

Pressure on to extend vaccination mandate

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Lockdown-ravaged businesses are pushing for vaccination mandates for workers now the Government has introduced a “no job, no job” rule for education and health workers.

Retail NZ chief executive Greg Harford said businesses were under huge pressure and many retailers would be disappointed with no progress toward the next phase of the Auckland “roadmap” this week.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern yesterday confirmed Auckland would remain at step 1 of alert level 3 and Cabinet would decide whether to move the city to the second stage of three steps in alert level 3 next week.

Auckland schools will not reopen on Monday, meaning distanced learning will recommence in term 4.

Waikato and Northland will remain at level 3 until 11.59pm on Thursday.

“Businesses urgently need action from the Government so they can introduce vaccination requirements or other actions in their business without running the risk of a personal grievance,” Harford said.

“We also need to see a target date from government for everyone to be vaccinated. This should happen immediately.”

Last Monday, Ardern introduced a three-step plan to transition out of Level 3 “safely and carefully” over coming weeks. Wage subsidy payments would continue while Auckland was at any stage of level 3. In this latest Delta-induced lockdown the Government has paid out more

than \$4 billion in wage subsidies, although the outlay is less than the

original Covid lockdown in 2020.

Auckland Business Chamber chief executive Michael Barnett said mandatory vaccination for education, health workers and associate services was an important principle that should also hold for workplaces trying to keep their employees and customers safe and healthy.

“If no job-no job is to be the rule for selected people-facing services by Government order, then it certainly is a principle that business owners would welcome also by Government order as well as enabling urgent access to rapid testing technologies to better manage and reduce risks.”

Barnett said it was extremely disappointing Auckland remains in a holding pattern with no easing of any restrictions as the virus sets the pace and leaks continue at the border.

Heart of the City chief executive Viv Beck said with growing case numbers and a rush to get vaccination numbers up, businesses were suffering financially while owners battled mental health issues.

Government must focus on boosting vaccinations and not focus on “one or two sectors at a time”.

“Many businesses are on the brink . . . we can’t just focus on one job at a time. There is also a growing mental health crisis that as yet is unquantified and unreported.

“Business and sector groups are broadly aligned on what needs to happen to address this growing crisis and we need to urgently galvanise this into one plan, working directly

with government and officials to ensure both health and economic needs are met,” she said.