



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

22 March 2020

Media statement

Chief Justice Helen Winkelmann says New Zealand's courts will continue to deliver essential justice services throughout COVID-19.

The Chief Justice and other judicial leaders have this afternoon published a set of protocols explaining the measures that will be taken to support the public health effort to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

The protocols will be updated as required in line with any changes to the alert levels.

The Chief Justice said courts provide an essential community service:

“My expectation is that whatever level the alert is raised to, the courts will continue to operate. There will however be changes to how each court operates.

“Although the operating circumstances of the courts may change during COVID-19, the courts will 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.”

Heads of Bench have also identified proceedings that will be given priority should the courts' services be significantly disrupted. Some concern matters to do with liberty:

- Criminal matters (warrants to arrest, bail, case review hearings, defended hearings, sentencings, various appeals)
- Protection of young persons in custody
- Habeas corpus applications
- Judicial review
- Mental Health Act orders
- Orders under the Health Act.

Other priority proceedings concern personal safety and the wellbeing of children, including proceedings relating to family violence and care and protection matters.

Chief Justice Winkelmann said the greatest impacts of COVID-19 will be felt on New Zealand's largest and busiest court, the District Court, which includes the Family Court, and the communities they serve.

She said the steps being put in place by Chief District Court Judge Taumaunu and Principal Family Court Judge Moran reflect their commitment to ensuring those who need to access the courts can continue to do so, while at the same time minimising and mitigating the risks to those engaging with the court.

To assist with this, the judiciary is asking that only those who are required to attend court come to the courthouse.

All people who are scheduled to attend court next week should continue to do so unless they are:

- told otherwise by the registry of the relevant court or by their lawyer;
- have been instructed to self-isolate or stay at home (eg if you are aged over 70);
- are feeling unwell.

If they are unwell or in isolation, it is important for them to contact 0800 COURTS (0800 268 787) before they are due to appear in court to receive direction as to when they are to appear, and that they also read the Ministry of Health's latest COVID-19 advice [here](#).

There is further COVID-related advice on the [Courts of NZ website](#), at the [Ministry of Justice website](#), and on the [dedicated all-of-government COVID-19 website](#).

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