

PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

TO: Emergency Departments and other providers

From: Dr Stephen Palmer, Medical Officer of Health and Clinical Head of Department

Date: Saturday, 4 April 2020

Title: COVID-19 – Advice for Emergency Departments and other providers on the special powers of the Medical Officer of Health

This advisory was prepared with the help of Dr Andre Cromhout, Director of Emergency at Wellington Hospital Emergency Department

As our response to COVID-19 continues it is almost certain that that we will experience situations that we never expected to be in. As time proceeds, we will encounter patients in the emergency department and in other providers who we have a high suspicion that they are infectious with COVID-19 and that they are unlikely to comply with the requirement to self-isolate.

Medical Officers of Health have access to special powers in relation to our COVID-19 response including requiring a person to be quarantined or isolated. To do this a Medical Officer of Health is required to go through a process to give the person or group every opportunity to comply with the requirement to self-isolate, and that whether the use of this power is proportionate with the risk to public health. It is inevitable that this process will take time and is not suited to the acute situation that can arise in the ED or other providers.

Staff can contact the on-call Medical Officer of Health (Ph 04 570 9002) to seek advice but there may be very little that can be done in real time. If the patient can return to a local residence then that would be the best option and the non-compliance can be picked up over subsequent days. If the patient is homeless then they should be treated in the usual way but the only option maybe hospital admission until the results are available.

With the very low number of confirmed COVID-19 cases coming through at the same as testing is ramped up the chances of patients that fit the clinical criteria being positive is **CURRENTLY VERY LOW.**

