

15 June 2020

Update: COVID-19 Guide for Media Covering court at Alert Level 1

The District Court is progressively reverting to normal operations since New Zealand moved to COVID-19 Alert Level 1 on 10 June, 2020.

A [Protocol](#) for Alert Level 1 issued by the Chief District Court Judge states that the court will carry out all its usual scheduled work and that Criminal, Family, Youth and Civil proceedings will, in general, return to normal.

Jury trials resume on 3 August, with the exception of Dunedin District Court where from 20 July jury trials will resume early so as to test the process of summoning jurors, the advice provided to jurors and any responses from jurors to the summons.

Accredited media's right to attend hearings in all but exceptional circumstances has been maintained through all COVID-19 alert levels.

At Alert Level 1, the use of remote participation will remain available to the court and participants in appropriate cases, such as purely procedural matters, to be determined on a case-by-case basis. Although there may be more use of remote participation technology than occurred before the COVID-19 response period, most substantive District Court hearings are expected to resume as face to face. Therefore, accredited media are encouraged to attend court in person for such hearings as the ability to participate using VMR will be determined on a case by case basis.

For the time being, District Court registries will continue to proactively email out regional Daily Lists for all criminal proceedings to regular and/or specialist accredited court reporters. These are for planning purposes to help journalists assess when they need to come to court in person. Accredited media may also continue to request press sheets for specific defendants or cases provided they are destroyed after one month. However, media should bear in mind that with the resumption of normal court operations, the Daily Lists will be considerably longer and therefore more prone to amendment or delay.

Where a hearing is to be held remotely, this will be indicated on the Daily Lists. Accredited media who wish to cover a hearing being held remotely by VMR or teleconference should notify the court registry where the matter will be heard as soon as possible before the hearing to ensure they know how to take part and how to provide identification. They may join the remote hearing on the basis that they remain muted and do not record sound or capture video without express permission of the judge, which is to be sought in the normal way under the [*Court Media Coverage Guidelines 2016*](#) unless the judge agrees otherwise. The judge will decide if there is anything the media cannot report.