

11 April 2023

Tēnā koutou katoa

Thank you all for the commitment, flexibility and innovation you have shown over the last three years, and the support you've provided all New Zealanders to keep themselves and their loved ones safe through immunisation.

We are writing to you yet again appealing for your help as we see the impact of low childhood immunisation rates taking its toll on whānau and communities.

Since the beginning of the year, we have had a number of near misses and warnings. As you will know, our low and inequitable childhood immunisation rates, particularly in tamariki Māori and to a slightly lesser extent in Pasifika children, puts us at significant risk of an outbreak of one of these vaccine preventable diseases.

- **Measles:** We have had one case of measles requiring intense contact tracing of 104 close contacts. We have had measles cases on two international flights where large numbers of New Zealanders had to be contact traced. It's not "if" we get another outbreak of measles, but when.
- **Pertussis:** A few weeks ago we had two young infants die of Pertussis and unfortunately another very young baby has died very recently.
- **Meningococcal:** We've had a number of Meningococcal cases among students in Christchurch.
- **Polio:** Polio is on the rise overseas and we are seeing a resurgence in many vaccine preventable diseases.

We know you've already been precalling, recalling, texting, phoning, visiting, outreaching and having conversations with vaccine hesitant parents. We also know that post-Covid, we have high levels of complacency and confusion amongst the public contributing to a lower level of confidence in the safety and effectiveness of vaccinations.

Working together we can make a difference:

- **Information:** We are launching an extensive communication campaign from mid-April and a new website (immunise.health.nz) with excellent supportive material for parents and whānau is now live. It also has a useful interactive tool to create a schedule of dates when each vaccination event is due.
- **Māori and Pasifika:** We know that for Māori and Pasifika we also need to rethink how we are delivering childhood vaccination and will continue to support community events, outreach and a holistic approach to vaccination, which we know were successful with our Covid vaccination programme.
- **Increasing access:** We are looking at how we can expand the role of Pharmacist vaccinations however want to acknowledge that majority of immunisations do and will continue to occur in general practice.
- **Digital technology:** Within the next six months we will have a new Aotearoa Immunisation register (AIR) with vastly superior functionality. It will also enable

consumers to look up their whānau immunisation status. We will be working with Primary Health Organisations and your local and regional Te Whatu Ora teams to support this roll-out.

- **Immunisation taskforce:** The Immunisation taskforce provided a report with 54 recommendations on how to equitably lift our childhood immunisation rates. The Prioritisation matrix is one component of this and we are committed to implementing all of the recommendations. The report is available publicly on the Te Whatu Ora website.
- **Immunisation funding:** We have increased the Immunisation fee for all childhood Immunisations to \$36.05 until 30 June 2023. We know this isn't what motivates you, but if we see a significant lift in our childhood Immunisation rates, we're hopeful we can make the increase permanent. Through Te Aka Whai Ora and our Te Whatu Ora Pacific team we are also investing more in Maori and Pacific providers and outreach services who often do not work on a fee for service basis.

So, thanks again for your support. We do not underestimate the challenge ahead of us nor the value that you bring to this important mahi.

Ngā mihi



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