

● Introduction

The Electricity Commission has produced this fact sheet to let electricity users know about the high-level aspects of the process for identifying medically dependent consumers (MDCs).

The process is set out in more detail in the *Guideline on arrangements to assist medically dependent consumers* (Guideline), available at www.electricitycommission.govt.nz/opdev/retail/lowincome.

● What is a Medically Dependent Consumer?

A MDC is a person who is dependent on mains electricity for critical medical support, and loss of electricity may result in loss of life or serious harm.

Ventilators, oxygen concentrators and ventricular assistance devices are examples of critical electrical medical equipment, but non-medical equipment can also be required for critical medical support. For example, a MDC may need to use a microwave to heat fluids for renal dialysis.

● What to do if you or a member of your household is medically dependent

If you think that anybody living in your household – such as you, the person that pays the electricity bill, a child or any other person that normally lives at the property – is medically dependent, please let your electricity retailer know as soon as possible.

● How is a Medically Dependent Consumer identified?

When a person is prescribed or supplied critical electrical medical equipment (such as a ventilator), he or she will be provided with a Notice of Potential Medically Dependent Consumer Status (Notice of Potential MDC Status) by their District Health Board (DHB), private hospital or General Practitioner (GP).

The Notice of Potential MDC Status confirms that the person is potentially a MDC, as defined in the Electricity Commission's Guideline.

● What is a Notice of Potential MDC Status?

The Notice of Potential MDC Status is a form that is filled in by you and your DHB, private hospital or GP. When the form is given to your retailer, it allows them to be confident about your MDC status.

● What to do once you have a Notice of Potential MDC Status

- Make sure you, or the person who pays the electricity bill, immediately notifies your electricity retailer that you have a Notice of Potential MDC Status. This can be done by telephone.
- Provide your Notice of Potential MDC Status to your electricity retailer (e.g. by post). Some electricity retailers may be happy to receive a copy; others may want to see the original.
- If you change electricity retailer you will need to let your new electricity retailer know of your status. You may be asked to send them your Notice of Potential MDC Status – so it's a good idea to keep it somewhere safe. You will not need to get a new notice each time you change electricity retailer.

● Verification of your MDC status

From time to time your retailer may ask you to provide suitable evidence that your MDC status is still the same, for example, a letter from your GP that confirms your Notice of Potential MDC Status is still valid. Your retailer should reimburse you for the reasonable costs incurred in obtaining suitable evidence, if your MDC status is confirmed.

The Electricity Commission recommends that your retailer asks for evidence of your MDC status no more than once a year, but they may do so more often if you get into arrears with your electricity bill.

● Payment difficulties

If you do get into payment difficulties, your electricity retailer should discuss payment alternatives with you, such as shorter billing cycles, smoothed payments, prepayment meters, and redirection of income. Advice and assistance is also available from budgeting organisations, such as the New Zealand Federation of Budgeting Services, and other social agencies.

Your electricity retailer may wish to refer you to Work and Income to see if you are eligible for income support. To refer you, your electricity retailer will need to have your permission, and have no reason to believe you would not be eligible for assistance. Work and Income will ensure that you receive all the financial assistance that is available to you.

● Alternate contact

You may also provide the name and contact details of one or more 'alternate contacts' who have agreed to assist you if a payment issue is pending. They may help by liaising between you and your electricity retailer to ensure you fully understand the situation, or, where agreed, by providing financial assistance. The alternate contact could be a family member, friend, or a social agency.

● Electricity Outages

Temporary electricity outages do occur from time to time.

MDCs need to take responsibility for ensuring that they have an emergency response plan in place for their medical care when electricity isn't available.

Plans can range from ensuring that a stand-by battery is always fully charged, to relocating to a friend's or family member's premises with electricity or, in very serious circumstances, calling an ambulance to be taken to hospital.