



COVID-19 Traffic Light Restrictions: Orange

Mackenzie District Council is implementing COVID Orange measures based on its understanding of the current government advice. We are continually reviewing our approach as further guidance becomes available.

At the heart of Council's approach is the health, safety and well-being of our communities, employees, contractors and visitors, and ensuring that we can continue to operate our core business safely and effectively.

When assessing the risk posed by COVID-19, Council have considered the following factors:

- No single measure will protect our staff and communities from COVID, but a range of measures will serve to delay the spread of the virus. Although vaccination reduces, but doesn't eliminate, the likelihood of transmission, and will limit the potential severity of symptoms, because we are a small workforce we need to take steps to – as far as practically possible – slow transmission of the virus through the team. Slowing transmission reduces the risk that we have a high number of staff isolating or off sick at any given time. Our small size means even a small number of employees off work could significantly impair our ability to provide essential services to our communities, including a Civil Defence response in the event of an emergency.
- A vaccination policy for employees is still under consultation, and we are working with contractors to ensure they can fulfil their roles while conforming with Council's requirements
- While we know that visitors are vaccinated, we don't yet know the vaccination status of all staff and contractors, so the possibility of transmission within the offices remains higher than if all the occupants were vaccinated. Requiring visitors to be vaccinated lowers the risk of an outbreak within the offices.
- Evidence from elsewhere in New Zealand suggests that when cases are picked up the virus has been in the community for ten days to two weeks preceding that. So a reactive approach is too little too late.
- Once the Auckland borders open it's almost inevitable that we will see community transmission in South Canterbury. Until the impact is known, it is prudent to take a cautious approach.
- Should we take a more relaxed approach now, and a community outbreak demands a stronger response over the holiday period, Council would not be a position to change our procedures and communicate that to the community.

It should go without saying, that Council's basis for taking any particular course of action is not to discriminate, but stems from a desire and responsibility to protect our communities, and our employees, as far as possible from the impact of COVID, so we are able to continue to provide essential services in the event of a community outbreak.

We acknowledge that there are a range of ways of addressing some of these issues, and council have endeavoured to balance the need for protection measures with access to facilities and services. We respect the fact that not everyone will agree with Council's approach, and welcome constructive feedback as to how we might better balance these responsibilities.

Council is also committed to working with individuals who do not have vaccination certificates to ensure that as far as possible the impact on them is minimised.

In most cases our customer service teams will be able to work with individuals to find solutions - indeed, we have been able to provide a solution to everyone who has contacted us with a specific issue since the traffic light system came into effect. A very small number of people have called Council with apparently no specific issue, and for no apparent reason other than to be rude and abusive to staff. If you have a specific issue we can assist with, please give us a call or email us at info@mackenzie.govt.nz - we have been clear that we will do everything we can, within the current framework of restrictions, to work with customers to find a mutually acceptable solution.

Public Facilities

Public facilities as described under the Orange framework include museums, art galleries, libraries etc.

Community Halls are not freely available to the public. The activities in halls and event centres fall under the description of 'Events' or 'Gatherings', which potentially present a higher risk of transmission and so different restrictions apply.

There is provision for changing a venue between requiring certificates and not, however this comes with a requirement to clean the venue between uses. Council is not resourced to provide this service.

As was the case under the previous Level 2 approach, under the Orange traffic light framework there will be some disruption to events if vaccine passports are required or not. Requiring vaccine passports potentially delivers the least amount of disruption to the greatest amount of people.

Rates Liability

Rates are a tax on property, not a payment for a specific service. Facilities like roads, pools, parks, libraries, museums and galleries are funded on a 'common good' basis. These things are a benefit to the whole community whether individuals use them or not, so everyone contributes to them collectively.

An example is someone who doesn't have a driving license. They're not allowed to drive on the road, but they still contribute to the cost of maintaining the roads because it's a benefit to the wider community. This is different to things that benefit customers directly like rubbish collections or water supply, which are paid for on an individual basis through a targeted rate, if you receive that service.

Therefore, regardless of an individual's choice to use a particular facility, the liability for the payment of rates remains.

Meetings

Council has accelerated plans to live-stream council and community board meetings. This will mean that if members of the public are unable to attend, whatever the reason, it will be possible to participate. We expect this solution to be available by February 2022.

Residents and ratepayers can also contact us via the website, or by email at info@mackenzie.govt.nz and information can be passed on to councillors during the public section at the start of a Council or Community Board meeting. Since elected members only listen to points of view in this situation and provide a considered response afterwards by email or letter, this will provide an effective solution until a video link option is available.