

Quick Reference Guide - Remote courts information for participants

Introduction to remote courts

This guide provides an overview of remote courts and the technology used for external participants, including counsel, witnesses, victims and other court participants.

Remote courts

Remote courts use a suite of hearing technology solutions to deliver high priority justice services.

In a remote court hearing, participants including the judicial officer and, in some cases, the court registry officer (CRO), attend remotely via teleconference (phone), virtual meeting rooms (VMR) or Microsoft Teams (Teams).

A judge or judicial officer can decide if a hearing (or 'appearance') will happen over the phone or by video. This might be due to an emergency event where we can't use the courthouse, or because it is a matter that doesn't require parties to attend in person.

You will be told by the court if your hearing is happening over phone or video. This will be confirmed in writing by email and will include the date and time of the hearing.

Why are remote courts necessary?

Remote courts have two key benefits:

- Fewer people, if any, are required to be present in the courtroom. This allows people to keep appropriate physical distance if required and reduces need to travel.
- Remote courts allow the courts to remain operational in situations where hearings would otherwise be suspended.

Virtual meeting rooms (VMR)

VMR is a remote hearing solution delivered with video conference equipment. VMR hearings require users to have access to Jabber Quick Guest software and the Mozilla Firefox web browser.

All attendees, including the judicial officer, can appear from any location. The CRO may be present in the courtroom to initiate and run the event but this is not always required.

A VMR meeting will involve at least two and usually three meeting room connections – one for the judge, one for the defendant and one for all other parties.

Microsoft Teams (Teams)

Teams is a platform that allows participants to communicate via video, audio and chat. All attendees, including the judicial officer and CRO, can appear from any location.

Teams can be accessed through a web browser (optimally Microsoft Edge). It can also be downloaded as an application on a computer or laptop. When using a smartphone or tablet, Teams must be

accessed via the application. We recommend you download the Teams app for a better experience and more features. Teams can also provide audio only when accessed by mobile phone or landline.

Viewing and sharing documents

External parties may be asked to file all court documents electronically via the court's general email address.

Documents can be shared with other parties using the Share Screen function in VMR and Teams.

Rules for phone and video hearings

A phone or video hearing is just as important as a hearing in a courthouse. It must be taken seriously. The below rules must be followed at all times during the hearing:

- Follow all instructions from the judge and the court taker/hearing manager
- Dress appropriately for court, just as you would if you were going to a courthouse
- No smoking or using e-cigarettes or vape pens
- No eating
- Drink water only
- Sit in a private, quiet space where you won't be interrupted
- If using video, make sure your face is well lit and that your shoulders and face are fully visible on the screen
- Do not record or take photos or videos of the hearing
- You must be by yourself unless the court has given permission to have someone with you.

What to do before the hearing

The email from the court will contain the technical instructions for joining the hearing. It will also contain contact details for the court. Use these details to let us know:

- The best phone number and email we can use to contact you
- If you can't join a phone or video hearing due to internet, mobile service, or device access issues
- Let us know if you want to have someone join the hearing with you, such as a support worker.

Other things to do:

- Make sure you have the right software or apps on your device
- Choose a quiet, private space to sit for the hearing and tell anyone around you (eg family/whānau or colleagues) that you cannot be disturbed during the hearing
- Have all required documents and information with you
- You may be asked to take an oath or affirmation at the start of the hearing. If you want to do this using a religious book or scripture, have it with you
- Check that the phone, laptop, or tablet you are using to connect to the hearing is fully charged or connected to power

- Put any other phones or electronic devices on silent or turn them off
- Be seated and ready to go 15 minutes before the hearing, to avoid any delays.

What to do during the hearing

Phone and video hearings work the same as hearings in a court. The judge or court taker/hearing manager will tell you what will happen at the start of the hearing.

Tell the judge if you need more information or a break during the hearing.

Remember that you will be visible at all times if you are on video. Even when you aren't talking, you must use appropriate behaviour.

Information for victims

If you are a victim, you can listen in to phone hearings. If necessary, and you have the required technology, you can also appear in or watch a video hearing. That means you don't have to be seen by other people during the hearing if you don't want to be.

A Court Victim Advisor will contact you to talk about options for participating in a phone or video hearing. They will also provide instructions for joining the hearing, let you know what to expect, and create a plan for following up after the hearing.

Court recordings and media coverage

The court will record phone and video hearings the same way as hearings are recorded in a courtroom.

Media applications can be made for access to the audio recording. This is done in the same way as the process for in-court media coverage.

[Media guide for reporting the courts and tribunals: edition 4.1](#)

All media enquiries should be directed to the Media Team.

Phone: (04) 918 8836 or (021) 636 416

Email: media@justice.govt.nz

Improving your internet connection

Remote courts are provided over the internet. To have the best experience:

- Do not use free Wi-Fi as this may not be secure and may have speed and data limits
- If on mobile data, ensure you have a strong signal.

Let the court know if you don't have access to the internet.

For further information:

If you are unable to organise connecting to VMR or Teams, or experience technical issues, contact 0800 COURTS (0800 268 787).