Public Health Guidance for Festival and Event Organisers

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Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
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Foreword

Festivals and events take place across Aotearoa New Zealand throughout the year. Many attendees will have a great time at their event of choice, and there are steps event organisers can take to eliminate or minimise the risks of harm.

There are a range of health risks to consider when hosting a large gathering, both physical and environmental. Organisers need to prepare adequately for these risks.

Large gatherings may include music festivals and concerts, sporting events, concerts, and cultural events.

Events can lead to the spread of infectious diseases. There are a number of other factors relating to events of all sizes that can impact health including, sanitation, weather, food, alcohol and other drugs, and the risk of injury.

There are a number of ways that events can support the health and wellbeing of attendees, as well as support the health of the local community. A coordinated and proactive approach to risk reduction and emergency management will facilitate providing a successful event.

This guidance explains factors relevant to public health and provides recommendations for how to protect and promote health at events intended for event organisers. Bearing in mind every event is different, please seek professional advice from relevant stakeholders in the planning stages as required.

Liaising with stakeholders early will support you to develop a successful event. Key stakeholders can include local council, emergency services, NZ Police, security providers, Māori Wardens, transport, food vendors and health service providers.

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Getting started

Assessing the risk

Completing a risk assessment is a key element in planning a successful event. By identifying potential risks that may impact event goers and local community, risks can be evaluated, and precautions or management plans can be developed. Risks may not be limited to the event goers but could impact the community and have national implications e.g. an outbreak of measles.

Examples of factors that may impact the risk include:

- Type and size of audience – especially those that involve people travelling to attend and the presence of international attendees
- Location – think about access to essential services if an issue does arise
- Duration – in particular multi day events and those that involve camping
- Time of the year and day – particularly over summer and holiday periods where many response services have less staff
- Type of activity.

The steps to complete in a risk assessment are:

1. **Identify the hazards and risks:** the aim is to identify all hazards and associated risks, regardless of whether they are within the control of the event organiser.
2. **Analyse the risks:** determine the likelihood of the risk and its potential consequences. This involves determining the severity of each risk.
3. **Evaluate the risks:** using the resulting risk levels, rank those risks and develop a prioritised list of risks requiring attention. This supports allocation of resources to those risks of greatest priority.
4. **Reduce and manage the risks:** risk can be controlled in several ways. The first objective should be to avoid or eliminate the risk entirely. Where elimination is not possible, exposure to risk should be reduced as much as is reasonably practicable.

See your local council’s website for an event health and safety risk management plan template.

Communicating with attendees

Consider what communication channels will be best for relaying event related information before, during and after an event to help lower risk and ensure people stay well.

Communications may be routine proactive messaging or may be needed in response to an emergency. Communications plans need to include both attendees and other agencies involved in planning and responding to the event.

Consider communicating with attendees a few days prior to the event to share a site map of where the parking is available, where water stations are, or any other important health and safety messages.

The best mode of communicating messages will depend on the demographics of the attendees.

Messaging should consider the event culture that organisers want to build and how to set expectations for attendees. Partnership with health and harm reduction services may be beneficial to tailor messaging for the event. Stakeholder engagement for testing and development of messaging can be beneficial.

Examples of health promoting themes for messaging could include:

- Hand hygiene and food handling advice to reduce spread of infectious diseases
- Sun safety
- Hydration
- Alcohol and recreational drug harm reduction messaging
- Sexual health messaging
- Promoting active and public transport to the event.

Health related advice, or emergency management messages may need to be delivered quickly through communication channels before, during and after events. Attendee and stakeholder contact lists should be assembled prior to the event and easily available to facilitate urgent communications. Consider testing systems to ensure there is capacity for rapid dissemination of information in the event of an emerging issue or emergency.

Use the tables below to help categorise potential risks:

Likelihood	Frequency	Consequence	Example
Rare	Once every 10 years or never hard of it happening	Less than minor	Minor injury, first aid not required
Unlikely	Event will seldom occur, i.e. every 2 years	Minor	Fire aid or minor treatment
Possible	Event will intermittently occur, i.e. annually	Moderate	Medical treatment required
Likely	Event will occur in most circumstances, i.e. monthly	Major	Serious harm, e.g. broken bones or hospitalisation
Almost certain	Event expected to occur in most circumstances, i.e. daily	Extreme	Loss of life, multiple serious harm, permanent severe disability

Once the likelihood and consequences have been decided a risk score or rating should be calculated.

Likelihood	Risk score	Consequence	Risk Score
Rare	1	Less than minor	1
Unlikely	2	Minor	2
Possible	3	Moderate	3
Likely	4	Major	4
Almost certain	5	Extreme	5

The product of multiplication gives us a risk category as follows:

Score	Category	Description	Example
0.1 – 3	Low	While control issues may still exist at this level the impact will be low.	Poor weather
4 – 7	Moderate	The level of risk is still considered unacceptable in certain circumstances.	Food poisoning event
8 – 14	High	Requires attention with a degree of priority. Remedial action should be identified and implementation commenced.	Water contamination
15 – 20	Critical	This level of risk also requires immediate attention and should not proceed without clear and timely action plans to reduce risk	Measles outbreak
21 – 25	Extreme	Do not proceed with any risk at this level without specialist assistance including development of contingency plans or risk transfer strategies	Tsunami warning

Considerations for event planners

Health and support services

Medical service providers

There are several options for health care services at events which may depend on the duration, size, and risk profile of the event. Options range from first aid provision, to having onsite medical care at the event.

Consider what level of support the event may need and engage with services like Hato Hone St John or other first aid providers to assess what may be suitable.

Where possible, events should be able to manage routine first aid and medical concerns. Most concerns will be able to be managed on site with adequate cover and experience, it is expected that approximately 1% of those requiring attention will need transport to hospital services. Factors that can increase the likelihood of medical care includes the numbers of patrons, duration of event.

Preventing the spread of infectious diseases

Large gatherings with crowds and shared facilities pose a risk for the spread of infectious disease, such as COVID-19, gastroenteritis, and measles. If there is a current outbreak of an infectious disease in the community, this will need to be considered as it may impact the risk to your event.

High density and indoor events are higher risk for the spread of infectious diseases. Events can limit the spread of disease by ensuring good hygiene practices with clear messaging and policies to encourage attendees to stay home if they are unwell. To support this, consider allowing for refunds if attendees are unwell and need to stay home.

Indoor events should ensure there is adequate ventilation. This can be done by:

- Opening windows and doors to prioritise fresh air
- Consider using air filters if the venue does not have a modern air filtration system.

More information on reducing spread of infectious diseases can be found here:
Healthy habits to stop the spread of illnesses

Preventing and preparing for outbreaks

The National Public Health Service (NPHS) is responsible for investigating and managing outbreaks of infectious diseases.

Contact information for attendees can support the ability to rapidly respond to outbreaks. Specific ticketing and scanning in for sections of an event, or transport, can be helpful to aid public health teams to accurately complete contact tracing for infectious diseases if required (e.g. in the event of a measles outbreak).

Ensuring tickets include full names, phone numbers and email addresses can help to rapidly identify and support contact tracing, and for post event communication of health messages. If your event is free, ensure that you have channels to communicate with event-goers during and after the event.

If you are aware of concerns around disease spread at the event, it is recommended that you contact your local public health service for advice and support.

You can also contact your local public health service to support messaging and provide resources.

Preventing foodborne illness

As an event organiser, you have a critical role to play to ensure food sold is safe and does not cause foodborne illness. Foodborne illness can be serious and, in some cases, fatal. Pathogens, chemical and foreign matter contamination as well as managing allergens all

need to be considered to ensure your customers are safe.

New Zealand Food Safety, a business unit of the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), has developed information on food safety issues to be considered during an event. This information is available here: **Food safety tips for event organisers**

All food sold, must be from a registered food business under the Food Act 2014. This ensures food businesses have in place food safety control measures, and these have been checked by an independent person.

You can confirm a food business is registered by checking the Ministry for Primary Industries public register available here: **Public Register | MPI**

If food is being sold as a fundraising activity, the registration requirements may not apply. However, given events can involve the widespread distribution of food, it is recommended that only low risk foods are sold as part of fundraising activities involving unregistered food providers. You can read more about food sales for fundraising here: **Fundraising and community event food safety rules**

You can contact NZFS or your local council if you would like to discuss food safety at your event.

Safe drinking water

Consider hiring a water tank, water fountains or providing bottled water to attendees.

Water intake can mitigate the effects of alcohol and drugs and protect from dehydration and heat exhaustion. If you are selling alcohol, you are legally required to provide readily available, and free, drinking water (Sale and Supple of Alcohol Act 2012).

This water must be supplied in free clean drinking vessels or available free in larger containers from which it may easily be poured or drawn by customers, together with clean drinking vessels that are also available nearby at no cost to attendees. Ensure that there are large signs for water stations that they are included on event maps.

Connect with your local council to explore what you can do to provide safe drinking water at your event.

Avoid drinking water that has not been treated — including water from lakes, rivers, or streams, or from an area where you do not know the quality of source water. You may need to put in place water testing and risk mitigations if your event's water source is not a main appropriately treated supply.

Consider encouraging attendees to bring a reusable bottle to have with them and refill on site.

Water intake will depend on the type of event and environmental conditions, however as a

guide for a single day event provide at least 2 litres of drinking water per patron, and for overnight events 20 litres of water per day per person will be required (drinking and non-potable water included).

To facilitate water consumption by attendees, there should be a minimum of one water station per 500 people. Keep water outlets separate from commercial outlets and bars and have them clearly visible with signage. Water outlets at entry and exit points are encouraged. "Roaming provision of water" by event/festival staff, such as through crowds and queues, are an effective way to ensure patrons can easily access water.

In extreme weather conditions, consider the use of water sprays to crowded areas where patrons may not wish or be able to leave the area (e.g., front of stage at music festivals or concerts) to access water or shade to cool down.

More information is available here: **Guidelines for Patron Welfare at Large Events**

Sanitation facilities

Toilets and handwashing facilities should be well lit and have adequate access to meet the needs of attendees. This includes ensuring wheelchair access and disability access toilets. Local council can advise on the minimum requirement for sanitation facilities.

Liquid soap and single use hand drying facilities must be available, and stocks should be regularly checked. The provision of hand sanitiser for people to use once they have cleaned their hands is optional.

Washing hands

It is important everyone involved in the event (including staff) is able to wash their hands thoroughly by using plenty of soap and hot water, cleaning between fingers and under fingernails, rinsing well and drying on a clean dry towel or paper towel.

Hand sanitiser should not be used as an alternative to providing adequate soap and water. Include hand hygiene signage to promote hand washing at the event. Locate sanitation facilities away from food storage and food service areas.

Waste and recycling bins must be large enough and be regularly checked for emptying.

Needle disposal units can be housed in toilet blocks and should be easily accessible with clear signposting.

Have separate comfort areas available for families and caregivers, and breastfeeding and expressing parents if the event is catered to all ages or families. This should be comfortable and private space.

General cleaning

Clean areas and surfaces that may have become contaminated with a suitable cleaning solution.

- clean food areas first and clean bathrooms last
- use different cleaning equipment in different areas e.g. different mops and different coloured cloths to clean different areas such as sinks and toilets
- soak cleaning cloths in sanitiser after use, followed by a hot water wash, then dry
- wash mops after they have been used, pour boiling water over them and dry in the sun. Never leave them soaking in water or disinfectant
- wash hands after cleaning

Emergency management

Managing emergency situations and emerging threats is a core element of event planning. Organisers should involve health, emergency and council services of the event and consider the potential impact on resources.

An emergency management plan should be developed with and communicated to emergency services prior to the event. Examples of potential emergencies include earthquakes, fire, storms, infectious disease outbreaks, or road closures. Event organisers are responsible for ensuring that patrons are safe and can safely travel home or to a safe place in the event of an emergency.

To aid in emergency management, it is advisable to contact relevant stakeholders and consider stakeholder meetings in the lead up to the event to establish relationships and understand roles in the event of an emergency. This also enables services to plan ahead and consider staffing levels for the event duration. Mass events are likely to put pressure on health and emergency services, particularly in peak holiday seasons.

Rostering for such services occurs many months in advance, so involvement in the planning stages allows emergency services to be prepared. Distribute the emergency management plan to relevant stakeholders with contact details so that they can get in touch before, during and after the event.

Ensure that in your site planning, emergency services can easily access the event. This will include consideration of traffic movements on site, ability to access roads, exits and entrances are not blocked and alternative entry and exit points are available if required.

The New Zealand Government developed Protecting Our Crowded Places from Attack: New Zealand's Strategy to help event organisers protect the lives of people working in, using and visiting their crowded place.

The strategy and tools are available online: **Crowded places strategy | New Zealand Police**

Inclusion and accessibility

Inclusive events are those which seek to meet the needs of all attendees and are open to adapting and learning in order to meet accessibility needs of attendees.

Approximately 20% of Aotearoa New Zealand's population identify as living with a disability. This includes physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual disabilities. Ensuring the event is accessible for all is important to make the event safe and enjoyable for attendees. Site planning must allow for those with access needs to safely travel to the venue, enter and exit, use facilities, and easily participate in the event and communicate with staff.

Promotional material should include information on:

- wheelchair access
- ramp access
- safe viewing areas
- accessible transport options.

Include appropriate contact details where those with accessibility needs can get in touch.

Alcohol and other recreational drugs

Alcohol

Combining large numbers of people and the consumption of alcohol requires careful planning to ensure the event is run safely and meets the object of the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012.

Detailed guidance for managing alcohol at large events can be found here: **Guidelines for Managing Alcohol at Large Events**

Recreational drugs

A drug harm reduction strategy can improve the safety of an event. This includes setting and communicating clear expectations to attendees and providing information on safety and support services available. Staff training should include knowing when and how to intervene and having a plan on how to respond to situations of life-threatening overdose.

Other ways to minimise harm include having a chill space/safe zone to support intoxicated people who need care, and a **drug checking service**. Drug checking services allow people to check what their drugs contain and receive advice on how to be safe. If drug contamination or concerning substances are detected at the event, have a plan for how this will be effectively communicated to attendees.

More advice on reducing drug harm at your event can be found at the NZ Drug Foundation website. This includes a **step-by-step guide** to assist you tyo develop a drug management plan.

Know Your Stuff NZ is the licensed provider that does drug checking at the majority of festival events.

The Level has a calendar of drug checking clinics across the motu, including some festivals.

Other organisations, including Hato Hone St John and the NZ Drug Foundation, may also offer this service.

Safe Zones

Safe zones are a designated area that is set up to provide supervision and support to attendees. Safe zones are an essential element of minimising alcohol and drug related harm at events. They can also be useful for distressed, lost or unwell attendees to seek support.

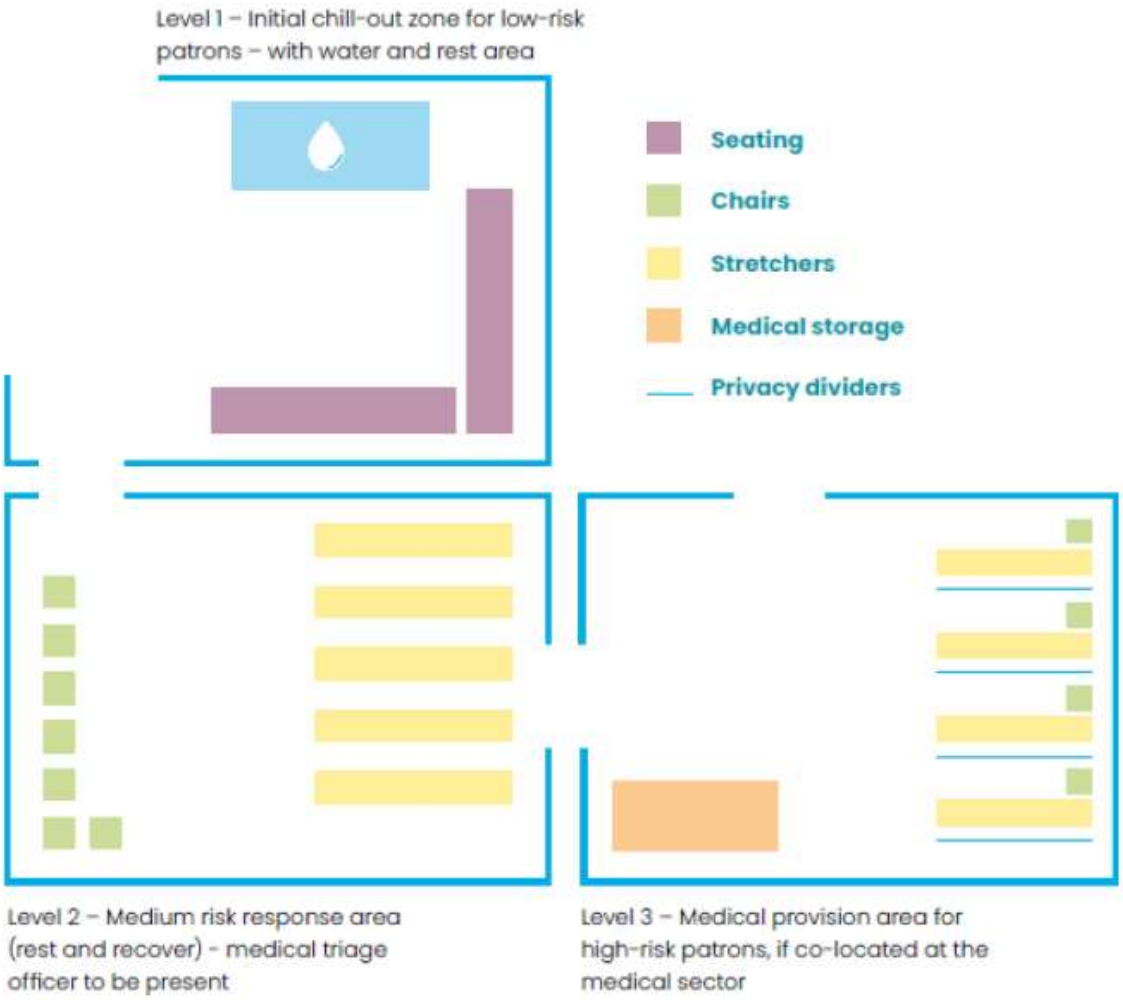
Events must be set up to provide wellbeing support to intoxicated persons. A safe zone

can ensure that intoxicated people have a dedicated alcohol-free space to be supervised and supported while arrangements are made for getting home safely, or for first aid care to be provided. Safe zones should be staffed by personnel who are proficient in first aid with clear escalation pathways for help if required.

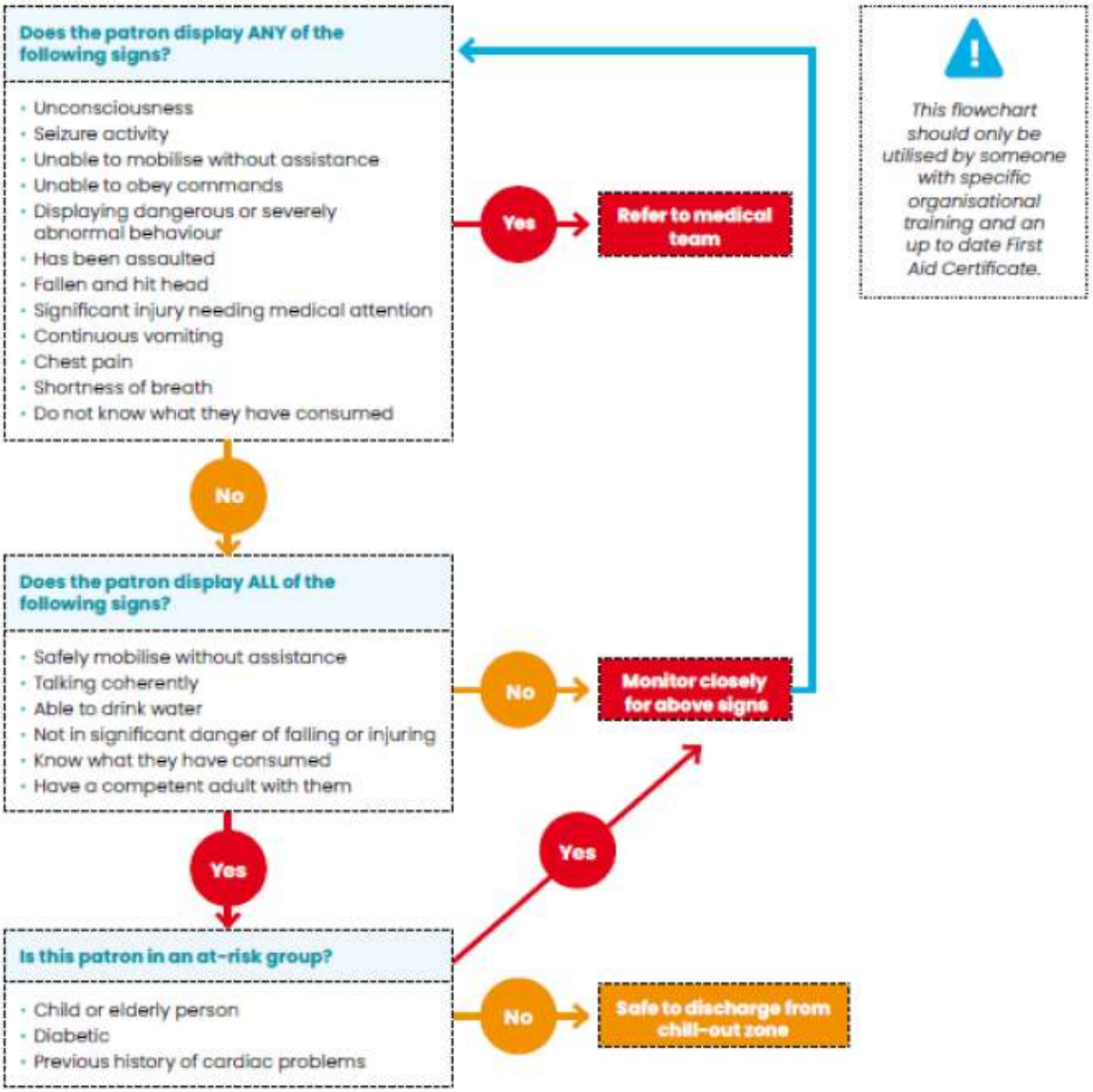
A suggested safe zone layout and referral flowchart for consideration of whether patrons need further medical support are on the next pages.

Three levels of chill-out zones can be provided, reflecting the level of treatment needed. Event managers are encouraged to collaborate with peer support services to determine which levels of response are required for each event.

Suggested chill-out zone layout



Assessment referral flowchart



Sexual health

Particularly for young people at music festivals, there is a risk of spread of sexually transmitted infections, unplanned pregnancies and sexual harm. Unsafe alcohol intake and recreational drug use increases the risk of sexual violence and unsafe sex practices at events.

Event organisers can play an important role in messaging and fostering a culture that promotes safe and respectful sex and relationships. Messaging should be delivered through a range of formats from prior to the event to after the event. The following messages can be promoted to prevent sexually transmitted infections:

- most STIs don't have symptoms, so you can't tell if your or someone close to you has an STI.
- it is quick and easy to get tested and treated for STIs such as syphilis, chlamydia, and gonorrhoea.
- keep sex safe by always using a condom and get regularly tested for STIs.
- Condoms offer the best protection against STIs and at the same time prevent unplanned pregnancies.
- STI testing is quick, easy, painless, and free (in most services).
- STI testing is confidential.

You can get tested at sexual health services, as well as at:

- **Sexual Wellbeing Aotearoa** (formerly called New Zealand Family Planning)
- GPs
- other community-based providers including **Burnett Foundation Aotearoa**, **Body Positive**, and **Positive Women**.

Consider providing staff with bystander training and how to respond appropriately to reports of sexual violence and ensure there are clear procedures for responding. If a safe zone is established at your event, this can be used to provide safe sex messaging and products to attendees.

Further information to support planning to promote sexual health and wellbeing can be found **here**. While this resource was developed for Australia, this is relevant to events in New Zealand to consider while planning.

For more information on STI testing (including testing for HIV) and how to get support:

- **Burnett Foundation Aotearoa** offers support and services for Gay and Bi men. Check out their website to learn more about STIs including HIV, testing options, free condoms, mpox vaccination, counselling etc. at their offices in the main centres.
- **Auckland Sexual Health** has just launched a new self-request service.
- **Positive Women** provides information supporting women and families/whānau living with HIV in Aotearoa New Zealand.

- **Te Taenga Mai** offers HIV prevention and support in Aotearoa for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.
- **HIV Better2Know** was developed by Positive Women to help everyday New Zealanders find information about HIV, where to get a test and where to find support.
- **Body Positive Inc.** is a peer support organisation, founded by and run for, all people living with HIV in New Zealand.

Transport

Increased pressure on transport systems may occur with large gatherings. A traffic management plan is usually required by councils to ensure that streets can be safely accessed. Liaise with your local council and transport agency on transportation and whether there is a need for a temporary traffic management plan to reduce risks.

Choosing a venue that is connected to existing public transport and active transport infrastructure can help reduce car dependency and traffic congestion. It is also important to promote active and public transport to travel to the event. If the venue is not already connected to public transport, or if attendees will exceed the existing transport systems capacity, offer a designated bus service to transport attendees to and from the event.

Transport options can also be linked in with accommodation providers for events that are bringing in many visitors to the area. Limited car parking at the event is a tool to disincentivise car travel or promote carpooling. If you do provide car parking at your event, communicate where the parking areas are located to attendees prior to the event.

Reducing the ability for cars to access the event and surrounding areas can make the venue and streets safer for attendees arriving and leaving, particularly more vulnerable attendees such as children, elderly, and people with disabilities.

Ensure that accessibility is considered when planning transport options for the event. Designated buses, or transport options for those with accessibility needs should be available for those who wish to use them. Specified parking for disabled people at the event should be arranged.

Weather

Weather conditions can influence the potential health impacts of an event. In the event of extreme weather events, consider early event postponement or cancellation. Early decisions will reduce risk by ensuring people are not out in potentially dangerous conditions, risking the health of attendees and others.

In planning stages, organisers should set clear trigger points for when an event will be cancelled. Extreme weather events may include, heavy rain, flooding, cyclones, heat waves or low temperatures. Each pose significant risks to health, including injury, death, increased risk of infectious diseases and dehydration, particularly for more vulnerable groups such as children and elderly. Review of the weather will be required throughout the event.

Particularly for summer events, high temperatures and sun can increase the risk of health effects such as dehydration, drug and alcohol harm, sun stroke and heat exhaustion. Children, elderly, and those with medical conditions are more vulnerable to the effects of heat. Strategies to mitigate heat can be to start later in the day when it is cooler, having a shorter event or scheduling in cooler months.

At the event, ensure there is adequate shade available, including areas where there may be long queues to reduce heat exposure. Make sure where people need to queue for long periods that they also have access close by to drinking water. Shade may need to be provided through temporary structures however, natural shade is the best form of shade.

Existing shaded spots should be utilised when planning the event layout. Air conditioning and industrial fans should be used indoors. Shaded areas are also important as sun protection for attendees. Providing access to water resistant SPF-30+ sunscreen encourages sun safety. Ensure sunscreen stations are visible and provide sun safety messaging.

Similarly, events held in cold temperatures need to consider ways to ensure attendees are warm and dry. Heating and drying stations, and provision of hot drinks can be considered as precautions

NPHS is available to be contacted for public health advice and support. It is best to contact us as early in the planning stages (at least six months prior to the event) or as soon as issues arise.

Further resources and information

- **Te Whatu Ora | Guidelines for Patron Welfare at Large Events**
- **Te Whatu Ora | Guidelines for Managing Alcohol at Large Events**
- **Ministry for the Environment | Major event greening guide: A practical guide to reducing the environmental impact of a major event**
- **New South Wales Health. Guidelines for Music Festival Event Organisers: Music Festival Harm Reduction**
- **Te Whatu Ora | Healthy habits**
- **Tauranga City Council | Event Waste Minimisation**
- **Tauranga City Council | Event Health and Safety**
- **Pennington | Sexual health and safety at festivals toolkit**
- **Hato Hone St John | Event Services**
- **NZ Drug Foundation | Events.**