

06 December 2021

Tēnā koutou katoa

Renewed focus on delivering Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccinations as we prepare for the potential re-opening of our borders in 2022

I'd like to acknowledge the great mahi you and your members have been doing in the complex and constantly changing COVID-19 environment. These are challenging times and I thank you for your ongoing commitment to our work in protecting New Zealanders.

I'd also like to give you an update on our internal structure here at the Ministry. On 1 November the Immunisation team integrated with the COVID-19 Vaccination and Immunisation Programme team, to form the National Immunisation Programme. Together this newly formed programme will be responsible for delivering all immunisations to Aotearoa New Zealand's population.

As we approach the end of the year, this newly formed team is focused on getting our population on track with the National Immunisation Schedule, with a particular focus on MMR vaccinations across age groups as New Zealand prepares to reconnect with the world in 2022.

Measles is one of the most infectious communicable diseases (R_0 value 12-18) and the on-going public health risk of measles to New Zealand will be very high when borders re-open. Any future outbreak may disproportionately impact our more vulnerable populations, in particular Māori and Pacific peoples who have lower MMR coverage rates.

On September 24, we shared updated guidance on concomitant administration of the Pfizer COVID-19 and other vaccines. This enables administration of all vaccinations (other than the Zostavax (shingles) vaccine) before, after or at the same time as the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. This provides an opportunity to increase MMR vaccine uptake by offering both vaccinations at the same time, where possible.

We see this as a three-phase approach:

- **Phase 1 – restart and refocus** from now until 31 December - Support an immediate restart through existing service providers to deliver MMR vaccinations (eg, Primary Care, Hauora Providers, Pacific Providers, Pharmacy and the DHB led measles campaign) and support provider-led concomitant administration opportunities with COVID-19 vaccination where possible.
- **Phase 2: Integrate and strengthen service delivery** from now through until 31 March 2022 and beyond – build on phase one to strengthen MMR vaccination delivery through integration with the COVID-19 immunisation programme.
- **Phase 3 – ongoing and sustainable** going forward, MMR vaccination is embedded as part of an equitable and sustainable National Immunisation Programme.

I ask that you support your members to prioritise measles immunisation wherever possible and offer MMR vaccines alongside the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. We also ask that you support them to make every effort to ensure that children overdue for their MMR immunisation – and any other childhood immunisations – are caught up as soon as possible, if relevant to your professional body.

The Ministry is currently reviewing additional funding options for this work, including a temporary increase in the vaccination payment, and will communicate this shortly.

All COVID-19 vaccinations need to be recorded in the COVID-19 Immunisation Register (CIR) and all other vaccinations in the National Immunisation Register (NIR) or Immunise Now. Work is underway to develop a National Immunisation Solution (NIS), that will support the recording of all vaccinations in a single new system, building on the successful CIR.

In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact Kath Blair, Manager, Immunisation at kath.blair@health.govt.nz.

Once again, thank you for all your work to support these important immunisation programmes.

Ngā mihi

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ashley Bloomfield', written in a cursive style.

Dr Ashley Bloomfield
Te Tumu Whakarae mō te Hauora
Director General of Health