

8 November 2021

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Re: OIA request – Immunisation rates for Māori and Pacific children

Thank you for your Official Information Act request received as a partial transfer from the Ministry of Health on 30 September seeking information from Auckland and Waitematā District Health Boards (DHBs) about immunisations for Māori and Pacific children.

The Ministry transferred the following questions to us:

2. Analysis or advice created in 2021 that examines possible reasons for a decline in vaccination rates among Māori and/or Pacific children.
3. Analysis or advice created in 2021 that examines vaccine hesitancy, including in relation to the Covid-19 vaccines.
4. High-level correspondence in 2021 with senior executives from other DHBs in relation to increasing childhood immunisations or addressing the decline in vaccination of Māori and/or Pacific children, including the planning of a hui on the subject.
6. Data showing the number of staff involved in childhood vaccinations for each month in 2021.
7. Data showing the number of staff who were moved from childhood vaccinations to the Covid-19 response at any time in 2021.
8. Details of any recovery or action plan created in 2021 to improve the rates of childhood immunisations and reduce decline rates for Māori and/or Pacific children.
9. Advice created in 2021 on the establishment of a merged Auckland region immunisation operations group.

Before responding to your specific questions, it may be useful to provide some context.

The falling immunisation coverage and widening equity gap is of concern both locally, nationally and internationally. Both the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF have indicated COVID-19 has created a disruption to the delivery and uptake of immunisation worldwide. The resulting drop in immunisation coverage increases the likelihood of outbreaks of vaccine preventable diseases.

When New Zealand's borders re-open, there will be an ongoing risk of measles outbreaks occurring due to the under-vaccinated cohort and both Waitematā and Auckland DHBs are taking immediate action.

We have developed a recovery plan in consultation with the Māori and Pacific Health Gains teams and primary health organisations (PHOs) on strategies to improve immunisation and reduce decline rates for Māori and Pacific. One possible contributing factor raised by PHO colleagues is the workforce pressures due to competing demands of lockdowns and the rollout of COVID-19 vaccination programmes.

Coverage has fallen during each lockdown, with some recovery seen when we have moved into Alert Level 1. However, the drop in coverage is more sustained for tamariki Māori. Review of other DHBs nationally reflects a consistent increase in Māori decline rates.

Both Waitematā and Auckland DHBs actively championed a national campaign on the basis of the clinical risk associated with the under-vaccinated population, most recently during the 2019 measles outbreak. We have requested assistance from the Ministry of Health at a national level to promote childhood immunisation.

In response to your request, we can provide the following information:

2. Analysis or advice created in 2021 that examines possible reasons for a decline in vaccination rates among Māori and/or Pacific children.

Vaccination rates for Māori and Pacific children are regularly monitored through a data extract of the National Immunisation Register (NIR) received weekly from the Ministry of Health.

Updated 2021 advice about possible reasons for declining vaccination rates among Māori and Pacific was created from feedback received from the primary care sector, including at Māori tamariki case reviews (in particular from our Well Child Tamariki Ora providers), immunisation operations group meetings (including lead maternity carer (LMC) representation) and other conversations undertaken by the DHB's Planning, Funding and Outcomes (PFO) division with PHO teams and our Outreach Immunisation Service (OIS) provider.

We encourage our OIS and NIR teams to record reasons for whānau declining or expressing hesitancy about immunisation on the National Immunisation Register, which provides insights into the reasons for any decline in immunisation rates.

A summary of the analysis and advice is presented and discussed at the DHBs' Community and Public Health Advisory Committee (CPHAC) meetings. Minutes can be found on our websites as follows:

Auckland DHB: <https://www.adhb.health.nz/about-us/governance-and-leadership/agendas-and-minutes/>

Waitematā DHB: <https://www.waitematadhb.govt.nz/about-us/leadership/committee-meetings/>

Vaccination rates are also reported quarterly to the Ministry of Health and are published on the Ministry's website at:

<https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/preventative-health-wellness/immunisation/immunisation-coverage/national-and-dhb-immunisation-data>

3. Analysis or advice created in 2021 that examines vaccine hesitancy, including in relation to the COVID-19 vaccines.

Vaccine hesitancy in relation to COVID-19 vaccines has not been investigated at the DHB level although, as noted above, we are aware it is having an impact.

Advice regarding hesitancy in relation to general childhood vaccines in the pandemic setting has been provided to the DHBs' Boards via the CPHAC reporting, as set out above in response to question 2. Sector feedback on the perceived contributing factors is provided below in our responses to question 5 and 8.

4. High-level correspondence in 2021 with senior executives from other DHBs in relation to increasing childhood immunisations or addressing the decline in vaccination of Māori and/or Pacific children, including the planning of a hui on the subject.

A Northern Region DHB immunisation working group (Auckland, Waitematā, Counties Manukau and Northland) explored factors contributing to reduced immunisation coverage, particularly for tamariki Māori. A draft report was presented to the Northern Region Child Health Steering Group on 6 September 2021.

The Child Health Steering Group gave feedback, which was incorporated into the final report from the Immunisation Working Group, which was provided to the Ministry. A copy of the report is enclosed:

Attachment 1 - Immunisation of Tamariki 0-4 years in the Northern Region: Review July 2021.

The report notes that long-term systemic failure continues to cause barriers for whānau Māori accessing immunisation services in New Zealand and that a regional approach to care through a shared framework offers opportunity to remodel the current programme that is not fit-for-purpose.

6. Data showing the number of staff involved in childhood vaccinations for each month in 2021.

Auckland and Waitematā DHBs employ an Immunisation and Senior Programme Manager within the Planning, Funding and Outcomes division. A number of other staff across both DHBs are involved in work related to childhood immunisations as part of their roles. However, as this work is a component of other work undertaken within our teams, we do not keep monthly data on this.

The DHBs contract primary health organisations in our districts to deliver childhood vaccinations through the more than 250 general practices (GPs) in our districts. Data on the exact number of staff involved in childhood vaccinations across both districts is not collected. Therefore, this aspect of your request is refused under section 18(g) of the Official Information Act, as the information requested is not held by us.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review of this decision by the Ombudsman. Information about how to seek a review is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or Freephone 0800 802 602.

7. Data showing the number of staff who were moved from childhood vaccinations to the COVID-19 response at any time in 2021.

Data showing the number of staff movements and secondments is not collected. However, we estimate a very small number of staff would have been moved from childhood vaccination work to the COVID-19 response, as maintaining and improving childhood immunisations remains a priority in our region. Again, we do not hold data in relation to GP practices.

8. Details of any recovery or action plan created in 2021 to improve the rates of childhood immunisations and reduce decline rates for Māori and/or Pacific children.

Auckland and Waitematā DHBs developed an action plan to improve the childhood immunisation rate, including activities specifically focused on Māori and Pacific children. On 11 August 2021, the Ministry of Health provisionally approved the action plan for both DHBs:

Attachment 2 - Childhood Immunisation Recovery Plan July 2021.

9. Advice created in 2021 on the establishment of a merged Auckland region immunisation operations group (IOG).

Please see the attached emails. The same message was sent from Waitematā DHB and Counties Manukau DHB to various stakeholders in regards to the establishment of a merged Auckland region immunisation operations group, as follows:

Attachment 3 – Two emails RE: Proposed merge/combining of the CMDHB, ADHB, WDHB immunisation working group meetings, 28 June 2021. (Email addresses of external stakeholders have been redacted.)

I trust that the information we have been able to provide is helpful.

We support the open disclosure of information to assist community understanding of how we are delivering publicly funded healthcare. This includes the proactive publication of anonymised Official Information Act responses on our website from 10 working days after they have been released.

If you consider there are good reasons why this response should not be made publicly available, we will be happy to consider your views.

Yours sincerely



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