

**Considerations for Sheds before reopening****Introduction:**

The change to Alert level 3 will have many shedders wondering when they may venture back to the shed, and shed committees interpreting official advice.

It's not a simple matter deciding when to open – we are well aware of a cabinet minister and a respected doctor incorrectly interpreting outdoor exercise advice at Level 4, and more recently regular clarifications of what Level 3 will permit.

MENZSHED NZ does not have a mandate to instruct sheds as to what they must do. Our role is more that of shed support. Shed committees are better placed to understand the risks to their membership – especially of those members with compromised health. Sheds differ significantly in terms of how often they are open each week, how many shedders attend, the nature of projects and the indoor/outdoor space available.

Clearly, sheds cannot be open at Level 3. As we near the proposed end to Level 3, we can expect more announcements and advice of what will be permitted at Level 2 (as happened during the L4 to L3 transition).

Sheds are encouraged to keep up-to-date with reliable news media – and the most reliable would be the COVID-19 website and the regular advice [here](#). See also the section for [Community groups, faith-based groups, clubs and societies](#). The Radio NZ [website](#) offers reporting too.

Whilst it is not the role of MENZSHED NZ to get involved in the running of individual sheds or their policies around COVID-19 or anything else, we offer the following on an “all care, no responsibility” basis by way of information, to help you start to transform your thinking around COVID-19 and in the hope that it may assist your planning.

**This checklist could be a good start point to work through:**

- Are there any risks arising from restarting your Men's Shed or a shed activity that has been shut down during Alert Levels and how will you manage these?
- How will you ensure all volunteers/members/visitors know how and are able to keep themselves safe from exposure to COVID-19?
- How will you gather information on the wellness of your volunteers/members to ensure that they are safe and well to participate at the Shed?
- How will you operate your Men's Shed in a way that keeps volunteers/members/visitors safe from exposure to COVID-19?
- How will you manage an exposure or suspected exposure to COVID-19?
- How will you evaluate, and continuously review, whether your work processes or risk controls are effective?
- How do any changes impact on the risks of the Shed activities you do?

**COVID-19 Symptoms:** (<https://covid19.govt.nz/covid-19/about-covid-19/covid-19-symptoms/>)

Symptoms of COVID-19 are similar to a range of other illnesses, such as influenza.

Having them does not necessarily mean that you have COVID-19.

Symptoms include:

- a cough
- a high temperature (at least 38°C)
- shortness of breath
- sore throat
- sneezing and runny nose
- temporary loss of smell.

These symptoms do not necessarily mean you have COVID-19. The symptoms are similar to other illnesses that are much more common, such as cold and flu.

Shortness of breath is a sign of possible pneumonia and requires immediate medical attention.

If you have these symptoms please call Healthline for free on 0800 358 5453 or you can call your doctor immediately. If you're outside New Zealand call +64 9 358 5453 or your doctor. Call your doctor before visiting.

Time for symptoms to appear - We don't yet know how long symptoms take to show after a person has been infected, but current World Health Organization assessments suggest that it is 2 to 10 days."

**Comment** - Studies overseas have shown that some people are **asymptomatic** (producing or showing no symptoms). So it may be prudent for sheds to assume that anyone and everyone entering their shed is carrying the virus.....

**How COVID-19 spreads** <https://covid19.govt.nz/covid-19/about-covid-19/how-covid-19-spreads/>

"Like the flu, COVID-19 can be transmitted from person to person.

The scientific evidence confirms that COVID-19 is spread by droplets. When an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks, they may generate droplets containing the virus. These droplets are too large to stay in the air for long, so they quickly settle on surrounding surfaces.

People may get infected by the virus if they touch those surfaces or objects, and then touch their mouth, nose or eyes.

That's why it's really important to use good hygiene, regularly wash and thoroughly dry your hands, and use good cough and sneeze etiquette."

**Comment** *For most of us "hand-to-mouth" contact - touching the mouth or around our eyes with the hand - is a deeply ingrained, instinctive and very frequent habit. People may get infected by the virus if they touch those surfaces or objects, and then touch their mouth, nose or eyes.*

## Preventing the spread of COVID-19 amongst sheddies:

Most sheds will be familiar with the management of hazards associated with power tools such as circular saws or angle grinders or working at height; we assess the potential hazards and then introduce procedures to eliminate, minimise or control them.

Along the way we consider the consequences of not controlling them e.g. cutting off a finger or breaking a bone. Or worse.

The process around controlling COVID-19 is really no different **but**:

- the hazard is an invisible one
- it is present on - and survives for periods of up to 3 days - on surfaces
- our habits such as hand to mouth contact are subconscious and therefore very difficult to modify
- meaning that if it is on a surface and we touch that surface, it is highly likely to end up in our mouths
- the worst-case consequence of not controlling the hazard – and particularly amongst our typically older members – is death

## Considerations around controlling the COVID-19 hazard:

We need to be mindful of how the virus spreads.

An “indirect” example would be when a person with the virus touches their mouth or an infected item such as their clothing and then touches a surface, or coughs or sneezes directly onto a surface.

Next somebody else touches that surface so that now the virus is on their hand.

Finally they make a subconscious hand-to-mouth movement and the virus has entered their body and they are infected. Or they pick up food which they put into their mouth. The virus transfers from their hand to the food and into their mouth.

Shortcutting this process - and greatly increasing the risk of infection - would be when the carrier transmits the virus onto food (by coughing, sneezing, normal breathing or direct handling) which someone else then puts into their mouth. For this reason sheds should think very carefully about any “shared food” situations such as communal morning teas or barbecues.

The obvious way to control the hazard is to not open the shed; an approach that has been mandated during levels 4 and 3.

As we move to less stringent levels sheds and their members will need to consider the appropriate methods to minimise potential transmission.

Whilst the “remove the hazard” approach would work it would not allow us to re-open.

Similarly a full clothing exchange (as would happen in a critical hygiene manufacturing environment) on the way into the shed would go a long way to minimising risk but is clearly not a practical option.

It will be up to each shed and their members to introduce appropriate measures.

We offer some potential approaches for your consideration below. This is by no means intended to be a comprehensive list or all encompassing solution, rather just something to start sheds thinking along the right lines....

What	How (some potential control measures)
Minimise COVID-19 entering your shed	<p>People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Shedders travel directly from home to shed, no detours</li> <li>· Don't allow anyone with symptoms to enter</li> <li>· All entering to wash hands and / or use hand sanitiser</li> </ul> <p>Stuff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· All stuff entering the shed (brought in by members or delivered by third parties) to be screened and either washed before use or left in quarantine for 2 or 3 days</li> </ul>
Minimise potential transfer of virus from person-to-person or person-to-surface	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Wear face masks*</li> <li>· Practice good social distancing</li> <li>· Educate members regarding contact surfaces such as the shared pen at shed sign in, cupboard and door handles, the shared milk jug at morning tea and control or eliminate where possible</li> <li>· Minimise sharing of spaces such as workbenches, tools etc.</li> <li>· Clean anything that anyone touches before the next person touches it, both during work periods and during smoko breaks</li> </ul>
Minimise transfer from surfaces to mouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Educate members regarding hand-to-mouth subconscious habit and all potential contact surfaces and chains of transmission</li> <li>· Encourage frequent hand washing but particularly before eating or any other hand to mouth contact</li> <li>· Remove high risk items such as communal food at morning tea, barbecues etc. (one asymptomatic person sneezes on the sausage rolls and the whole shed gets infected)</li> <li>· Ask members to BYO coffee cups, plates etc.</li> </ul>
Individual risk assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Ask members to assess their own individual risks and control their exposure accordingly</li> </ul>

*\*whilst not required in NZ, the wearing of masks whilst shopping or travelling on public transport is now mandated in some countries. Studies suggest that this minimises – to a degree – the spread of the virus from the carrier during coughing and sneezing. As an aside this is the reason why Japanese typically wear masks during the flu season; not to protect themselves but to protect others.*

### **Cleaning the shed before re-opening:**

It is widely accepted that the virus can only survive on a surface for a maximum of three days. So if your shed has been closed for 6 weeks i.e. nobody has entered during that time, then there is no need to do a special COVID-19 clean before re-entering.

For different (not COVID-19 related) reasons, a thorough flush of water through taps and cleaning the fridge and other food storage areas would be wise. Mice and other vermin might have found the shed to be a cozy refuge and breeding area too.