

19th April 2022



Official Information Act Request for – Covid-19 Admissions

I write in response to your Official Information Act request received by us 22nd March 2022 by way of transfer from the Ministry of Health, you requested the following information:

1. Please indicate what is your exact procedure for determining that hospital admissions in this current time are in fact directly due to covid.
2. Ie: are u testing people who are admitting themselves for something non respiratory related and if they test positive after admission for sars cov 2 are you listing it as a covid admission regardless
3. Ie: people who are admitted for something respiratory related that is later diagnosed as not sars cov 2, are you indicating them as covid hospitalizations if they return a positive test during admission.

Counties Manukau Health Response:

For context Counties Manukau Health (CM Health) employs over 8,500 staff and provides health and support services to people living in the Counties Manukau region (approx. 601,490 people). We see over 118,000 people in our Emergency Department each year, and over 2,000 visitors come through Middlemore Hospital daily.

Our services are delivered via hospital, outpatient, ambulatory and community-based models of care. We provide regional and supra-regional specialist services i.e. for orthopaedics, plastics, burns and spinal services. There are also several specialist services provided including tertiary surgical services, medical services, mental health and addiction services.

Before responding to your request it is important to note that coding is based on capturing the relevant diagnoses and procedures within the patient's episode of care. COVID coding in itself is complicated as it is documentation based and patients can present with different scenarios. In addition to this, COVID coding continuously changes while adjusting to COVID situational changes.

1. Please indicate what is your exact procedure for determining that hospital admissions in this current time are in fact directly due to covid.

At this time, all Emergency Department admissions receive a PCR test however not all are required to wait for a result prior to hospital pathway, for example:

- If a patient is COVID positive or returns a positive rapid antigen test our team do not need to wait for a PCR result and can admit the patient into a COVID bed space.
 - If a patient is COVID exposed or intermediate risk the Emergency Department team will wait for the PCR test result to ensure there is no potential exposure to others when moving to a ward.
 - If a patient has COVID symptoms however returns a negative rapid antigen test result the Emergency Department will wait for the PCR test result to ensure there is no potential exposure to others when moving to a ward.
 - If a patient does not have COVID symptoms they can be admitted to a non- COVID bed space.
- 2. Are u testing people who are admitting themselves for something non respiratory related and if they test positive after admission for sars cov 2 are you listing it as a covid admission regardless**
- 3. le: people who are admitted for something respiratory related that is later diagnosed as not sars cov 2, are you indicating them as covid hospitalizations if they return a positive test during admission.**

In response to questions two and three of your request, patients who present to the Emergency Department are admitted under their presenting symptoms and, as above, patients in the Emergency Department are PCR tested for COVID-19.

If a patient has a confirmed positive PCR result during their episode of care and it has been confirmed through COVID documentation, then the patient has COVID coding assigned as an additional diagnosis as the principal diagnosis will be the non-respiratory related condition as this was the reason for admission.

If a patient had a respiratory illness not related to COVID however their PCR result returns COVID positive within the episode of care, COVID codes will be assigned as an additional diagnosis.

Clinical Coders do not assign COVID codes based on lab results alone.

I trust this information answers your request. You are entitled to seek a review of the response by the Ombudsman under section 28(3) of the Official Information Act. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or Freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response or an edited version of this may be published on the Counties Manukau Health website. If you consider there are good reasons why this response should not be made publicly available, we will be happy to consider this.

Yours sincerely



Pauline McGrath
Chief Operating Officer and Acting Chief Executive Officer
Counties Manukau Health