



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

25 March 2020

**Media statement**

## Note from Chief Justice Winkelmann

The Prime Minister has announced the alert level for COVID-19 in New Zealand is to rise to Level 4 - Eliminate on Wednesday at 11:59 pm. This effectively shuts down all but the provision of essential services. I acknowledge the concern amongst the public, court staff and legal practitioners regarding any requirement to travel to court for hearings or to attend to filing of documents. I also understand that the restrictions imposed by the level 4 alert make it difficult for parties and legal practitioners to conduct court proceedings.

However, courts are an essential service. New Zealand courts must continue to uphold the rule of law and to ensure that fair trial rights, the right to natural justice and rights under the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act are upheld.

The heads of bench have decided that only proceedings affecting the liberty of the individual or their personal safety and wellbeing, or that are time-critical should be heard while we are at alert level 4. Please refer to the [protocols](#) for each court for more assistance as to the nature of the proceedings which might meet these criteria.

To the maximum extent possible, and to avoid the need for people to attend court in person, the courts will use remote participation to hear these matters. Remote participation may involve AVL where that is possible, telephone or email.

However, in the District Court, Family Court, High Court and Court of Appeal in-person attendances may be required in some cases. Where court attendance is unavoidable, the safety of the public, court staff and members of the legal profession is paramount. Measures have been taken to achieve physical distance and to improve courthouse hygiene. The Ministry of Justice has posted designated hygiene officers to each court to ensure that the increased hygiene standards are maintained.

Detailed advice about the District Court sitting during the level 4 alert period is set out on the [District Court website](#).

Detailed advice about the High Court sitting during the level 4 alert period is set out on the [Courts of New Zealand website](#).

Each court is requiring filing of court documents by email during the level 4 alert. Courts will not receive in-person filing of documents, though arrangements may need to be made to receive some without-notice applications in the Family Court. Courts will continue to receive filing by post for those who cannot access facilities to file by email, but due to hygiene requirements, processing of documents received by post may be significantly delayed. Again, please refer to the [protocol](#) for each court for more information as to what is required to file documents.

Courts will waive the payment of filing fees for documents filed during the level 4 alert to the extent judges can do so under s 24 of the Epidemic Preparedness Act or pursuant to other relevant court rule or regulation.

I appreciate the commitment that the people who work to support the operation of the courts have shown over the last two weeks. Our frontline court staff and members of the legal profession have continued to serve the interests of justice. Their constructive approach to the necessary changes we have implemented, and will continue to implement, keeps the courts operating and ensures that justice is administered.

Regular updates will continue to be made to this website and to the Courts of New Zealand Twitter account [@CourtsOfNZ](#).

**Links:**

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

District Court website: [www.districtcourts.govt.nz](http://www.districtcourts.govt.nz):

Courts of NZ Twitter account: [@courtsfnz](#)

District Court Twitter account: [@NZDistrictCourt](#)