homes. If this is not possible, these businesses must close their operations.

What is considered an essential service may change over time. Some activities that are not essential now may become essential if New Zealand remains at alert level 4 for a sustained period.

If you are unsure if your business is an essential service, you can email essential@mbie.govt.nz.

You can also contact the BusinessNZ family for advice at:

- Upper North Island (EMA): 0800 300 362
- Central Region (Business Central): 0800 800 362
- Canterbury Employers' Chamber of Commerce: 0800 50 50 96
- Otago Southland Employers' Association: 0508 656 757

How can businesses find out if they are essential?

A list of essential services is available at <https://covid19.govt.nz/government-actions/covid-19-alert-level/essential-businesses/>

The list may be updated by the Government.

Do I need to shut my business if it isn't on the list of essential services?

At Alert Level 4, you must close your premises, but you may operate your business remotely (e.g. with workers working from home) if you are able to do so.

How can an essential service be delivered in a way that limits public health risks?

Businesses delivering essential services should consider measures to:

- minimise personal interactions among staff, and with and between customers, and
- ensure appropriate health, hygiene and safety measures are in place.

It is for each sector or business to decide how best to do this. Examples include:

- working from home as much as possible
- limiting staff interaction through physical distancing and split shifts

- limiting interaction with and between customers, e.g. through online or phone orders, contactless delivery, or managed entry and physical distancing
- frequent cleaning of premises, counters and EFTPOS terminals
- personal protective equipment for staff
- hygiene basics of hand washing and hand sanitisers.

What should I do if I think my business should be an essential service, but isn't on the list?

There are designated lead government agencies in each sector who are responsible for deciding whether specific activities count as essential services. The list of essential services may be amended by government over time as our response to COVID-19 evolves.

If you think your business should be an essential service email essential@mbie.govt.nz.

What does the “supply chain” mean?

The “supply chain” for a particular good or service refers to all the inputs and processes involved in its creation and distribution. When something is an essential service, this also includes critical components in its supply chain. For example, because food distribution is an essential service, this means the growing of food is also considered essential.

Public facing Q&A

What does it mean if I work in an essential service?

Each essential business needs to plan for how they continue their operations: they will need to meet appropriate public health measures, or arrange for essential work to be done from home. You should work from home if you can, but your employer will tell you about the specific arrangements for your workplace.

What do I do if I work for a business that is not an essential service but my employer requests I come into work?

We will work with businesses to make sure they are complying with the Alert Level 4 restrictions.

If a business chooses to ignore official advice and continues to trade, there will be actions taken to stop this.

If you are unsure if you should be working, you can contact your union or email essential@mbie.govt.nz.

What if I'm not sure whether I work in an essential service?

In the first instance, contact your employer. If you are still unsure, you can email essential@mbie.govt.nz.

What are "fast moving consumer goods"?

These are generally the kinds of things you buy at supermarkets. They are affordable, in high demand, and sold quickly.

These would typically include:

- Food,
- Beverages,
- Toiletries and personal care items,
- Cleaning products,
- Baby products e.g. formula and nappies,
- Pet food,
- Over-the-counter medicines,
- Alcohol & tobacco, and
- Stationery.

Can I still shop at my dairy?

Yes, dairies can choose to stay open but must have a 'one in, one out' rule, and cannot sell food prepared on the premises.

Are food delivery services (e.g. subscription food boxes and takeaways) considered essential services?

Takeaway operations and premises, as well as cooked food delivery services must shut down at level 4. We cannot guarantee every kitchen operates strict food preparation controls or that everyone who works in a kitchen is well. Evidence overseas suggests virus has been spread via poor food hygiene practices, so it's a real risk we have to eliminate.

Meals on Wheels has been granted an exception to this restriction due to the social service it provides.

Subscription food boxes are considered an essential service.

Whole food delivery services (e.g. subscription food boxes) and supermarket delivery services can continue to operate but must use non-contact delivery measures i.e. online and phone orders and contactless delivery.

Will public transport continue to run? Can taxis and rideshare drivers continue to work?

At level 4 there will likely be reduced public transport service levels. Public transport will be focused on allowing essential workers to travel between their homes and workplaces; and to allow the public to access food and medical care.

Taxis and rideshare drivers can continue to work at levels 3 and 4, but will need to meet the appropriate health measures. Similar to public transport, there will likely be reduced service levels.

If you have neighbours who are reliant on public transport to go to the supermarket, you could offer to do their grocery shopping (while taking all necessary health measures).

Is animal welfare covered?

Yes. Veterinary and animal health/welfare services are essential services, and pet food is a fast-moving consumer good. Pet food is available at supermarkets and vets.

Travel to look after animals is allowed, as long as you take the necessary health measures, and comply with any region-specific travel measures.

Can I buy alcohol?

Under Alert Level 4, people can still purchase alcohol from supermarkets. Liquor stores are closed unless they are within a Licensing Trust area.

Why is alcohol considered essential?

Closing all alcohol outlets could lead to people living in licencing trust areas travelling outside of their communities to purchase alcohol, potentially breaking self-isolation, and impacting our ability to contain transmission.

Will hardware stores be open?

Hardware stores will only be open to tradespeople, who need supplies in order to provide an essential service. They will not be open to the public.

Can I get a trade person to come and do essential maintenance at my house?

Yes, if this is essential to maintain the necessities of life or critical to safety. This includes electricians, plumbers and builders.