

About the Dioxin Health Service

The Dioxin Health Service is a health support service for people who were exposed to dioxin from the former Ivon Watkins Dow (IWD) factory in Paritutu, New Plymouth.

The Dioxin Health Service is based on a free annual health check delivered by a primary care team in a general practice setting. It may also include referrals to other publicly funded services depending on patient's health needs, like referral to smoking cessation programmes, physical activity programmes, nutrition advice, mental health services, genetic counselling, and serum dioxin testing (under limited circumstances).

Do I have to determine my patient's eligibility for the Dioxin Health Service?

No. Eligibility is based on where and for how long an individual lived or worked in relation to the former IWD factory and whether they are entitled to publicly funded health services in Aotearoa New Zealand.

An individual's eligibility will be determined when they apply to the Dioxin Health Service. An appeals process is available for unsuccessful applicants.

How will I know if one of my patients is eligible for the Dioxin Health Service?

Applicants must provide the name of their health provider with their application. The nominated practitioner for the successful applicant will then be informed in writing by the Health Support Service that the patient is eligible for the Dioxin Health Service. At this time, the nominated practitioner will be given information about the Dioxin Health Service, specific tools for use in the health check, and a claim form.

Specific questions about the annual health check

What is the free annual health check?

Eligible individuals are entitled to a free annual health check. The content of each check depends on the patient's medical history, current health needs, and the clinical decisions made by the primary care team. The free health check generally involves:

- Talking about dioxin exposure, its health effects, and the patient's exposure
- Talking about the patient's health and providing brief advice on staying healthy

- Discussing any mental health concerns the patient may have
- Considering whether the patient has any symptoms or conditions associated with dioxin exposure and completing a physical examination if necessary
- Referring the patient to Green Prescription programmes, nutrition services, smoking cessation, mental health, genetic counselling, or serum dioxin testing (under limited circumstances).

For more information on how to conduct the health check, please review the health provider guidance: [*Undertaking Health Checks in the Dioxin Health Service*](#).

Will the first health check be the same as subsequent annual checks?

The content of each health check depends on the health needs of the individual, good clinical practice, and the clinical judgement of the primary care team. Some patients will receive similar services each year while others will get different services.

Who should deliver the annual health check?

The annual health check is delivered by a primary care team in a general practice setting. The primary care team will need to decide who should be involved and how. This may include a general practitioner, nurse practitioner or other primary care practitioners within the team.

What is the service fee for the annual health check?

The fee for the first annual health check is \$220+GST per health check per person. The fee for the second and all subsequent annual health check is \$75+GST per health check per person.

No other fee or co-payment can be charged to the patient.

Are laboratory or pharmaceutical costs included in the service fee?

The Dioxin Health Service only funds the annual health check. Any diagnostic tests or treatment/management services referred from the health check are publicly funded as normal. Serum dioxin testing may be funded separately in limited circumstances (see the [**Serum Dioxin Testing Factsheet**](#)).

How do I claim the service fee for the annual health check?

Health providers can invoice the Dioxin Health Service directly for all annual health check payments. Please electronically send all invoices to hss@allenandclarke.co.nz and address all invoices to:

Dioxin Health Service
PO Box 10730
Wellington 6143.

What information do I need to provide to invoice Health New Zealand?

Please include all the information requested below on each invoice. Health New Zealand requires that you provide the following information when seeking payment for the health check:

- Full name of the patient
- Patient NHI
- Patient's date of birth
- Date and duration of the health check
- Practice PHO
- Health support service components that the patient was referred to
- Name of the general practice
- The name and registration details of the health practitioner delivering the health check.

Please do not send Health New Zealand or the Health Support Services any of the patient's medical history. This should be kept between with the patient and the health provider.

Specific questions about referred services

What services can I refer a patient to?

You can refer your patient to the following services if they are available in your area:

- Publicly funded screening services such as bowel screening, breast screening and cervical screening.
- The Green Prescription programme or other physical activity programmes.
- Dietician and nutrition services.
- Smoking cessation and support services to modify risky drinking behaviours.
- Primary mental health services.
- Genetic counselling.

How do I refer a patient to these services?

As patients will be accessing existing local services, you will need to consider the referral guidelines and processes of each specific programme.

Will there be cost to the patient for referral?

Patients pay the usual cost to access referred services. In many cases, these services are free or offered at low or very low cost. Genetic counselling services are free.

Specific questions about serum dioxin testing

What is serum dioxin testing?

In the blood, dioxins bind to lipids and lipoproteins. Serum TCDD levels are highly correlated with adipose tissue TCDD levels. Serum dioxin testing involves taking about 90 millilitres of the whole blood. The serum must be extracted from whole blood within 30 minutes of it being taken before being sent to a technical testing laboratory. Test results are expressed on a lipid weight basis.

Serum dioxin testing is not usually recommended for individuals. Results only tell a person what the level of dioxin in their blood is today. It is an unreliable way to measure their past exposure to dioxin. Dioxin has a generally accepted average half-life of between 7 and 11 years; however, half-life varies depending on age at exposure, gender, amount of body fat, breastfeeding, and dose. Any dioxin present will naturally decrease over time although at varying rates. Also, serum dioxin testing:

- Cannot give a likely cause or prognosis for a current health condition
- Cannot reliably help to estimate a person's current health risks
- Could mislead a person about their past exposure to dioxin, and
- Could mislead a person about their current health risks.

Serum dioxin tests are not routinely done. They have previously been used most frequently as part of research studies. Serum dioxin tests may be available privately but because of the highly specialised nature of the serum dioxin test and the small number of service providers, serum dioxins tests are very expensive.

If there are limitations with the test, why is it included in the Dioxin Health Service?

Health New Zealand recognises that some exposed individuals may be very concerned about their blood level of dioxin to a point where this may affect their normal functioning. Knowing what their serum dioxin level is may help some to move on and bring about significant improvements in mental health where the test is a part of a broader therapeutic programme.

Who is eligible for a serum dioxin test?

Because of the limitations associated with serum dioxin tests, they are not available to every person who is eligible for the Dioxin Health Service. Access is enabled where a general practitioner considers that the test result will materially benefit the patient as part of a wider therapeutic programme, where the patient has a realistic understanding of the test's limitations, and where a special approval has been granted.

How can a patient access the serum dioxin test?

A patient may request a serum dioxin test at the time of the annual health check. Routine serum dioxin tests are not recommended.

The patient's general practitioner will need to apply for special approval from the Dioxin Health Service to refer the patient for the serum dioxin test. Contact details if your patient requests a test are 0800 288 588 or email hss@allenandclarke.co.nz.

If the serum dioxin test is approved, before the patient can be referred to the laboratory for blood taking:

1. The patient's general practitioner must discuss the limitations of the serum dioxin test and ensure the patient is fully informed of these.
2. The general practitioner must conduct an assessment of need (based on guidance provided by the Dioxin Health Service).
3. The patient may also be referred to mental health services, where the general practitioner has identified that the patient's emotional wellbeing would materially benefit as part of a broader therapeutic programme.

Is there guidance to refer patients to if they want more information about serum dioxin tests?

Yes. A factsheet is available: [*Serum Dioxin Testing*](#).

How are the test results communicated to the patient?

The results of the serum dioxin test are sent to the general practitioner and the laboratory. Funding for an additional consultation is available (if the patient would like a re-referral to their general practitioner to explain the results). Test results will also be available to the patient if they would like these.

How do I interpret the serum dioxin test results?

Specific interpretation support will be provided when serum dioxin test results are returned.

What funding is available for the serum dioxin test?

The serum dioxin test and consultation are free to the individual if approved by the Dioxin Health Service. The funding for this is covered in the funding for the health check. No other fee or co-payment can be charged to the patient.

Getting more information

You can get more information about dioxin exposure, its health effects, and the Dioxin Health Service from Health New Zealand at www.tewhatauora.govt.nz/dioxins

Where can my patient get more information?

Health New Zealand has developed a range of information for eligible patients and other interested individuals. This information is included on Health New Zealand's website. General

information about the Dioxin Health Service and about dioxin exposure and health effects has also been provided to eligible individuals as part of their eligibility pack.

A factsheet on serum dioxin testing is available on Health New Zealand's website. If your patient would like more information, they can discuss this with you, or they can contact the Dioxin Health Service at hss@allenandclarke.co.nz or call 0800 288 588.

Contact details

Dioxin Health Service

PO Box 10730

Wellington 6143

Email: hss@allenandclarke.co.nz

Telephone: 0800 288 588

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