



**CHIEF DISTRICT COURT JUDGE
FOR NEW ZEALAND
TE KAIWHAKAWĀ MATUA O
TE KŌTI-Ā-ROHE O AOTEAROA
Judge Heemi Taumaunu**

Media Embargo 1am, Monday 27 April 2020

Statement from the Chief District Court Judge

Extra measures to observe COVID-19 Alert Level 3

The District Court is taking extra steps in relation to the safety of court participants and observance of COVID-19 Alert Level 3 restrictions when the court reopens to the public on Tuesday 28 April.

The courts are an essential service during the pandemic response period. The Alert Level 3 [Health Act order](#) provides that essential personal movement includes leaving home to attend Court.

The Chief District Court Judge, Judge Heemi Taumaunu, says the District Court must continue to process cases, provided the work can be done in a way that complies with physical distancing and hygiene requirements. Although the move to Alert Level 3 gives the District Court an opportunity to do more work than it could under Alert Level 4, the court will still be operating at reduced capacity.

The Chief Judge says there will be screening at entrances to carefully control and limit numbers coming into District Court locations. Physical distancing and hygiene protocols, including extra cleaning, will be observed within courtrooms and court precincts, in line with Alert Level 3 requirements. PPE will be available to anyone who asks for it, and people may also use their own PPE if they choose.

To stagger the numbers, those on bail and due to attend court will be, to the extent possible, allocated times to appear, spread throughout the day. This should minimise any need for people to queue before they are screened and permitted to enter. (Lawyers with business at court, accredited media, and stakeholders, will not be required to queue and will be allowed to enter before others waiting outside.)

“I expect this to be an orderly process, and people coming to court should be prepared to queue outside, at two metres apart from each other,” Chief Judge Taumaunu said. “Only those who are required in court should attend, and defendants are permitted to bring only one support person.”

Everyone will also have to provide details for a COVID-19 contact-tracing register. Proof of identification may be required.

“On Tuesday, the number of people attending court on bail is not expected to be large. We are expecting fewer than 70 people staggered throughout the day to attend in response to their bail conditions at Auckland District Court, and even fewer at Manukau – our two biggest courts.”

For the first week of Alert Level 3, the numbers of people expected to attend court on bail have been reduced through call-overs and other measures put in place by local Judges in consultation with court managers. In addition, the District Court will continue to deal with people in custody, but using AVL as much as possible.

Judges will defer some cases if numbers attending turn out to be greater than anticipated. Few, if any, Judge Alone Trials are expected to be heard during the first week at Alert Level 3.

The court will also be sensitive to difficulties lawyers may experience in taking instructions from clients or briefing witnesses. The court accepts that this may result in some cases having to be adjourned. Extra space will be made available for lawyer-client interviews by using vacant courtrooms whenever interview rooms are too small for physical distancing. Anyone vulnerable on health or age-related grounds should not come, and will not be required to come to Court.

The Chief Judge urges people unsure about when they need to come to court to talk to their lawyer, or if they do not have a lawyer, to call **0800 COURTS (268 787)** for information.

People who had their cases adjourned during Alert Level 4 were given new dates to appear, and are expected to attend court on those dates.

Although the public counters will remain closed during Alert Level 3, there will be drop-box facilities available for filing in person.

More detail about how all divisions of the District Court, including Family Court and Youth Court, will operate under Alert Level 3 are contained in a recently issued [protocol](#). From Tuesday, the Chief Judge says he intends to keep the operation of the Alert Level 3 protocol under constant review.

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