

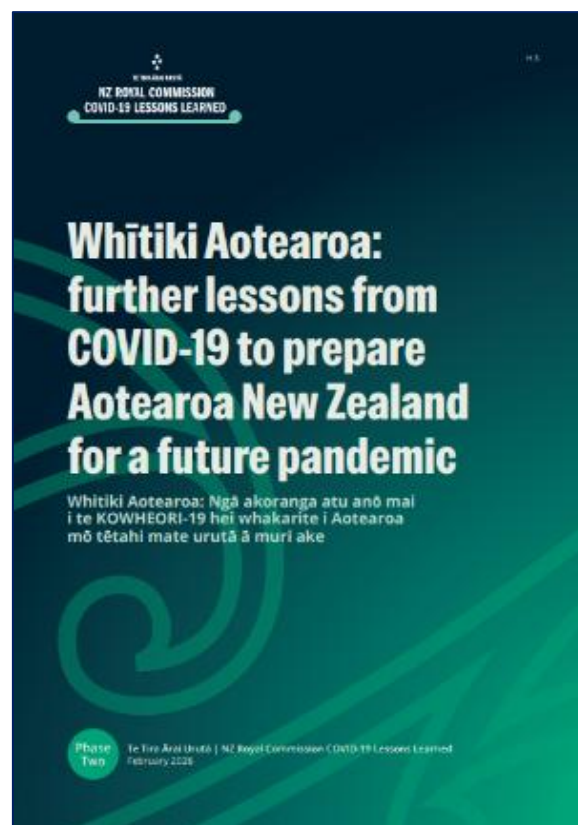


TE TIRA ĀRAI URUTĀ

# NZ ROYAL COMMISSION COVID-19 LESSONS LEARNED



## Lessons learned from COVID-19: Phase 2 summary of findings



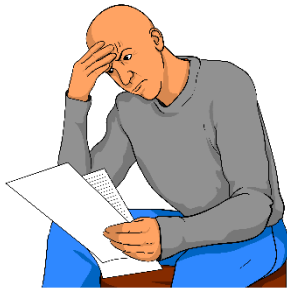
**Published: April 2026**

# Before you start



This is a long document.

It can be hard for some people to read a document this long.



Some things you can do to make it easier are:



- read it a few pages at a time
- set aside some quiet time to look at it
- have someone read it with you to support you to understand it.



# What you will find in this document

Page number:



What this Easy Read is about.....4



What is the Royal Commission? .....8



About Phase 2 .....11



What we found out.....15



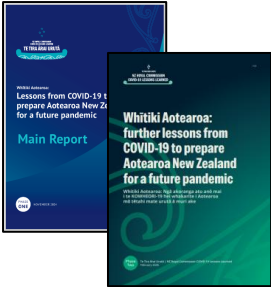
What New Zealanders told us.....29



Our recommendations .....40

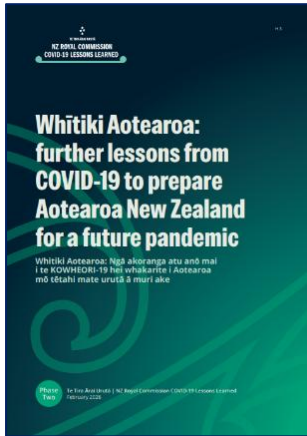


What happens now .....44

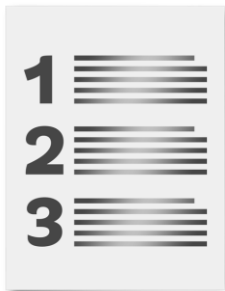


Read our reports .....47

# What this Easy Read is about



This Easy Read is a **summary** of the **Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 Lessons Learned – Te Tira Ārai Urutā** report about **Phase 2** of its work.



Here a **summary**:

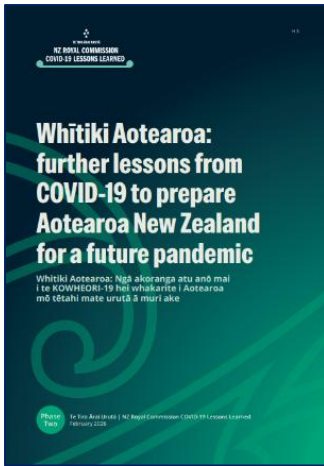
- is shorter than the full report document
- tells you the main ideas.



Here **Phase 2** means part 2.



In this document the **Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 Lessons Learned – Te Tira Ārai Urutā** will be called the **Royal Commission**.



The full Phase 2 report is called **Whitiki Aotearoa: further lessons from COVID-19 to prepare Aotearoa New Zealand for a future pandemic.**



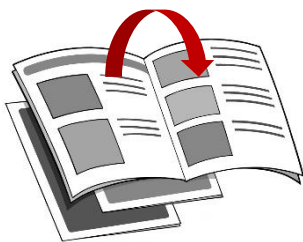
The Royal Commission is a group of people who learned about things that happened during the **COVID-19 pandemic.**



**COVID-19** is a type of virus that makes people sick.



A **pandemic** is when many people around the world get the same sickness at the same time.



We tell you more about the Royal Commission on **pages 8 to 10** of this document.



When you see the words **we / us / our** in this document it means the Royal Commission.



There were 2 phases to the work by the Royal Commission:

Phase 1 looked at:



- what happened during the pandemic in New Zealand
- made **recommendations** to the Government about its findings.

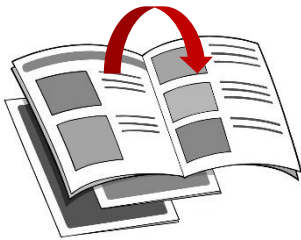


Here a **recommendation** is an idea about how to do something better if there is another pandemic.



## Phase 2:

- looked at some new things about the pandemic
- looked at some of the work done in Phase 1 more closely
- made recommendations to the Government about how to prepare for another pandemic.



Go to **pages 11 to 14** to find out more about Phase 2 of our inquiry.



Go to **pages 47 to 50** find the links to our reports.

# What is the Royal Commission?



The Royal Commission was announced by the Government in 2022.



It is a group of people who learned about things that happened during the COVID-19 pandemic.



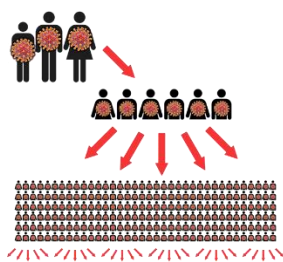
The Royal Commission is not part of the Government.



The Government asked the Royal Commission to look at some things to do with the pandemic.



The Government could not tell the Royal Commission what should go in its reports.



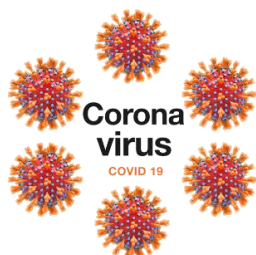
The work of the Royal Commission was to find things out about the pandemic.



This is so the country can be ready if other pandemics happen.



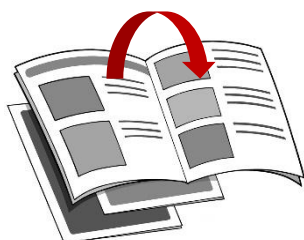
To do this the Commission looked at lots of information.



They also asked people to talk about what happened to them during the COVID-19 pandemic.



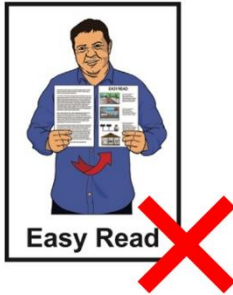
As part of their work the Royal Commission showed the Government what they found out in their reports.



There are links to these reports on **pages 47 to 50.**

You can find more information about the Royal Commission at this **website**:

[www.covid19lessons.royalcommission.nz](http://www.covid19lessons.royalcommission.nz)



This website is **not** in Easy Read.

## About Phase 2



At the end of 2024 the Government asked the Royal Commission to:

- find out what was learned from how the Government dealt with COVID-19

and

- how to be better prepared for another pandemic if one happens.



This part of our work was Phase 2.



We looked at the decisions the Government made about the pandemic from:



- February 2021

to

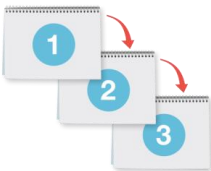


- October 2022.



The topics we were asked to look at were Government decisions about:

- **the vaccine:**
  - approvals / saying yes to using vaccines
  - processes / steps to start using the vaccine
  - safety
- **vaccine mandates.**





A **vaccine** is a medicine that can help stop you from getting very sick.



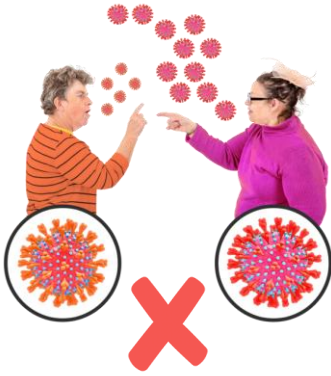
**Vaccine mandates** are when people have to get a vaccine to do something like their job.



The topics we were also asked to look at were Government decisions about:

- COVID-19:
  - testing technology
  - **contact tracing** technology
- **lockdowns.**



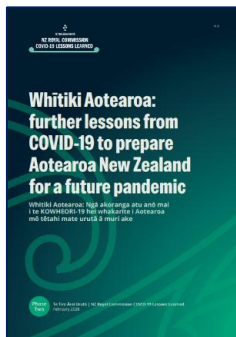


Here **contact tracing** was used by health services to find people who may have been close to someone who had COVID-19.

This was done to help stop the spread of COVID-19.



**Lockdowns** were when the Government asked everyone to stay at home so they did not get sick.



Our report is based on the **evidence** we collected over the last 15 months.



Here **evidence** is true information that supports people to make decisions about how to manage something like a pandemic.

## What we found out

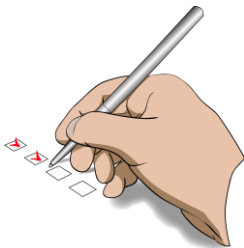


We found that the Government response to COVID-19 here in Aotearoa New Zealand was:

- well thought out

and

- done in the right way using the information available at the time.



We also found areas where we think the Government response could have been stronger.



There were things the Government:

- needed to change quickly when they got new information

but

- could not change quickly.

These changes were to things like the Government COVID-19:



- response **strategy**

- **settings**.



Here **strategy** was the plan to keep New Zealanders safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Here **settings** were the rules about what you could do at different times during the COVID-19 pandemic.



## The Government:

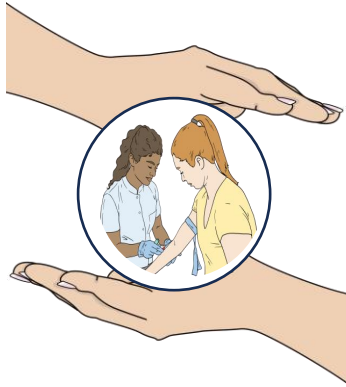
- made some decisions about the response

and

- did not use all the information available to support these decisions.



This included some decisions they made about using mandates.



## What we found out about vaccines

Vaccines were seen as a way to:

- protect New Zealanders from getting the virus
- stop having to use things like lockdowns to protect people.



We found:

- decisions about using vaccines were made on evidence that they were safe



- **risks** and **side effects** were **monitored** using information from experts in:



- New Zealand
- other countries.



Here **risks** are the things that could go wrong if somebody has the vaccine.



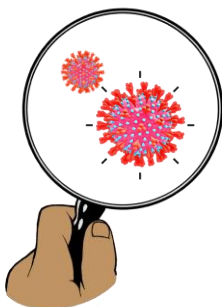
**Side-effects** are when something you do not expect happens to your body when you:

- have a vaccine
- take medicine.

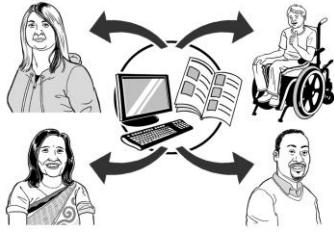


Side-effects:

- do not happen very often
- are sometimes bad.



**Monitored** means to watch something closely to see what is happening.



We found that the Government shared information about the risks of the COVID-19 vaccines.



The Government did not understand fully how worried people were about how safe the vaccines were.

## Vaccine mandates



The Government vaccine mandates were the main thing people worried about.



Some people told us the vaccine mandates made them feel safer.



These were people more likely to be affected very badly if they got COVID-19 like some:



- disabled people
- people with health conditions.



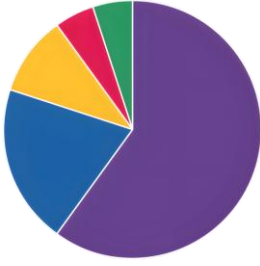
Some people told us mandates:

- stopped them getting their rights
- harmed them.



Here **rights** are things that everyone should:

- have
- be able to do.



We:

- looked at all the evidence

and

- decided vaccine mandates do work to keep people safe.



Mandates should still be used if there is another pandemic when:

- they are used carefully
- they are monitored carefully
- there are clear rules about how to use them.



Decisions to end mandates should be made quickly.



Doing this will mean human rights will not be affected for longer than they need to be.



## Testing and tracing technologies

**Testing** for COVID-19 was an important part of the New Zealand health response.



Here **testing** means ways of finding out who had COVID-19.



Testing was very important to:

- find out where a COVID-19 outbreak was happening
- work to stop the COVID-19 outbreaks from spreading.





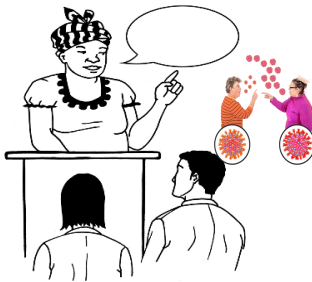
The test for COVID-19 used most in 2021 was the Polymerase Chain Reaction / PCR test.



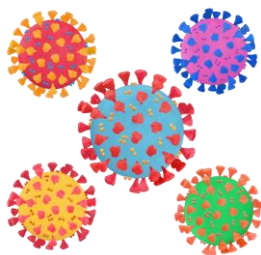
The PCR test was used because it is very **accurate**.



Here **accurate** means that the results of testing for COVID-19 are correct.



The PCR testing system could not keep up with all the new cases of the **Delta** COVID-19 in early 2022.



Here **Delta** is a variant / kind of the COVID-19 virus.



The Government was slow to say yes to other ways to test for COVID-19.



It also took a long time to bring tests to New Zealand from other countries.



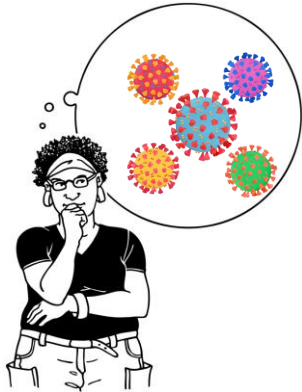
This meant people found it hard to get good ways to test for COVID-19 when they needed to.



We thought:

- the main decisions about testing technologies were well thought out

but



- there needed to be more thinking about what would happen over time:

- about different ways of testing that could be done
- how people were affected when they could not get the tests.



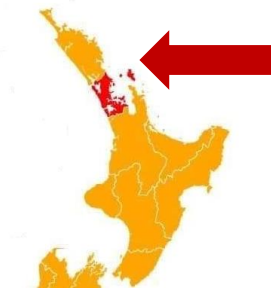


## Lockdowns

There was a national lockdown in August 2021 to try to stop the spread of the Delta variant / kind of COVID-19.



Health experts told the Government lockdowns should be longer in:



- Auckland
- Northland
- Waikato.



This made things very hard for people in areas like their:

- communities
- businesses.



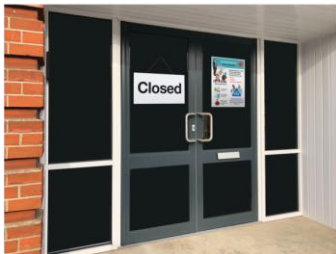


We found that the Government should have had a good look to make sure lockdowns were working.



This could have supported decisions:

- to move out of lockdown
- to know when lockdowns were not working to stop the spread of COVID-19.



Stopping the lockdowns too soon would have been bad for:

- the economy like for businesses
- communities like keeping people safe from getting COVID-19.





Having more data / information would have supported the Government to make decisions on what would happen if:



- there were no lockdowns
- lockdowns were stopped too early.



After looking at the evidence again we think the Government:

- had enough information to make decisions about lockdowns
- usually made the right decisions about lockdowns.



## What New Zealanders told us



An important part of Phase 2 was hearing from people who lived in New Zealand during the COVID-19 pandemic.



We got more than 31 thousand written **submissions** from New Zealanders about their experiences.



Here a **submission** is a way to tell us what you thought about the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



We also met people in person around the country to hear what they had to say.

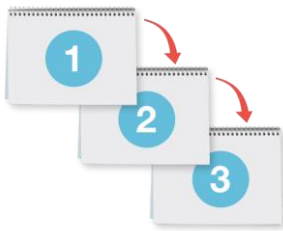


## Vaccines

People told us what they thought about:



- vaccines
- approval to be able to use the vaccine
- processes / steps for people to get the vaccine
- how safe the vaccine was.



Some people said they:

- were worried about the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine
- did not feel supported when they said they had been hurt by having the vaccine.





People said they were mostly happy with how easy it was to get the vaccine.



## Vaccine mandates

People talked about the vaccine mandates the most in the submissions.



People had different feelings about the vaccine mandates.



Some people said that the vaccine mandates:

- made people disagree with each other
- caused a lot of worry about money when somebody could not work.

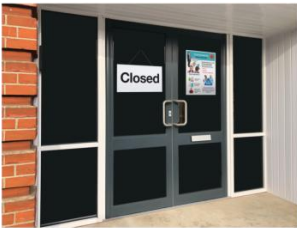




People also told us it should have been easier to say no to having the vaccine.



Other people told us they felt safer knowing most people had a vaccine.



## Lockdowns

People told us how hard it was for them during the lockdowns.



They told us about things like:

- not being able to see their loved ones
- losing their jobs.





Many people told us lockdowns helped them to feel safe by stopping the spread of COVID-19.



People also told us they were thankful / grateful for the Government support during the lockdowns.



People also told us they were not happy with how long the lockdowns took.



Many people were unhappy with the very long lockdown in August 2021 for:



- Auckland
- Northland
- Waikato.



## Testing and tracing technologies

People told us what they thought about:



- getting tested for COVID-19
- tracing technologies like the COVID-19 app
- other things they had to do during the COVID-19 pandemic like wearing a mask.



People told us they had bad experiences with wearing masks like:

- people who did not have to wear masks were often treated badly
- the masks did not feel comfortable
- other problems when wearing a mask.





People were happy the **Rapid Antigen Tests** did not cost money.



**Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs)** were tests people used at home to find out if they had COVID-19.



People told us they should have been able to get the RATs earlier.



## Communication and information

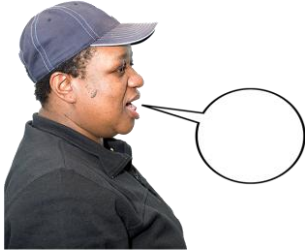
Here **communication** means how the Government told New Zealanders information about COVID-19.



Some people felt the Government communication about COVID-19 was very good.



Some people felt that the Government communication made people feel more scared.



Some people told us they thought COVID-19 was a story made up by the Government.



## What Māori and Pacific peoples thought

Māori and Pacific peoples told us how hard it was not to be able to do **cultural** things like going to a tangi / funeral.



**Cultural** means things to do with **culture**.

**Culture** is a way of:

- thinking that a group shares
- doing things as a group.





Many people told us how supportive some groups were during COVID-19 like:

- local iwi / tribes
- Pacific groups.



## Talking to organisations and communities



People told us the Government started out working well with:

- organisations
- communities.



They told us that this did not last.



People wanted some new things that started during the pandemic to keep going.



For example the Government worked well with other groups like community organisations at the beginning of the pandemic.



People living in different parts of the country said each place:

- found different things hard
- had different things they needed from the Government.





## What people felt about how the Government managed COVID-19



People had different feelings about how the Government managed the pandemic.



Many people told us they:

- felt safe
- thought the Government did a good job.



Some people felt the Government had too much control over the lives of people.



The people who did not like how the pandemic was managed said they did not trust the Government now.

# Our recommendations



We made recommendations to the Government about what to do if a pandemic happens again like how to:



- get ready for pandemics
- manage pandemics.



We recommended:

- putting things in place to support good decision making about what to do like:
  - make sure there are ways for all government organisations to work well together
  - have ways to change decisions quickly during a pandemic.





We also recommended:

- making **laws** that say what special powers the Government can have during a pandemic that:



- protect human rights
- say what things the Government can / cannot do.



- preparing for how a pandemic can affect places making money like:



- businesses
- industries / groups of business that do similar things



- planning how to support people with money during a pandemic.



A **law** is a rule made by the Government that everybody must follow.



We also recommended:

- making a guide to support people with making decisions during a pandemic
- understanding how the COVID-19 response affected communities
- making good ways to communicate what is happening during a pandemic.



You can look at our Phase 2 report to read:

- what we found out during our inquiry
- all our recommendations.





You can read the report at our  
**website:**

**[www.covid19inquiry.nz](http://www.covid19inquiry.nz)**

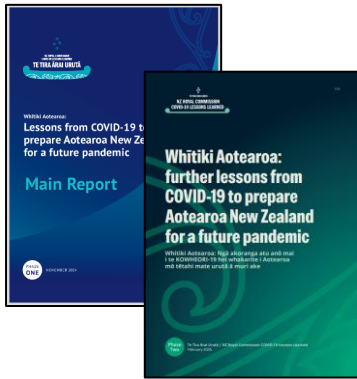


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# What happens now



We have now finished the inquiry into the Government response to the COVID-19 pandemic.



The Government now have our 2 main reports about:

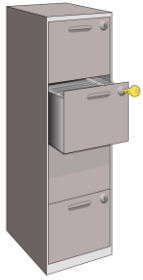
- Phase 1
- Phase 2.



It is now up to the Government to decide:

- what recommendations they will follow to support Aotearoa New Zealand if there is another pandemic
- what work they will do to follow the recommendations.



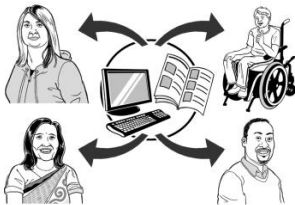


All the information the Inquiry collected will be stored at **Archives New Zealand Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga**.



**Archives New Zealand Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga is:**

- a government organisation
- keeps government information safe.



Some of this information:

- can be looked at by the public
- will be kept private.





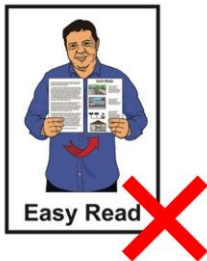
For any questions about the work of the Inquiry contact Te Tari  
Taiwhenua Department of Internal  
Affairs by **emailing:**

**statutoryinquiries@dia.govt.nz**

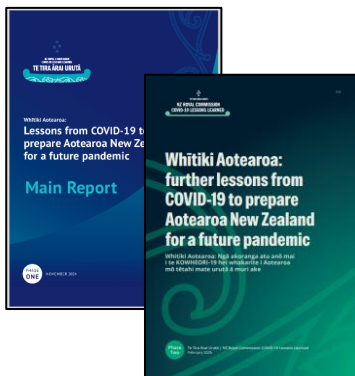


For more information about the work of the Inquiry visit our website at:

**www.covid19inquiry.nz**



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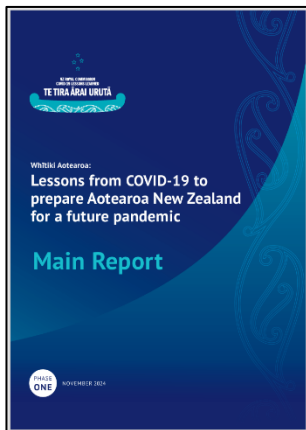


There is information on where to read our reports in the next part of this Easy Read.

# Read our reports



You can find the links to the Royal Commission reports on these pages.

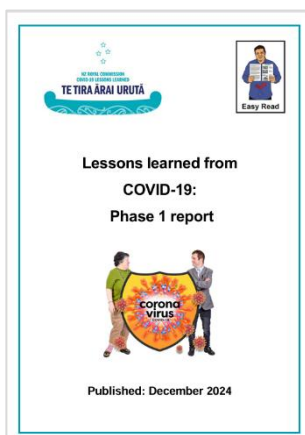


You can read the first report **Lessons from COVID-19 to prepare Aotearoa New Zealand for a future pandemic** at this **website**:

<https://tinyurl.com/C19MReport>

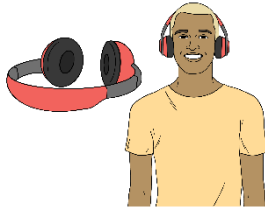


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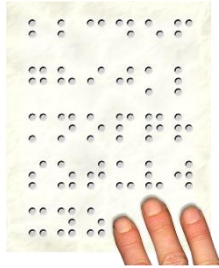
You can read the Easy Read summary of this report called **Lessons learned from COVID-19: Phase 1 report** at this **website**:

<https://tinyurl.com/C19ReportPhase1>



The summary of the Phase 1 report is in these alternate formats:

- audio
- Braille
- Easy Read
- large print
- New Zealand Sign Language.



These alternate formats are available at this **website**:



**<https://tinyurl.com/LangAltFor>**



The summary of the Phase 1 report is also in these languages:

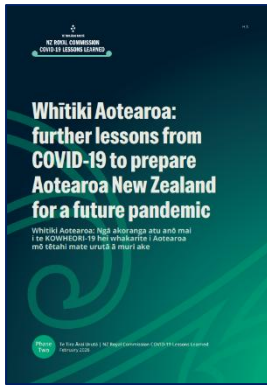


- English
- te reo Māori
- Samoan
- Tongan
- Hindi
- Simplified Chinese.



You can find these at this **website**:

**<https://tinyurl.com/LangAltFor>**



You can read the second report  
**Whitiki Aotearoa: further lessons  
from COVID-19 to prepare  
Aotearoa New Zealand for a future  
pandemic at this website:**

**<https://tinyurl.com/RCOI-Phase2>**



This information has been written by the NZ Royal Commission COVID-19 Lessons Learned Te Tira Ārai Urutā.



It has been translated into Easy Read by the Make it Easy Kia Māmā Mai service of People First New Zealand Ngā Tāngata Tuatahi.



The ideas in this document are not the ideas of People First New Zealand Ngā Tāngata Tuatahi.



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