



Wellness Matters While Under Lockdown

The global impact of COVID19 has been profound, and many countries affected by it have taken a “suppress and mitigate” approach towards fighting, what is now, a pandemic. Still, extreme and necessary measures such as the lockdown are highly disruptive to the public in terms of participation in their daily activities, roles, and routines. In turn, this can affect their mental health. This commentary is intended to promote understanding of the rationale for the lockdown before addressing the need for a health and well-being plan that will support people during the suppression and mitigation related interventions.

A report from the Imperial College COVID19 Response Team (UK) gives an excellent explanation of both mitigation and suppression strategies and has been influential in providing direction to the decision/policymakers. There is a difference between the two approaches, suppression's purpose is to "interrupt, reduce and eliminate" whereas, mitigation's purpose is to slow down the rate of infection (see Table 1.1 below). Depending on the measures selected at any given time, these strategies impact on the day-to-day occupations and related activities of people worldwide.

Table 1.1

Non pharmacological intervention (NPI)	Suppression	Mitigation
Social distancing	Entire population	Select groups deemed to be vulnerable e.g. elderly
Home isolation	Symptomatic cases	Suspect cases only
Household quarantine	Family members of symptomatic cases	Only those exposed to the virus
School and universities closure	All	Partial to none

Furthermore, the report pointed out that "intermittent social distancing" triggered by trends in disease surveillance may allow interventions to be relaxed temporarily. However, it also warned that non-pharmacological interventions would need to be reintroduced if, or when, case numbers rebound. The report indicated that the significant challenge of intensive interventions is that they need to be maintained until a vaccine becomes available, which could be 12-18 months from now. Public health experts and leaders around the world have emphasised that this is a marathon, not a sprint.

According to New Zealand's former Director-General of Health, Chai Chuah: "Days after this report was published, numerous governments started closing their borders, restricting population movements, banning mass gatherings, and shutting down public and private services." The release of the national alert levels and the current Level 4 nationwide lockdown are examples of such actions.

New Zealand is under total lockdown for "several weeks." Chai Chuah, who is presently in Penang, Malaysia, looking after his elderly mother, noted in a recent communication that these measures, necessary for public safety, will have a sweeping, wide, deep, and lasting impact on people's daily lives. Similarly, the Imperial College report acknowledged, but did not elaborate on how these drastic measures will have both short-term and long-term implications.

Lockdown is a stringent but "necessary" intervention. Its effect on people's lives is unprecedented, as occupations and life roles including self-care, work, education, productivity, leisure/play, sleep and relaxation are disrupted. The impact on elderly people, families with young children and vulnerable populations is of concern. With the passage of time, if the lockdown period is extended, people's health could be at risk, and things like healthy eating and physical exercise may be discarded. Increased screen time could become the norm as some people will explore and adopt alternative ways of surviving. For example, endlessly watching television or playing games on a computer.

It is difficult to fully predict the long term effects or the future recovery package needed at the individual and community level. Still, it is a responsibility of everyone to support our communities in adapting and coping with lockdown and the disruptive social changes to daily activities. We all have a role to play, big and small, collaborating in a complex adaptive system. Traditional healthy living approaches that focus on discrete behaviours related to diet, physical activity, or smoking need to be more inclusive of the range of activities and behaviours that will support physical and mental health and thereby - well-being.

The Do-Live-Well (DLW) framework is pertinent to the current situation. Developed by occupational therapists in Canada, this tool was designed to capture evidence linking a range of activity patterns to health and well-being outcomes. It provides a unique view on how to manage the social changes that are currently disrupting the roles, routines, and day-to-day activities of the public. The framework is based on occupational therapy principles, theories and practices. Do-Live-Well advances the

health promotion discourse and opens new opportunities for intervention at the individual, community, and social policy levels. Of note, the framework acknowledges that individuals are not solely responsible for improving health and well-being instead, personal and social situations (e.g. the lockdown) play an essential part. You can find it at www.dolivewell.ca

In the opinion of Professor Clare Hocking, a New Zealand occupational therapy academic, "We need to ensure people do not go stir crazy while they self-isolate (for a long time in the case of people who are immune-compromised). We also need to be mindful of people who are now trying to work from home, with their children at home." The Auckland University of Technology based professor added, "Even when confined, people still need to have a routine that includes being physically active, having fun, staying in contact with other people, and not getting overloaded with the news every hour." Professor Hocking recommends the Do-Live-Well framework as a useful tool to manage the health and well-being of New Zealanders during lockdown.

The key message of this article is based on the premise that what people do everyday has an essential impact on their health and well-being. Accordingly, people engage in a wide range of activities that combine to activate the body, mind, senses and spirit. Being socially connected is very important, even a physical activity like going to the gym offers a chance for social engagement. Since the lockdown has limited opportunities for face-to-face social connection, people need to find other ways to fill the gap. The time is right to try something new. For instance, Namrata Verma, a Bangalore (India) based Zumba instructor, commented that her Zoom subscribers have increased over the last few weeks. GrabOne offered a deal on e-learning of Te Reo Māori and Les Mills have collaborated with TVNZ for a fitness programme.

Occupational Therapy New Zealand Whakaora Ngangahau Aotearoa (OTNZ-WNA) can be contacted by members of the public, media, or policymakers who are interested in planning a support system for themselves and/or the community.

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Kia Kaha!

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