

Advice on News and Media as an essential service

To: News and media organisations

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Introduction

1. News and media functions have been identified as an essential service during the Covid-19 response and Level 4 period.
2. The critical role of media is reflected in a number of Memorandums of Understanding held in the sector with the National Emergency Management Agency.
3. Government is not requesting that any broadcasters go off air; all news and media organisations are encouraged to continue their services from within their own buildings or from home wherever possible.
4. Health guidelines must be followed at all times to protect staff, those they interact with, and the general population.
5. The Ministry recommends an approach based on media being able to maintain a limited number of staff primarily for the provision of news and current affairs programming, and critical broadcast continuity.
6. Within that limited number staffing, it may be possible to provide broader programming; this should be encouraged but the focus of organisations should be on the provision of news and current affairs.
7. The approach set out below is subject to change as the situation develops; feedback from organisations on how we can collectively improve the approach is welcome throughout the Level 4 period.

Principles

8. These principles are organisation neutral and apply to print, broadcast and online media formats.
9. Media play an important role in informing New Zealanders at a time when reliable and fast information is vital.
10. The distribution of public health messages to the New Zealand public is critical in order to keep the public informed.
11. We ask that broadcasters are mindful of the mental health of viewers while New Zealand is at Alert Level 4.
12. Media companies will abide by public health measures that are in place at each COVID-19 alert level, as set out on the COVID-19 webpage.

Guidelines

13. Reporting staff will be allowed a measure of freedom of movement to allow for effective coverage and reporting. Numbers of reporting staff should be kept to a minimum.
14. Health measures must be rigorously in place at all times for on-site and off-site activities and reporting staff.

15. Health measures are critical for reporting staff. This to protect both reporting staff themselves and all those they interact with, including key decision makers and other essential services personnel.
16. Where key news or current affairs programming is provided by a contracted third party (a production company), these guidelines will apply to those companies.
17. These guidelines do not apply to programming provided by a contracted third party that is not focused on news or current affairs.

Consultation

18. Treasury, Te Puni Kōkiri (for Māori TV) and the Ministry for Pacific Peoples (for the Pacific Media Network) have been informed of this approach.
19. The National Emergency Management Agency has been informed and strongly supports the inclusion of news and media as an essential service.

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Hon Kris Faafoi
**Minister for Broadcasting, Communications
and Digital Media**