

## Immunisation

### Introduction

The following is a position statement on immunisation prepared by Population Health for Waikato District Health Board (Waikato DHB).

### The Waikato District Health Board's position

The Waikato DHB agrees that immunisation is a successful preventative and appropriate intervention, which reduces burden and suffering and can potentially, eradicate disease<sup>i</sup>. Increasing regional immunisation rates as identified within the national health targets is important because immunisation is a key public and personal health activity.

The Waikato DHB believes that employees of the Waikato DHB should be aware of the Waikato DHB immunisation policy<sup>1</sup>, and should not propagate information that conflicts with the Waikato DHB immunisation policy. The organisation will actively seek to distribute accurate information on immunisation to the community.

The Waikato DHB will also support and encourage activities that lead to an increased number of fully immunised people within the Waikato DHB region (i.e. "opportunistic immunisation shall be offered where possible" highlighting the positive effects that integration between services can have on overall immunisation numbers).

The Waikato DHB agrees that immunisation is an effective strategy to reduce inequalities and will promote initiatives that can help raise the immunisation rates of Māori and Pacific Island children.

The Waikato DHB gives its support to both the national immunisation programme and the national immunisation register.

### International and national background

The World Health Organisation states that immunisation is one of the most successful and cost effective ways of preventing disease and improving health<sup>1</sup>. Immunisation works by utilising the natural defense mechanisms of the body - the 'immune response'. Since the immunised person's resistance has been built up against the disease, if in future they come in contact with the disease their immune system will be more resilient against disease<sup>ii</sup>. Immunisation can provide protection for the individual and the community.

In New Zealand, vaccines that are a part of the national immunisation schedule<sup>2</sup> contribute to New Zealand's National Immunisation Programme which offers free vaccinations to people from eligible groups<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> This can be obtained from <http://166.83.144.90:84/Policy/files/Policies/Admin-Clinical/Immunisation%20policy%200206.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> A list of the vaccines that are a part of the national immunisation schedule are available at : <http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/immunisation-schedule>

<sup>3</sup> Eligible groups are different for each vaccine.

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Immunisation coverage is lower for Māori and Pacific Island children than other New Zealand children. Improving immunisation rates in these groups will help prevent disease and reduce health inequalities<sup>i</sup>.

New Zealand has a computerised information system: The National Immunisation Register (NIR). The NIR holds immunisation details of New Zealand children born after birth cohort June 2005, and children immunised with the MeNZB™ vaccine and/ or Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine as part of the Meningococcal B and Human papillomavirus Immunisation programmes.

The NIR is a key tool that assists New Zealand to monitor and improve its immunisation rates, helps to ensure immunisations are given at appropriate times and enables authorised health professionals to quickly and easily find out what vaccines a child has been given (this includes children from families that are more mobile, or accessing multiple healthcare providers)<sup>iii</sup>.

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<sup>i</sup> World Health Organisation. (2009). Immunization. Retrieved June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009 from the 'World Health Organisation' website: <http://www.who.int/topics/immunization/about/en/index.html>

<sup>ii</sup> Ministry of Health. (2008). Immunisation: About immunisation. Retrieved June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009, from the 'Ministry of Health' website: <http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/immunisation-about>

<sup>iii</sup> Immunisation Advisory Centre. (2004). National immunisation register. Retrieved June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2009, from the 'Immunisation Advisory Centre' website: <http://www.immune.org.nz/?t=609>

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