

BUSINESS CONTINUITY – SUPPORT



All of us have a role to play in stopping further spread of the COVID-19 virus. Fundamental to New Zealand's response is not putting yourself or others at risk if you are unwell – don't go to work or be out in public if you are sick.

In response there are number of options available that can help you provide business continuity and support through this time.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Wage Subsidy Scheme

To provide support to businesses experiencing a significant downturn because of COVID-19, the Government announced details of a wage subsidy scheme. The subsidy is to be paid to qualifying businesses on a 'per worker' basis for a 12 week period.

Leave Payment Scheme

The COVID-19 Leave Payment Scheme is designed to help people who should self-isolate, but otherwise might be deterred because of financial reasons. The scheme is open to all workers in all firms, sectors, and regions, sole-traders and the self-employed where the need to self-isolate or recover from COVID-19 prevents a person from working.

Link: <https://www.employment.govt.nz/leave-and-holidays/other-types-of-leave/coronavirus-workplace>

Work and Income Benefits

The Government has also removed the stand-down period to access main benefits effective 23 March 2020. This means you can apply for a main benefit (for example, if your workplace has temporarily closed, you have had a reduction in hours of work, or have been made redundant) and once your application is approved you may start to receive your main benefit sooner.

Link: <https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/eligibility/emergencies/2020/coronavirus.html#null>

Tax Relief Measures for Individuals

There are three main changes to tax relief settings. Recipients will not have to do anything to receive these additional entitlements. The additional support will be calculated automatically.

- Main benefits will increase on 1 April 2020 in line with wage growth (indexation) AND then by an additional \$25 per week.
- Winter Energy Payment will start on 1 May 2020 and be paid at double the current rate for 2020 only. The rates for 2020 will be \$40.91 per week (single people) and \$63.64 per week (couples or people with dependents).

- From 1 July 2020, working families will no longer need to be “normally” working at least 20 hours a week (sole parents) or 30 hours a week (couples with children) to be eligible for the IWTC.

Link: <https://www.ird.govt.nz/Updates/News-Folder/tax-relief-coronavirus>

REDUCING WORKLOAD

Employers and employees must discuss in good faith the implications of COVID-19 on their working arrangements.

Where changes to current working arrangements are proposed by an employer, there are specific good faith requirements that must be followed.

Guidance on Workplace Change

Employers and employees may be considering changes that involve workplaces closing temporarily or reductions in hours. These changes require additional good faith or other process arrangements.

Reduction of Work Hours

Generally, if an employment agreement has the employee's hours of work, then an employer can't change them without the employee's agreement. If the employment agreement says that an employer can change the hours of work, the employer still has to act fairly and reasonably before they do.

Annual Leave

As a first principle, employees should be able to decide when to take their annual holidays. Employers and employees may agree to take annual leave during temporary closures of a workplace due to COVID-19. If an employer and employee cannot agree, an employer may direct annual leave be taken if they have first discussed this with the employee and provided 14 days' notice before the annual leave is to be taken.

REMOTE WORKING

Spark, Vodafone NZ, 2degree and Vocus have removed data caps on all residential, small and medium business plans until the end of June to support kaimahi now working from home due to Covid-19

Link: <https://www.spark.co.nz/help/covid-19#wfh>

Link: <https://www.vodafone.co.nz/network/reliable/remote-working/>

When you're working from home, you should prioritise taking care of your health and safety and the health and safety of your dependents. This includes being aware of the risks around you and working out how to manage them. For example, taking breaks to manage fatigue, and making sure your workspace is ergonomically sound.

Keep open contact with your employer. Act in good faith and be honest with your employer about how you are feeling and any concerns you have. If your workplace is safe and you're returning to work, plan your commute ahead of time. Check out public transport and carpark building availability.

Tips for Working Remotely

If your business is shifting to working from the 'home office', we have some tips to help you minimise the impacts of the self-isolation efforts.

Set-up Home Office

A dedicated working space with a comfortable desk and chair can help ensure you are more productive at home. It's even better if you can set up double monitors, a wireless keyboard and mouse.

Crank Up the Communication

Pick up the phone instead of emailing if a quick decision is needed. While audio calls are great, video calling can help avoid feelings of isolation or disconnection. Have regular video conferences with your team to check-in and collaborate.

Make Sure You Have Enough Data

Whether you are relying on your home Wi-Fi, hot-spotting off your phone or a laptop with a SIM card, you need to make sure that you have enough data to support both your work and personal life for the next while.

Get What You Need Without Leaving The House

It's not just supermarkets and takeaway outlets that do home delivery, stores such as Noel Leeming can deliver your technology needs too. Online messaging boards and social media platforms can help you stay connected to friends and family.