COVID-19 Weekly Monitoring Report

Tuesday 5 May 2020

[IN-CONFIDENCE]

Current strategy: Elimination through stamping out the virus

Current Alert Level: 3

This weekly report responds to COVID-19 Ministerial Group's 9 April directive for All-of-Government officials to develop a set of measures and regular reporting that will inform future decisions on changing Alert Levels or the overall strategy, and to report them regularly.

The report places information about COVID-19 in New Zealand and health system capacity alongside evidence of the effects of the restrictions on the economy and society more broadly, and public attitudes towards, and compliance with, the restrictions.

This report covers:

The contents of this report reflect the principal matters that need to be taken into consideration when determining whether to change alert levels.

There are some gaps in measures and data, and these are noted where applicable. All-of-Government officials will continue to improve the measures.

Key changes and developments from last week

Developments to note:

- Daily cases and active cases continue to drop, along with detected cases of potential community transmission.
- As expected, there is increased mobility associated with the shift to Alert Level 3, with New Zealand mobility now closer to Australia.
- There has been a steady reduction in public's perception of the threat from COVID-19.
- Contract tracing timeliness is close to the targeted level, although this is under a lockdown environment.
- There has been a modest reduction in the number of MSD hardship grants toward the end of April and this trend has continued as we shift into Alert Level 3. Grants remain at an elevated level.

Additions to the report:

- contact tracing timeliness data
- tracking daily cases by symptom onset date as well as report date
- mobility data (Apple) including an Australian comparison
- survey data on perceived threat from COVID over time.

Improvements we are working on:

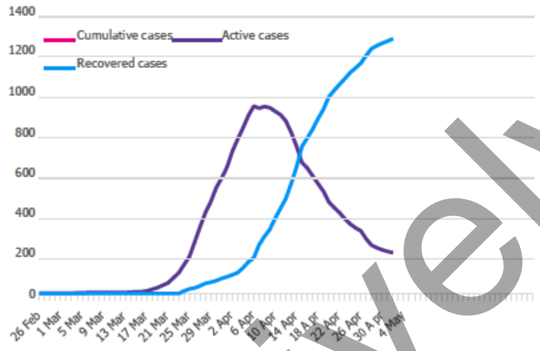
- accessing data on time from symptom onset to isolation to measure the overall performance of our test-trace-isolate system
- accessing timeliness of testing data
- number of active cases by location of isolation (self-isolation, quarantine, hospital, rest homes, etc)
- accessing non-health sector PPE data.

COVID-19 in New Zealand

New case numbers have declined further over the past week to consistently fewer than five per day (Figure 2). The last recorded cases were on Friday 1 May.[1] We continue to have relatively few serious cases, and relatively low incidence of cases amongst the particularly vulnerable elderly population. There are now under 200 active cases (Figure 1).

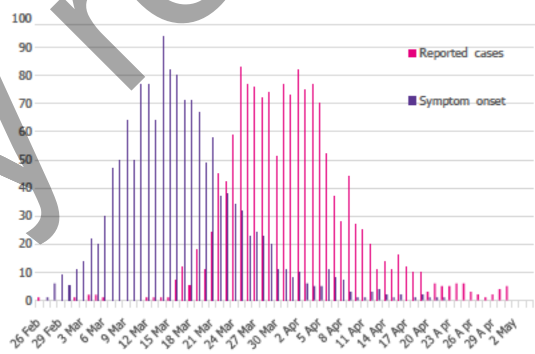
Levels of detected community transmission have further reduced. A case on 25 April is listed as under investigation (); we understand this investigation has now been completed with no link to another case identified. There are cases of potential community transmission reported on 29 April and 30 April. The 29 April case was an asymptomatic case detected by workplace surveillance testing. The case reported on 30 April had a symptom onset date of 5 April, suggesting an infection date between 23 March and 3 April. Although all close contacts have tested negative, some unexplored links are being followed up.

Figure 1: Cumulative, active and recovered cases



Source: EpiServ via Ministry of Health, Statistics New Zealand

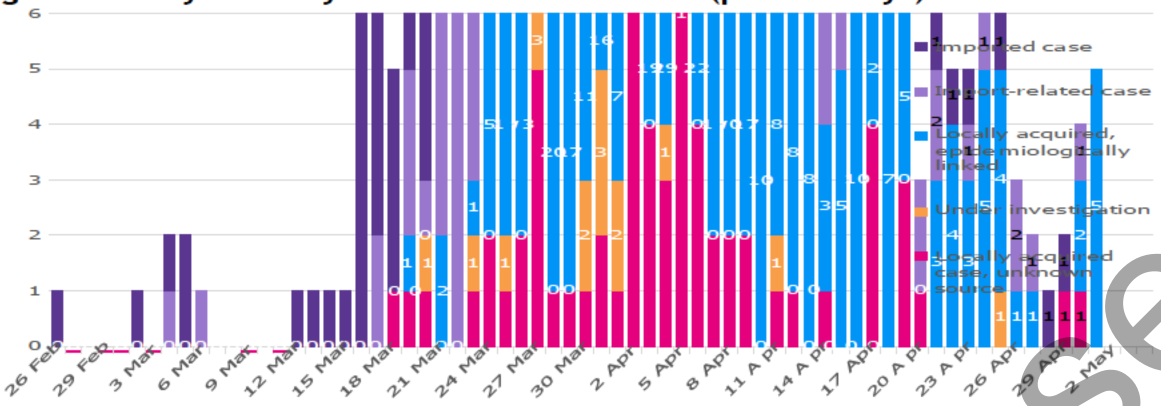
Figure 2: Daily cases and symptom onset date[2]



Source: EpiServ via Ministry of Health

[1] The public announcement of two cases on 3 May referred to cases that had been recorded earlier as suspected cases, and which had their status updated to probable cases that day.
[2] Current estimates are that symptoms appear 2-12 days after infection (on average 5 days after infection).

Figure 3: Daily cases by source of transmission (past 14 days)



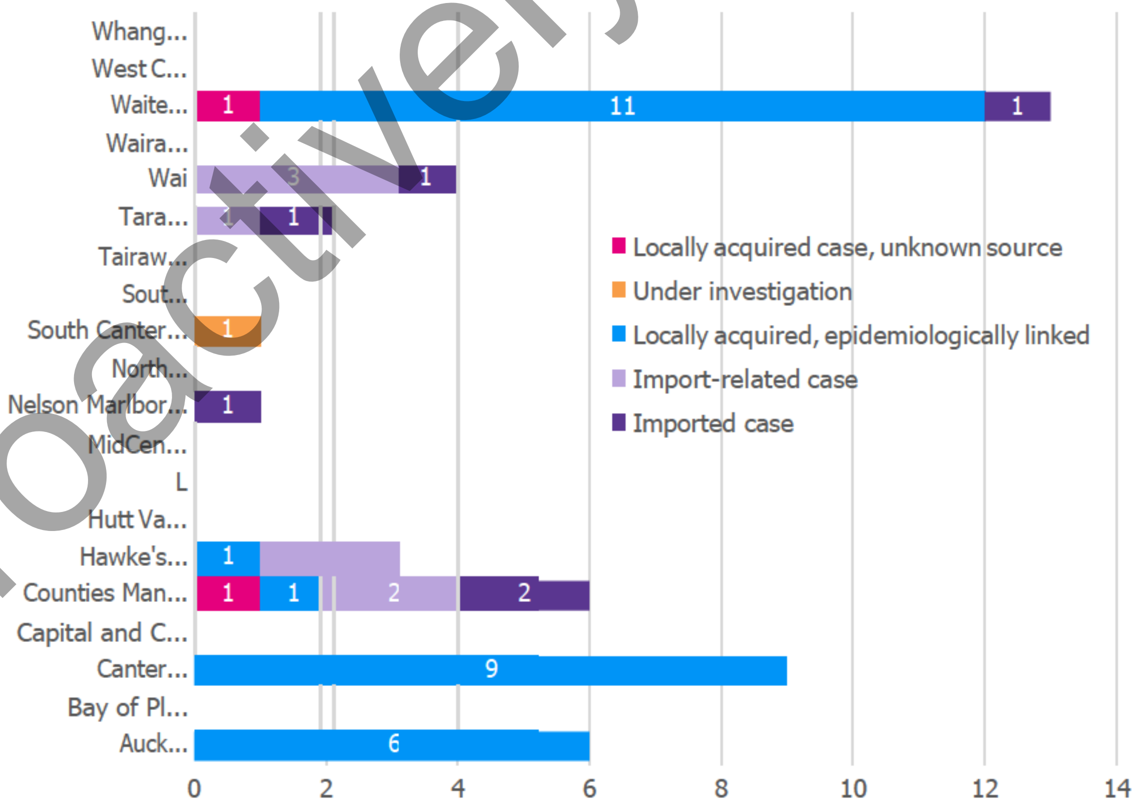
Source: EpiServ via Ministry of Health

Definitions:

- Import-related case: Cases that have a link to an imported case.
- Locally acquired cases, epidemiologically linked: Cases that have a link to a locally acquired case with an unknown source.
- Locally acquired cases, unknown source: Cases that have no link to another case or overseas travel (potential community transmission).

Regionally, cases over the past 14 days have been concentrated in two DHBs: Canterbury and Waitematā. Bay of Plenty, Capital and Coast, Hutt Valley, Lakes, MidCentral, Northland, Southern, Tairawhiti, Wairarapa, West Coast and Whanganui have had no new cases over the past 14 days (Figure 4).

Figure 4: DHB cases over the 14 days to 4 May, by source of transmission

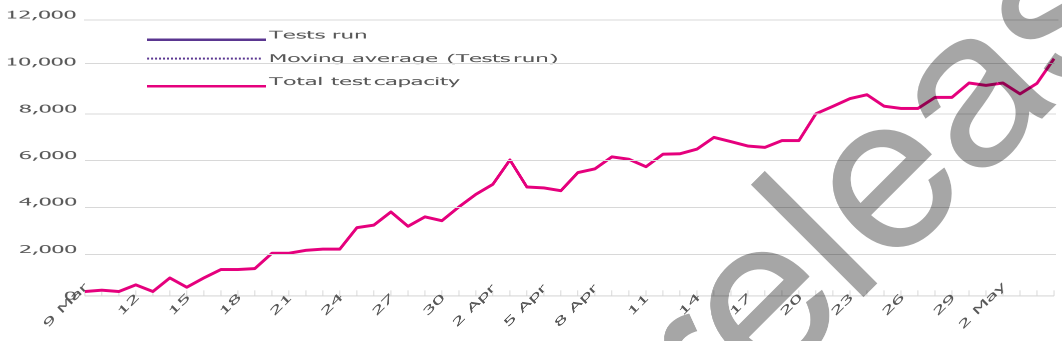


Source: EpiServ via Ministry of Health

Testing and tracing system

Our testing capacity is now over 9,000 tests per day (Figure 5). As at 21 April, complete test stock on hand in labs is 59,000, which is 14 days' supply at current (7-day average) levels. Demand for testing has been responsive to changes in policy to test with a wide range of symptoms. Targeted testing of higher-risk groups (e.g. airport workers) has also contributed to the increase. We have confidence in our testing regime. At this stage all DHBs in New Zealand have undertaken a level of testing that compares favourably internationally.

Figure 5: Testing capacity



Source: Ministry of Health

Figure 6: Testing rate per 1,000 population, by DHB

Source: Ministry of Health

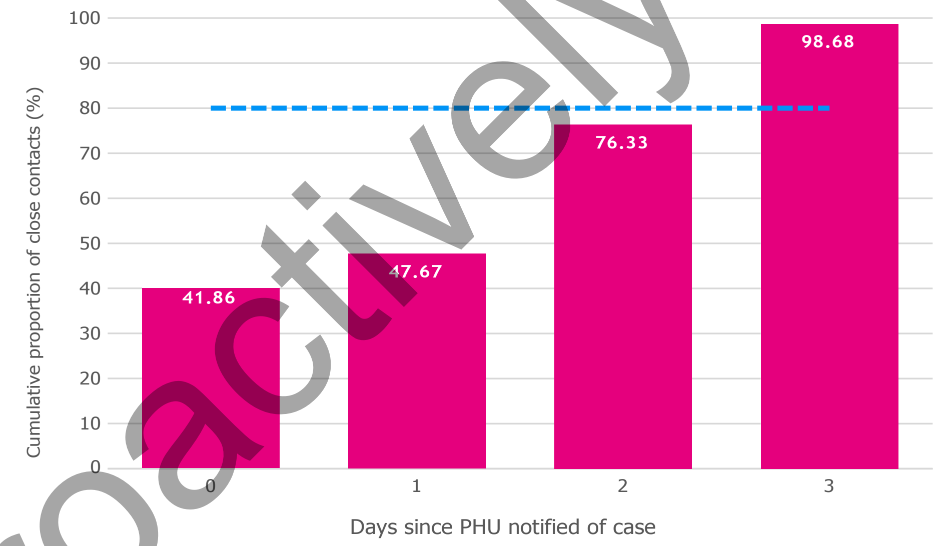
The Public Health Units (PHUs) currently have combined capacity to contact and investigate up to 185 cases per day. In addition, the National Close Contact Service (NCCS) has capacity to scale up to 10,000 calls a day to trace and quarantine.

Cabinet has approved funding for PHUs (in addition to $15 million of funding already provided to PHUs in March). This will further increase and strengthen their baseline capacity to ensure sufficient localised capacity, with the NCCS providing surge capacity. This provides capacity to manage a range of scenarios under different alert levels.

As we remain in Alert Level 3, the number of close contacts per case has remained low.

In addition to capacity, timeliness measures are critical to understanding the performance of the testing and contact tracing systems. Following the audit of contact tracing, the Ministry of Health established a number of performance metrics including that all close contacts of a case should be contacted within 48 hours in at least 80% of cases. At this stage data is only available by date, rather than time, so we are reporting in terms of number of days in the chart below (Figure 7). Achieving the target would require more than 80% being achieved within two days.

Figure 7: Time between notification of case and tracing of close contact, 21-27 April



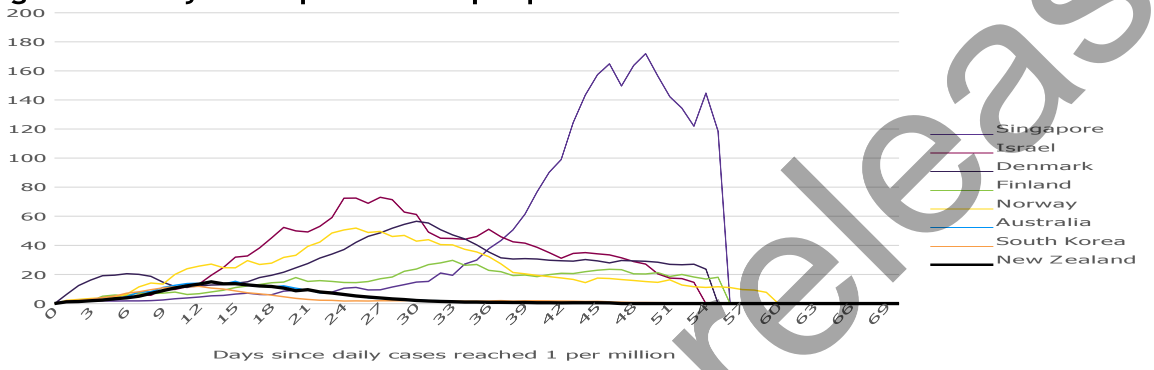
Source: Ministry of Health

International comparisons of cases and testing

International comparisons are limited by different case reporting standards, testing processes and test reporting methodologies.

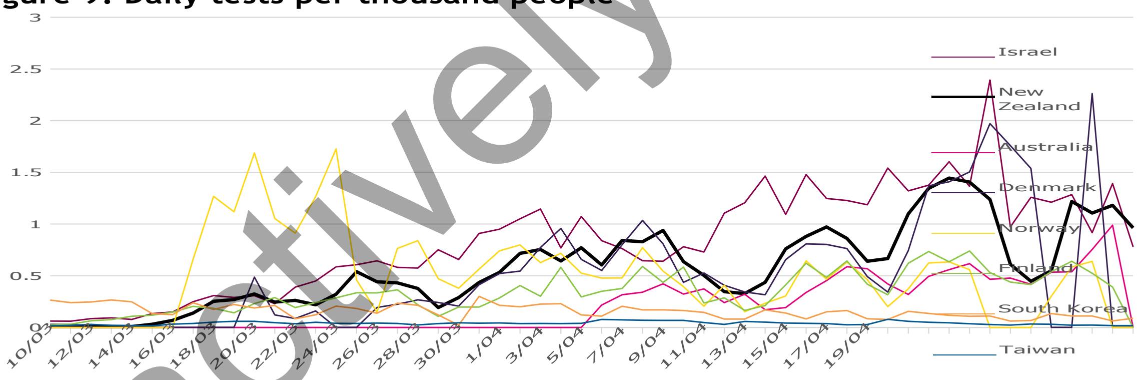
However, New Zealand appears to have performed well internationally in reducing daily cases and maintaining high levels of testing (Figures 8, 9 and 10).

Figure 8: Daily cases per million people



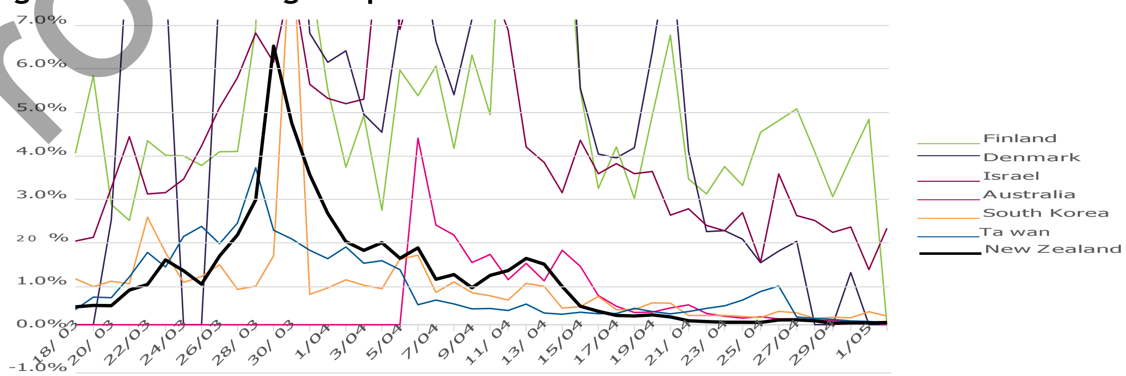
Source: Our World in Data

Figure 9: Daily tests per thousand people



Source: Our World in Data

Figure 10: Percentage of positive test results



Source: Our World in Data

Health system capacity

Our health system is not currently under significant strain due to cases of COVID-19 (Figures 11, 12, 13,14).

Figure 11: Availability of ventilators, by DHB

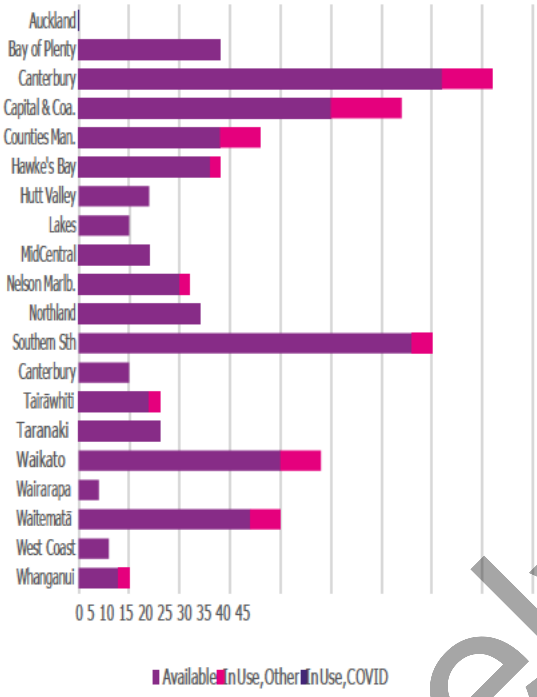
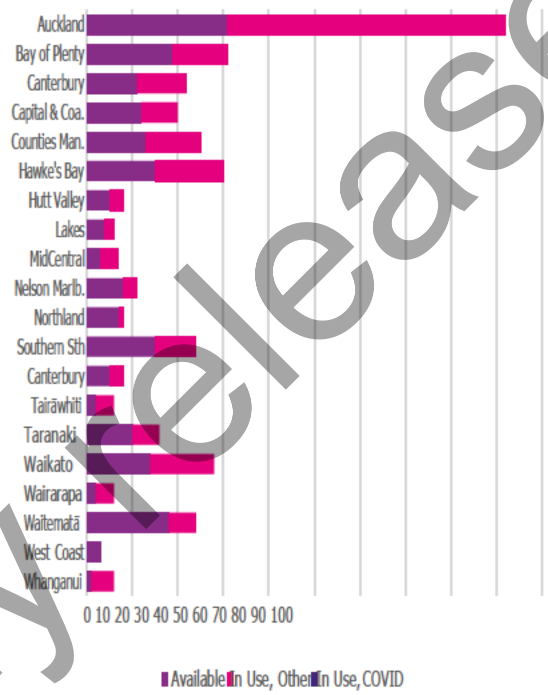


Figure 12: Availability of ICU beds, by DHB



Source: Daily COVID DHB SITREP as at midnight 3 May

Figure 13: Available ventilators and ICU beds, nationally

National ventilators		National ICU beds	
In use, COVID	0	In use, COVID	0
In use, other	29 (10.7%)	In use, other	183 (48.0%)
Available	242 (89.3%)	Available	198 (52.0%)
Total	271	Total	381

Source: Daily COVID DHB SITREP as at midnight 3 May

Figure 14: Health workforce surge availability

Total registrations in surging workforce database (available to support the COVID-19 effort if required)	3,583
Total registrations in surging workforce database (available, unavailable or availability unknown)	9,770
Registrations deployed into roles	22
Number of current demand requests	11

Source: MoH COVID-19 recruitment database as at 4 May

PPE stocks are generally increasing with stock in the national reserves exceeding recent distributions and large orders due in the next fortnight (Figure 15). The data below only includes PPE for the health sector. Efforts have continued to build up stocks in the national reserve to provide security against any future disruptions in supply or a significant increase in cases.

We are looking into getting non-health sector PPE data.

Figure 15: PPE availability for the Health Sector

Product Description	Stock on Hand		PPE Received Last Week	PPE on Order		Average Distribution to DHBs for Previous Fortnight (13-26 April 20)
	DHBs	National Reserves		Expected in Next Fortnight	Total on Order	
N95 Mask (or equivalent)	1,029,393	8,897,150	0	732,800	11,732,800	307,600
Procedure Mask (or equivalent)	5,357,639	15,166,463	9,760,000	15,002,044	107,802,044	3,120,500
Isolation Gown (or equivalent)	429,787	86,500	0	600,000	3,817,900	25,000
Disposable Apron	1,199,414	94,000	0	900,000	2,803,000	0
Glasses/goggles (or equivalent)	43,058	147,900	150,000	250,000	1,015,201	1,000
Face shield (or equivalent)	52,859	700,992	291,600	8,400	8,400	0
Nitrile Gloves	16,131,254	9,518,200	0	0	123,000,000	984,421

Source: MoH PPE data as at 30 April

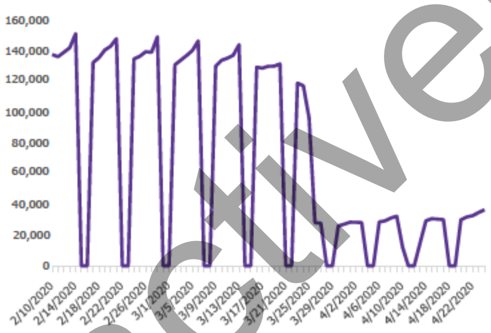
Public and business compliance and movement

People generally appear to be complying with Alert Level 3 restrictions and movement continues to be below pre-lockdown levels, although compliance may be more challenging to retain as the perceived threat from COVID-19 declines.

The shift from Alert Level 4 to Alert Level 3 has seen a significant increase in movement, but it remains significantly below normal levels. The increase was expected, given relaxation of restrictions on work and access to non-essential goods and services. Measures of physical movement (light vehicle traffic volumes and people movements as indicated by mobile phone location data) show increases since 28 April. The number of driving route requests made on Apple Maps (relative to the pre-lockdown baseline) is now closer to levels in Australia, but remains lower.

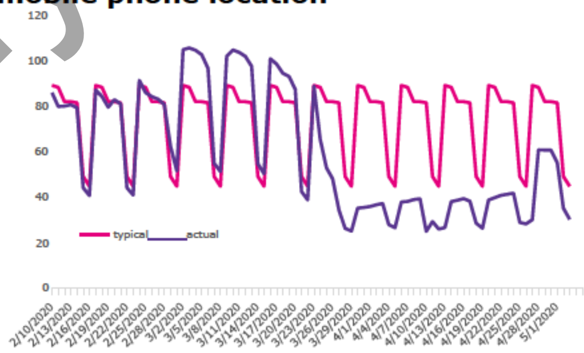
Online public reports of breaches and Police recorded breaches have reduced under Alert Level 3. Complaints have transitioned from being reports regarding individuals, and are now predominantly related to businesses and mass gatherings.

Figure 16: Light vehicle traffic volumes in main centres



Source: NZTA

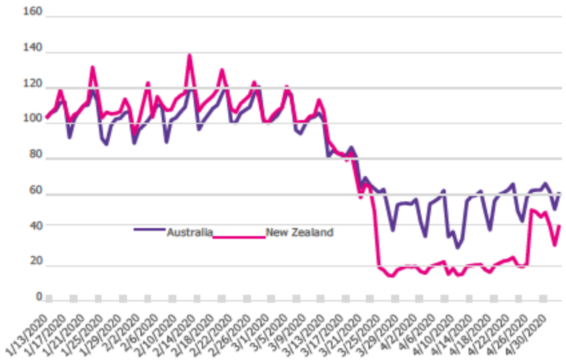
Figure 17: People movement (between neighbourhoods) based on mobile phone location

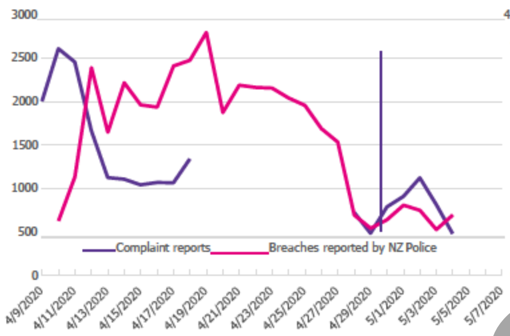


Source: Data Ventures, AOG calculation – st. dev. of SA2 hourly populations

Figure 18: Volume of driving direction requests on Apple Maps (13/01=100)

Figure 19: Complaints from public (left axis) and lockdown breaches reported by New Zealand Police (right axis)





Source: Apple Mobility Trends

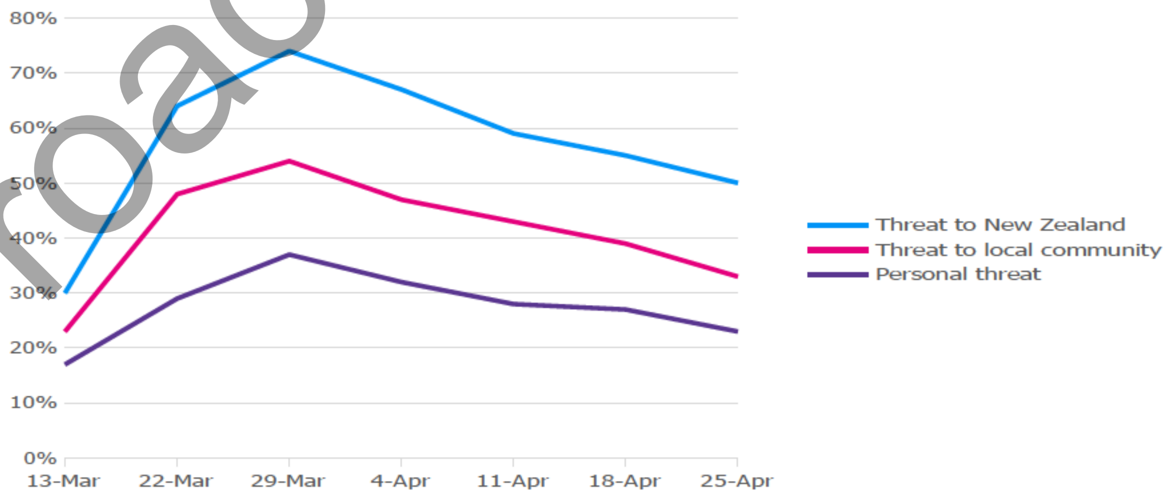
Source: NZ Police

There is limited information about compliance in key areas of transmission risk:

- [redacted]
- There is also limited information about business plans and processes for physical workplaces, athough industry level guidance is being created. There are an estimated 1.2 million workers at physical workplaces under Alert Level 3. While we understand that most businesses are trying to comply with expectations, we do not have data on whether workplaces have robust plans and processes inplace.

Compliance may be more challenging to retain as the perceived threat from COVID-19 declines. The proportion of people perceiving "high" or "very high" threat to themselves from COVID-19 has declined continuously from a high of 37% on 28–30 March to 23% on 24-27 April (Figure 19). Perceived threats to family, community and New Zealand have declined similarly.

Figure 20: Proportion of people who consider COVID-19 poses a 'high' or 'very high' threat



Source: Ipsos, *Tracking the coronavirus: reults from a multi-country poll* (n=610–696)

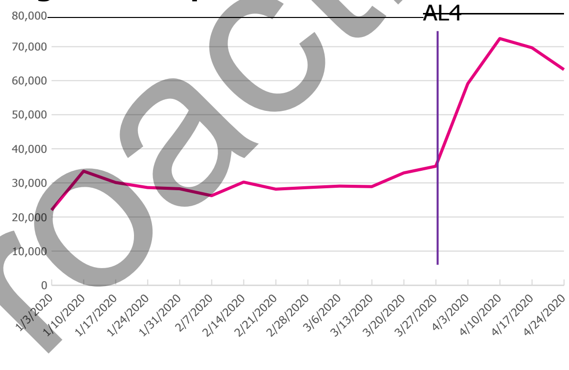
Effects of the measures on society

COVID-19 is affecting material wellbeing. Special Needs Grants remain at an elevated level, although there has been a modest week-on-week decrease since its peak in early April (Figure 21). The trend in Special Needs Grants is driven by food poverty, consistent with increased demand for food banks. In some regions, the Salvation Army reports receiving as many texts for support in a day as it usually receives in a week. They distributed 6,000 food parcels in the week ending 24 April. Many are new clients. Other food banks report similar increases.

Payment holidays have continued to rise, albeit more slowly (Figure 22). Most (62%) payment holidays are with telco and energy providers.

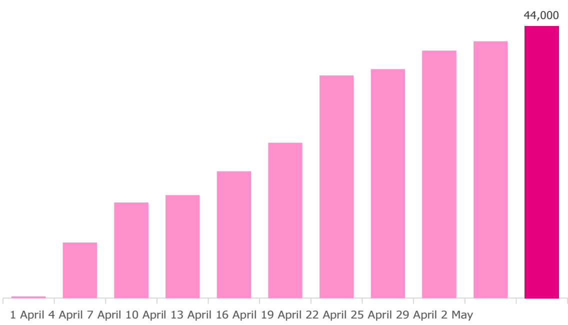
The impacts on safety are not entirely clear. After a slight increase in the first week of Alert Level 4, police call-outs for family harm have reduced to pre-lockdown levels (Figure 19); and call-outs for sexual harm have declined. That said, many MSD-funded service providers report higher rates of new clients and an increase in the severity of violence and abuse. Reports of Concern (ROCs) to Oranga Tamariki are stabilising around 1,000 per week, which is lower than usual but similar to the 2019 April school holidays. Calls to family violence and elder abuse helplines are lower than usual, but texts to Youthline are relatively high and increasingly about abuse.

Figure 21: Special Needs Grants



Source: MSD

Figure 22: Payment holidays



Source: Centrix

Note: Centrix data does not include all credit providers in NZ but it depicts an accurate trend

Figure 23: Family harm investigations

Figure 24: Reports of Concern

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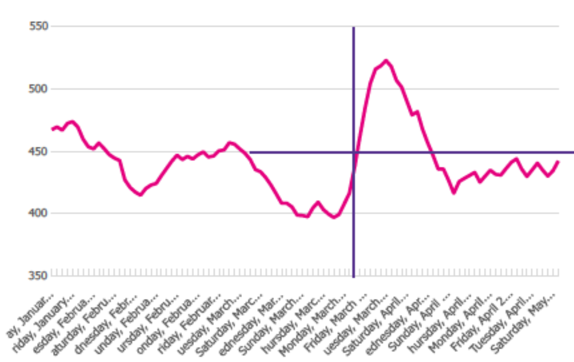
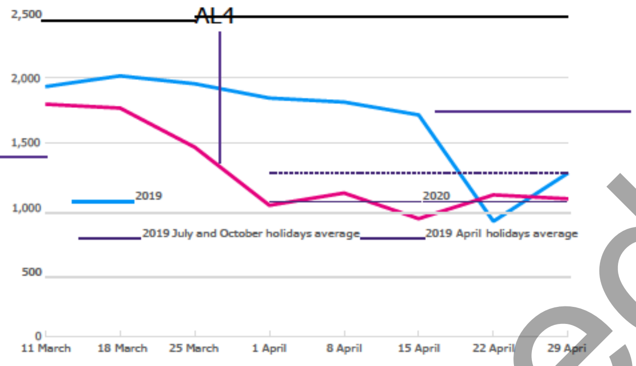


Source: NZ Police provisional data, subject to change



Source: Oranga Tamariki

Provisional results from the Health and Wellbeing Survey suggest that depression and anxiety have remained static throughout lockdown (Figure 25). Worry about COVID-19 from people's main media source has reduced (Figure 26). This is unlikely to be the result of changing media habits, as the pattern is consistent across sources. However, the mental health of young people may be deteriorating, based on texts to Youthline, which were exceptionally high for self-harm and suicide in the week 20-26 April.

Figure 25: Percentage of survey respondents reporting depression or anxiety symptoms

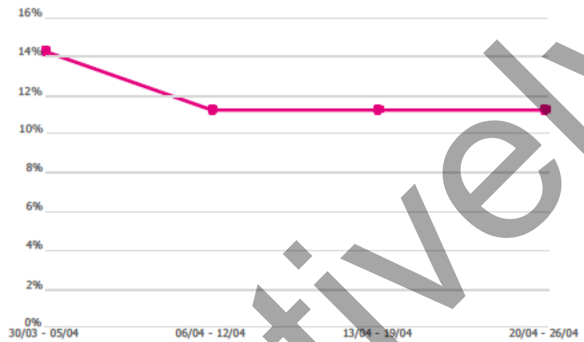
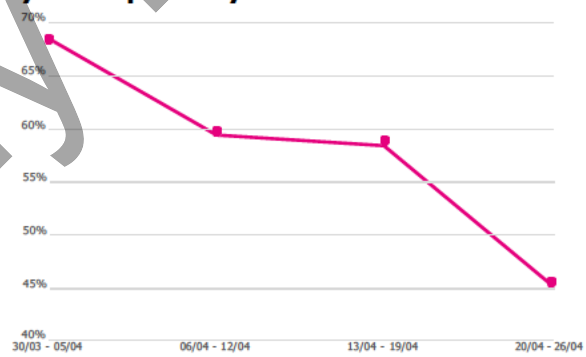


Figure 26: Percentage of survey respondents reporting being worried by their primary news source



Source: Provisional data from the COVID-19 Health and Wellbeing Survey, Ministry of Health

Key issues raised by selected Priority Communities:

Some Māori in rural communities report difficulty accessing water, especially in drought-affected areas. They also report difficulty accessing healthcare, information and technology. Digital exclusion is also a concern for older people and many in Pacific communities, limiting their access to goods and services and information about Alert Levels. Some Pacific communities are concerned about an increase in online gambling. A Survey by the Health Promotion Agency indicates some movement towards online gambling, but otherwise Pacific people are gambling less during lockdown. Most disabled people report being able to safely access food and other essential items. Access to PPE and user guidance remains their concern.

Effects of the measures on businesses

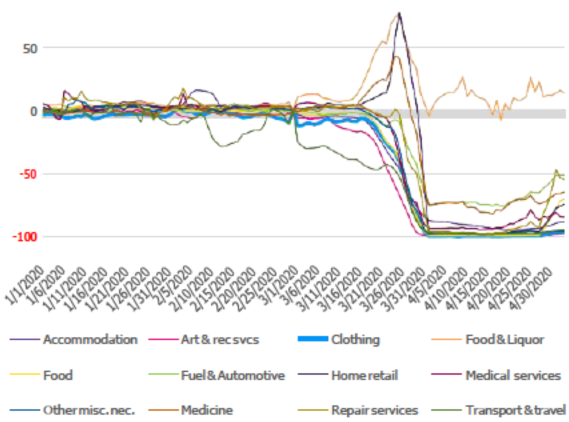
The first week in Alert Level 3 has seen an increase in business activity relative to Alert Level 4 as the focus has shifted from essential services to safe activity. MBIE estimates suggest that around 95% of businesses are permitted to open under Alert Level 3 compared with just 20–25% under Alert Level 4. However, MBIE notes that safe trading restrictions mean that most of these firms are operating at reduced capacity, while some will be unable to operate if they cannot met the safe trading guidelines. A recent Research NZ survey found that only 44% of its respondents who are employed said they would be returning to work under Alert Level 3, which most said was because their organisation didn't meet the criteria to re-open.

Some of the lower activity levels in Alert Levels 4 and 3 will be due to reduced inter-regional mobility as a result of restrictions on domestic travel. Indicators such as the daily change in distance travelled by heavy vehicles illustrate the importance Inter-regional trade to normal business operations. On this measure, the average distance heavy vehicles travel has decreased some 48% compared to early March. It is also worth noting that increased inter-regional mobility will be critical to enabling better labour market matching, especially at a time when some regions will be looking for seasonal workers while others will have an excess of workers (particularly from tourism and retail trade).

The labour market outlook is rapidly deteriorating. Although job losses have been delayed by the widespread uptake of wage subsidies and the use of cash reserves and loans, the situation is appears to be unsustainable for many businesses. In particular, a net 52.7% of retail businesses are already reporting lower employment levels relative to a year ago, while a net 50% expect to reduce staffing levels over the coming year. That compares with construction where a net 28.2% reported fewer jobs than a year ago, while a net 52.6% expect to reduce staffing levels in the coming year.

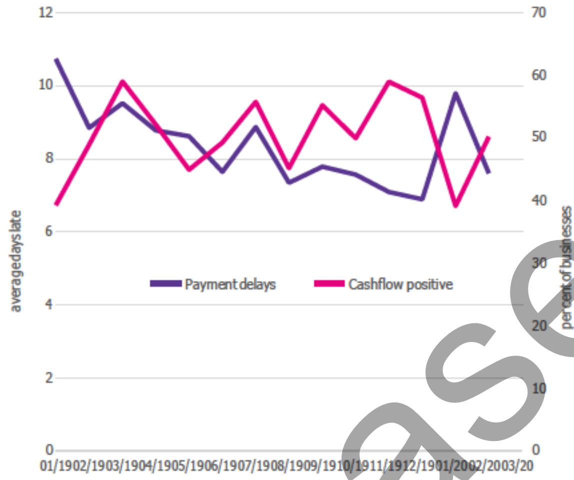
Meanwhile, investment intentions remain weak, and surprisingly (given activity expectations were the highest in this sector) are the lowest for agriculture with a net 62.1% of businesses expecting to reduce investment activity over the coming year. Retail was close behind (at a net -53.6% of businesses) while the construction sector was the least pessimistic at a net -31.6%. Overall, the data suggest a substantial and widespread decline in investment activity ahead.

Figure 27: Card spending compared to the same period last year



Source: Marketview

Figure 28: Xero Small Business Insights



Source: Xero

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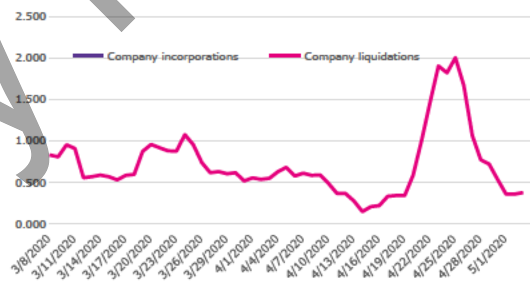
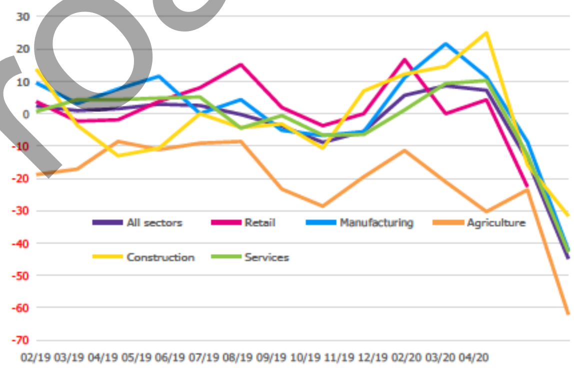
Source: MSD

Figure 30: Companies Office activity (ratio to year earlier, 7-day rolling average)



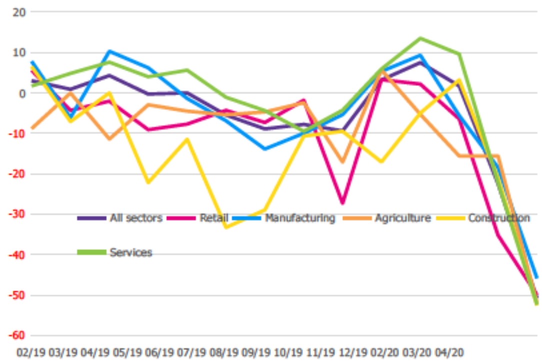
Source: Companies Office

Figure 31: Net positive investment intentions



Source: ANZ Business Outlook

Figure 32: Net positive employment intentions



Source: ANZ Business Outlook

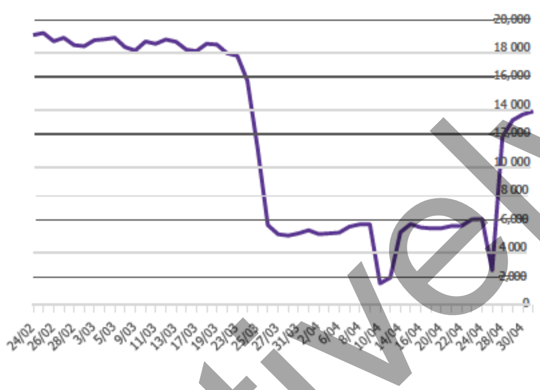
Macroeconomic and fiscal effects of the measures

Consistent with the business section above, economic activity has increased substantially under Alert Level 3 compared to Alert Level 4.

However, in the latest ANZ Business Outlook survey businesses remain pessimistic about their own activity levels, with a net 55% of businesses expecting weaker activity in the year ahead, and headline business confidence at -67%. The number of Jobseeker recipients has increased sharply by over 35,000 since 20 March.

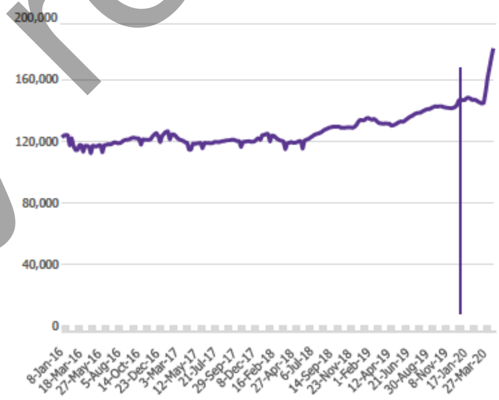
Merchandise exports to China and imports from China are above last year's levels, however exports and imports to the rest of the world remain subdued due to weak global demand. International prices for New Zealand commodity exports have weakened. New Zealand's trade weighted index has stabilised in the past two weeks, reflecting broadly stable risk sentiment across global markets.

Figure 33: Heavy traffic volumes in main centres



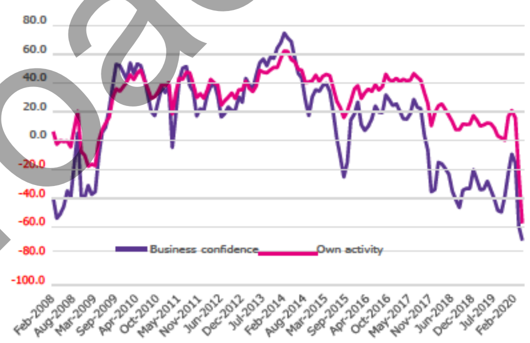
Source: NZTA

Figure 34: Jobseeker Support recipients



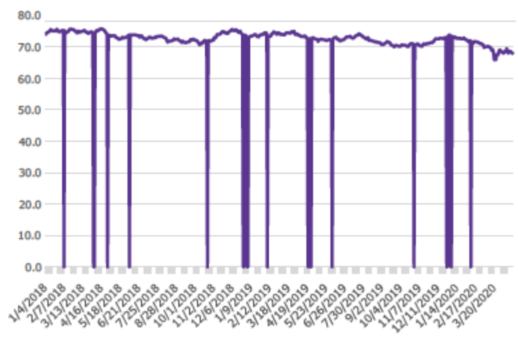
Source: MSD

Figure 35: ANZ Business Outlook



Source: ANZ

Figure 36: Trade Weighted Exchange Index



Source: RBNZ

Fiscal response packages announced to date amount to around $22bn in committed spending (across a range of income support, general business support and sectoral measures) and the expected costs of guarantees and indemnities (Figure 37).

Figure 37: Fiscal costs of commitments and programmes already announced

Spending package	Total impact on net core Crown debt ($bn), period to 2023/24
Income Support	14.884
General business and firm support	5.734
Aviation support	0.600
Health	0.606
Other	0.402
Total all packages	**22.226**

Note: The figures above includes the cost to the Crown of the Business Finance Guarantee scheme, but not the costs to the Crown of the Small Business Cashflow Scheme which have not yet been estimated. Current estimates of the cost of indemnities provided to the RBNZ are low to nil.

Excerpt from the Executive Summary of the Treasury's 13 April Report on Economic Scenarios

"The first five scenarios assume no additional fiscal support measures beyond the approximate $20 billion of direct support that has already been announced. We also consider the economic outlook if the world economy is weaker and takes longer to recover. Key results include:

"Falls in annual GDP are greatest in the year to March 2021, and vary from a decline of around 13% in Scenario 1, the least restrictive of the scenarios considered, to closer to one third in Scenario 3 which involves tight restrictions throughout the year.

"Peaks in the unemployment rate vary from around 13% in Scenario 1 to nearly 26% in Scenario 3.

"Inflation remains below the 2.0% mid-point of the target range throughout the forecast period, and monetary conditions are supportive throughout.

"...an additional $20 billion in fiscal support ($40 billion in total) cushions the decline in output and lowers the unemployment rate. In Scenario 2a, additional direct fiscal support is increased by $40 billion ($60 billion in total). Relative to Scenario 2, GDP growth is higher and the unemployment rate is lower by around 6 percentage points in the June 2021 quarter."

Public attitude towards the measures

Independent public opinion research has found New Zealanders continue to be generally in agreement with the current measures in place.

A Colmar Brunton public research report (conducted 20–21 April) asked New Zealanders a range of questions about the response to COVID-19. Public sentiment was generally positive, with 82% of respondents saying they either strongly agreed or tended to agree with the long-term effectiveness of the response (Figure 38).

Figure 38: Survey question - How much do you agree or disagree that the measures the Government has put in place to control the coronavirus pandemic will be worth it in the long-run?

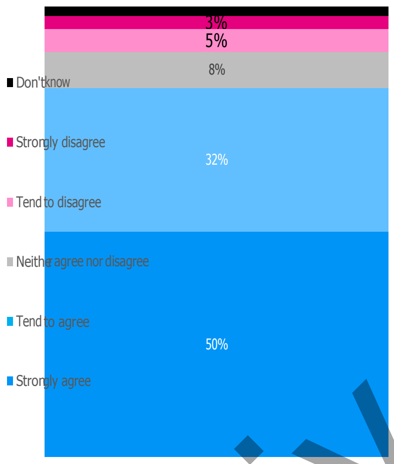
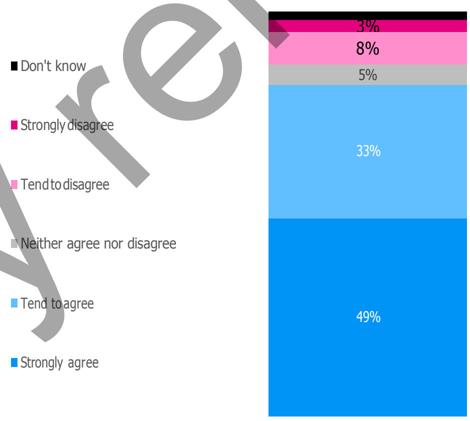


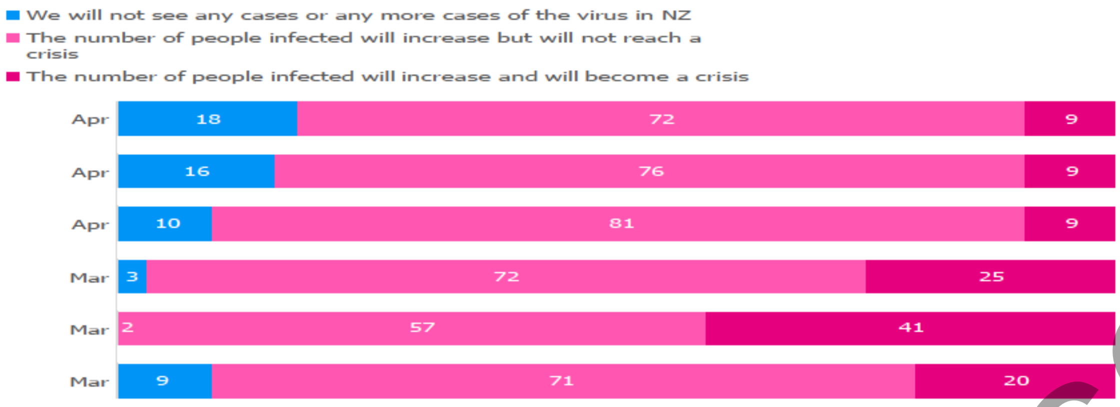
Figure 39: Survey question - The Government announced it will move from Alert Level 4 (Lockdown) to Alert Level 3 (Restrict) on Monday 27 April. How much do you support or oppose this decision?



Source: Colmar Brunton report of 23 April. Base: All New Zealanders 18+ (n=601).

Ipsos research (conducted 24–27 April) found the majority of people (72%) expect cases to rise but do not think this will result in a crisis (Figure 40). Given this sentiment, the public response towards shifting from Alert Level 4 to Alert Level 3 was generally positive (Colmar Brunton – 83% supportive; Ipsos – 80% supportive).

Figure 40: Survey question - Which of the following is closest to your point of view about the state of the virus in New Zealand in the coming weeks?



Source: Ipsos research, Tracking the Coronavirus: Results from a multi-country poll; Wave 10: 25-27 April 2020

So far, almost all respondents surveyed as part of the Health and Wellbeing Survey (undertaken by the Ministry of Health) have found the rules around alert levels clear and easy to follow.

Covid19.govt.nz web traffic, social media and call centre data has reported a significant increase in public interest about Alert Level 2, indicating the general population is looking towards the end of Alert Level 3. Covid19.govt.nz web traffic in the week following Alert Level 3 being instated found 56% of all searches were about Alert Level 2 (28 April – 4 May).