

COVID-19 Vaccine and Immunisation Programme Update

17 February 2021

Headlines

Reclassification of COVID-19 vaccines: COVID-19 vaccines are currently classified as prescription only, but from 16 February this will change for vaccinators who have successfully completed a training course approved by the Ministry of Health and comply with the immunisation standards of the Ministry of Health.

Eligibility for COVID-19 vaccination: COVID-19 vaccinations are publicly funded for everyone in New Zealand. This means that if you are in New Zealand, you are eligible to receive free COVID-19 vaccination regardless of your immigration or citizenship status.

Vaccine rollout: As announced by the Prime Minister recently, we expect the rollout of the first Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines for our border and managed isolation and quarantine workers (about 12,000 people) to get underway on 20 February.

Possible Adverse Events: Following administration of the first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine from Saturday 20 February you may receive calls from consumers who have received the vaccine and suspect that they may have experienced a side effect related to the vaccination.

Other vaccination programmes: COVID-19 vaccines cannot be administered within two weeks of an influenza vaccine, or four weeks of any other vaccine.

Publicity campaign to begin: Our campaign to raise awareness of the importance to get vaccinated is getting underway this weekend.

Training and Additional Workforce: Our first vaccinators and vaccination administrators have now completed training and many more will be training over the next few weeks.

COVID-19 Immunisation Register (CIR): The web-based national COVID-19 Immunisation Register (CIR) to record COVID-19 vaccinations is now operational and ready for the first vaccinations on Saturday.

Cyber security risks: Government cyber security agency, CERT NZ has been made aware of examples of COVID-19 vaccine scams overseas.

Reclassification of COVID-19 vaccines

COVID-19 vaccines are currently classified as prescription only, but from 16 February this will change. From that date, all COVID-19 vaccines can be administered without first obtaining a prescription or standing order when administered by a vaccinator who has successfully completed a training course approved by the Ministry of Health and who complies with the immunisation standards of the Ministry of Health.

This is a temporary classification (under section 106 of The Medicines Act) and will be renewed as required on a six-monthly basis. See [here](#) for the gazetted notice. If you have any queries, please contact us at COVID-19vaccine@health.govt.nz

Eligibility for COVID-19 vaccination

COVID-19 vaccinations are publicly funded for everyone in New Zealand. This means that if you are in New Zealand, you are eligible to receive free COVID-19 vaccination regardless of your immigration or citizenship status. As with COVID-19 testing, information collected as part of the vaccination process will not be used for immigration-related purposes.

Eligibility for COVID-19 vaccination is set out separately in the COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility Direction 2021, which applies in addition to the Health and Disability Services Eligibility Direction 2011. This means that anyone in New Zealand is eligible for publicly funded COVID-19 vaccination even if they would not normally be eligible for public

funded health services under the Health and Disability Services Eligibility Direction 2011. See [here](#) for the gazetted notice.

Vaccine rollout

As announced by the Prime Minister, we expect the rollout of the first Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines for our border and managed isolation and quarantine workers (about 12,000 people) to get underway on 20 February. We are working closely with District Health Boards who will be organising the administration of the vaccine, and with employers and other relevant agencies.

Once we have vaccinated border and MIQ workers, we will focus on their household, followed by other frontline health and disability sector workers. We are working with DHBs and sector groups to finalise who will be part of this group. This will be followed by other at-risk groups. We will provide you with more details on this as soon as they come to hand.

For more information on the rollout, please see the [update](#) from our colleagues at Unite Against COVID-19.

Possible Adverse Events

Following administration of the first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine from Saturday 20 February you may receive calls from consumers who have received the vaccine and suspect that they may have experienced a side effect related to the vaccination. A new reporting form for adverse events following immunisation (AEFIs) with COVID-19 vaccines is available on the Centre for Adverse Reactions Monitoring (CARM) website ([add link](#)) and is designed to make reporting of AEFIs easier. Please use this new form to report all suspected AEFIs for COVID-19 vaccines. You do not have to be certain that the vaccine caused the event in order to report.

Medsafe is actively encouraging healthcare professionals and members of the public to report suspected AEFIs for COVID-19 vaccines to:

- add to the information we already know about the safety profile of each vaccine
- act as an early warning system for the identification of previous unrecognised or rare side effects.

Medsafe and regulators across the globe are sharing emerging anonymised safety data. See the data sheets and consumer medicine information for the expected reactions for approved COVID-19 vaccines. These documents are published on the [Medsafe website](#).

Other vaccination programmes

COVID-19 vaccines cannot be administered within two weeks of an influenza vaccine, or four weeks of any other vaccine. Having a gap between two different vaccinations makes it easier to judge which vaccine may be responsible for any adverse events. This is important in the current context because COVID-19 vaccines are new.

[Advice from Ministry of Health on administering MMR and the COVID-19 vaccine to Tier 1 workers and their household contacts](#)

- There needs to be a four-week gap between receiving the MMR and COVID-19 vaccine.
- There may be an overlap between the 15-30-year olds targeted by the measles immunisation campaign and people working at the border or MIQ facilities and their household contacts who are eligible for the first roll-out of COVID-19 vaccine.
- Please screen those coming in for MMR catch-up vaccine by asking if they are eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine as part of Tier 1 roll-out.
- If someone is within four weeks of receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, priority should be given to the COVID-19 vaccine over MMR.
- Please re-book them for their MMR on completion of their two COVID-19 vaccine doses so that the opportunity to protect against measles is not lost.

Sequencing of COVID-19 and influenza vaccines

We will be developing vaccination plans with providers that take into account the current recommended spacing of at least two weeks between receiving COVID-19 and influenza vaccines, shown in the following example schedules:

Example 1

Day 1	Day 14	Day 35
Influenza	COVID-19 dose one	COVID-19 dose two

Or example 2:

Day 1	Day 21	Day 35
COVID-19 dose one	COVID-19 dose two	Influenza

This sequencing is based on a phase-three clinical trial of the Pfizer vaccine which included a protocol for administering the influenza vaccine with a two-week gap either before or after both doses of COVID-19 vaccination. The COVID-19 vaccine cannot be administered at the same time as the influenza vaccine.

Publicity campaign to begin

The first steps in our campaign to raise awareness of the importance to get vaccinated gets underway this weekend with full page ads in newspapers around the country. The campaign will focus on the safety aspect of the COVID-19 vaccines, aiming to build confidence and addressing questions and concerns that people may have. You will notice a new colour scheme to support this campaign – we will be moving to a mauve/purple while keeping the yellow to announce changes in alert levels. There will also be some social media activity and radio ads at this early stage. The full scale campaign including television ads will get underway later this year.

Training and Additional Workforce

Our first vaccinators and vaccination administrators have now completed training and many more will be training over the next few weeks. The training is provided by the Immunisation Advisory Centre. Currently, training is available only for those involved in the initial roll out of the Pfizer vaccine. Training for all other vaccinators, including those within general practice, aged residential care and the pharmacy sector, will occur from April 2021 and you will be notified about this in more detail in due course. Once training is complete, webinar support is available to vaccinators. Vaccination course training costs are fully funded by the Ministry and will be free to the vaccinator.

We have begun analysing the registrations with our COVID-19 Surge Workforce database. We do need more vaccinators – but please remember this database is for people not currently in the health workforce but willing to be involved in the roll out, especially in the second half of the year. If you know of anyone who might be interested please ask them to register on the [**Ministry of Health website**](#).

COVID-19 Immunisation Register (CIR)

The web-based national COVID-19 Immunisation Register (CIR) to record COVID-19 vaccinations is now operational for the first vaccinations getting underway on Saturday. The CIR allows vaccinators to quickly and accurately record the event at the site of vaccination. It has been built on the same platform as other health registers (such as the Bowel Screening Programme), using tried and tested methods. Training and information will be available about using the system and will be available to all vaccinators as part of the COVID-19 vaccination training in due course.

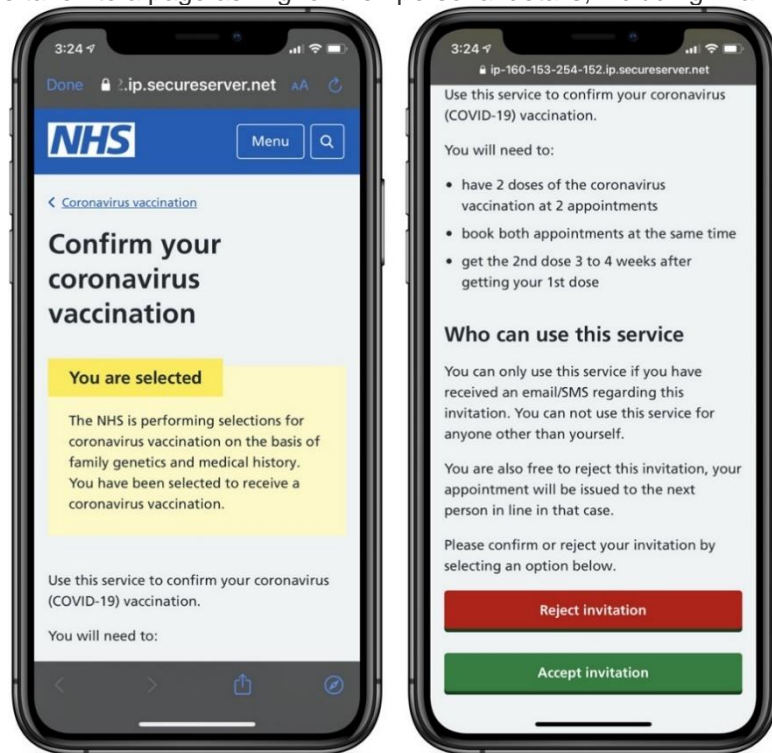
Notifications from the CIR to a person's GP is in development and should be available from mid-March. Once this is operational, notifications of those vaccinated so far will be sent to general practices.

The CIR is only for COVID-19 vaccinations and all other vaccinations should continue to be recorded on the National Immunisation Register. As part of the development process, we have and will continue to incorporate feedback from DHBs that we have been working with, to make sure the system is easy for vaccinators to use. The

register will help us manage the public health risk of COVID-19 and we will be able to look at the data to better understand vaccine safety and effectiveness.

Cyber security risks

Government cyber security agency, CERT NZ has been made aware of examples of COVID-19 vaccine scams overseas. One particularly convincing scam was purporting to be from the National Health Service (NHS) UK. The scam asked recipients to accept their coronavirus vaccination invitation. Regardless of whether they accepted or declined people would be taken to a page asking for their personal details, including financial information.



The scam was clearly from offshore as it referenced the NHS. However, it's only a matter of time before scams evolve to become New Zealand focused. It pays to remain vigilant as the vaccine rollout starts. If you're unsure if something is legitimate you can report it confidentially to the COVID-19 vaccine scam reporting government agency CERT NZ.

CERT NZ has set up a dedicated web page and email address for reporting: www.cert.govt.nz/covidscams People working in the health sector are seen as trusted sources of information that people may come to for guidance. Some important points to remember are:

- The vaccine is free and at no point will you be asked to pay for securing your place in the queue.
- Any communications about the vaccine will come from the Ministry of Health or other trusted sources. If you receive any emails out of the blue asking for financial and personal details it is most likely to be a scam.

Next steps and additional information

As more details of the rollout are confirmed, we will keep you updated of progress, including what you and your colleagues need to know and do. We know there are lots of questions so please channel these through to COVID-19vaccine@health.govt.nz. Also keep checking the [Ministry website](#) for updates.

If you would like to subscribe to this newsletter, you can do so [here](#). Thank you for your ongoing efforts to keep New Zealand communities free from COVID-19.