



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

26 March 2020

MEDIA STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE –

Public access to courts tightened for safety reasons

To preserve public safety and give effect to the COVID-19 Alert Level 4, District Courts and the High Court are excluding from courthouses members of the public whose attendance is not required for the business of the court that day. This takes effect immediately.

In contravention of the nationwide lockdown that is in place under COVID-19 Alert Level 4, a number of people have attempted to enter courthouses as supporters of defendants.

Under s 197 of the Criminal Procedure Act 2011, a court may exclude members of the public when necessary to avoid endangering the safety of any person present, to avoid undue disruptions to the conduct of proceedings, or to avoid prejudicing the maintenance of the law.

In the present state of emergency, it has been necessary to exercise this power.

Supporters not to enter courthouse without permission

With effect immediately, the only members of the public who can enter the District Court or High Court for criminal proceedings are those whose presence is required for the business of the court.

The court will remain open to accredited members of the media to ensure that the principles of open justice continue to be observed. The following people are also permitted to enter the court: defendants, prosecutors, lawyers and officers of the court. All people attending court may be required to show identification.

As a result of these measures, supporters of people appearing in person will be denied entry to courthouses unless they get advance permission from the presiding Judge.

These requests cannot be made in person at the courthouse because all public counters are closed to the public, as are court precincts.

Instead, permission can be requested by telephoning the Ministry of Justice Contact Centre **0800 COURTS (0800 268 787)**.

If permission is given to attend as a supporter, a court security officer will advise the person that they may enter. For the health and wellbeing of everyone in the courthouse, supporters will be denied entry if they are feeling unwell or have flu-like symptoms.

If any supporter disobeys safety orders from court staff, or creates a disruption, they will be asked to leave.

The priority of the courts during the pandemic emergency is to keep all staff and court users safe while providing fair and effective justice.

Attendance for priority Family Court or civil hearings

For those people who need to attend a court for priority Family Court proceedings, or other priority civil proceedings, there will be signs on the court doors advising how they can contact court staff for assistance.

Find out more

Regular updates will continue to be made to this website and through the Courts of New Zealand Twitter account [@CourtsofNZ](https://twitter.com/CourtsofNZ).

Also see the following links:

Courts of NZ website [COVID-19 updates](#) and [Court Protocols](#)

District Court website: www.districtcourts.govt.nz

Ministry of Justice: www.justice.govt.nz

Courts of NZ Twitter account: [@courtsofnz](https://twitter.com/courtsofnz)

District Court Twitter account: [@NZDistrictCourt](https://twitter.com/NZDistrictCourt)