

Politicians: please work together to minimise the spread of COVID-19

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With COVID-19 now present in New Zealand, and the situation a genuine health emergency, it is essential our political leaders work together and use their influence to minimise the impact of the virus in our community.

As a group of more than 50 of the country's leading infectious disease and public health scientists and professionals, we ask the following of our political leaders:

Although it is election year, we urge politicians resist the temptation to scaremonger in an attempt to score points in the media. Instead, they should use their moments in the spotlight to amplify messages of our health system's preparedness and how New Zealanders can individually make a difference at this critical time. A cross-party parliamentary task force on COVID-19 could be one way to ensure this cooperation happens in a timely and productive fashion.

The level of fear around COVID-19 is high. New Zealanders are being bombarded with information and misinformation about this new viral disease. When people are scared or ill-informed, they aren't at their best. When they are well-informed they can make a huge difference both as individuals and as members of the wider community. This is very true with COVID-19, where

every person practising good hygiene and cough etiquette can radically impact the spread of this disease. If the virus spreads further throughout our communities, and authorities ask people to limit social contact and self-isolate, cooperation with these necessary measures will play a crucial role in minimising COVID-19's spread and protecting the most vulnerable among us.

Teams of infectious disease, public health and primary care experts are advising the Government on the best way to deal with this threat. Specialist members of our country's health system have been preparing for such a scenario for many years and their plans are being put into action, and tweaked where necessary as new information comes to hand. These experts are monitoring the rapidly changing situation, looking to what is being done and what is working in other countries, and giving pragmatic, evidence-based advice on a regular basis. Politicking and criticising these professionals who are working hard on behalf of the country does nothing more than undermine them and public confidence in our system. It is the media's role to report on matters of public interest and concern, and we ask politicians to leave this task to them and instead show leadership in spreading essential information.

It is essential to work together in times of crisis. We need our politicians to avoid cluttering the media landscape with political messages and undermining the life-saving information coming from the government, health professionals, scientists and public health officials.

Competing interests:

Nil.

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