

8 March 2022

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s 9(2)(a)

By email: s 9(2)(a)
Ref: H202200477

Dear s 9(2)(a)

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) on 20 January 2022 for information relating to AstraZeneca and alternative vaccines. Each part of your request has been addressed in turn below:

1) How many AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in NZ since it was approved.

As of 11:59pm 27 February 2022 there have been a total of 7,974 AstraZeneca doses administered in New Zealand.

2) What was the rationale to put in place barriers for those people who didn't want a pfizer COVID-19 vaccine by only offering AstraZeneca later on in the vaccination program and not at the start for those who didn't want a Pfizer vaccine. I understand the effectiveness of pfizer is better but why did the Ministry put in place barriers such as prescriptions, and reasons other than personal choice for people to have AstraZeneca administered to them when it is widely used overseas when I would of thought any vaccine is better than not being vaccinated at all.

The decision to make the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine the primary vaccine of the COVID-19 immunisation programme was based on timely access to a safe and effective vaccine for the eligible population.

Initial clinical trials indicated that while both vaccines prevent COVID-19 caused by SARS-CoV-2 in individuals 18 years of age and older, in general the Pfizer vaccine offered a higher level of protection than the AstraZeneca vaccine.

The timing of Medsafe's provisional consent process for COVID-19 vaccines is dependent on the sponsor company's provision of information to support the ongoing quality, safety and efficacy of the vaccines. Provisional consent for the Pfizer vaccine in New Zealand was granted on 3 February 2021 while provisional consent for the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine was granted on 22 July 2021.

Further information about the approval status of COVID-19 vaccine applications received, including the Pfizer Comirnaty COVID-19 mRNA vaccine and COVID-19 AstraZeneca vaccine, is available at: <https://www.medsafe.govt.nz/COVID-19/status-of-applications.asp>. Here you will be able to find documents including the Gazette notice, data sheet and consumer medicine information.

Offering the AstraZeneca vaccine at certain sites was a pragmatic approach in light of the high coverage of the Pfizer vaccine across the eligible population, as well as the training and cold chain requirements of offering alternative vaccinations. District Health Boards were tasked with ensuring an equitable geographic spread of sites offering the AstraZeneca vaccine, to ensure it was accessible for people who wanted to receive it.

3) Does the ministry plan to roll out other Medsafe approved vaccines such as Jassen and Novavax to the NZ public, if not why have they been approved?

New Zealand has utilised a primarily Pfizer based immunisation programme based on timely access to a safe and effective vaccine for the eligible population. New Zealand is maintaining access to alternative vaccines in our portfolio as one of the ways to manage continued uncertainty associated with the pandemic. For instance, AstraZeneca has been utilised for individuals who cannot or prefer not to have the Pfizer vaccine. However, New Zealand continues to focus on a primarily Pfizer based COVID-19 vaccine immunisation programme.

Medsafe has granted provisional consent of the Janssen Pharmaceutical vaccine, however provisional consent does not mean that the government has committed to using the vaccine in New Zealand. New Zealand has secured two million doses of the Janssen vaccine through an Advance Purchase Agreement and officials are working with Janssen to confirm vaccine delivery schedules.

As you may be aware, on 28 February 2022, Cabinet agreed on a decision to use Novavax for adults 18 years and over. The first doses are anticipated to arrive in New Zealand this month and officials are working with Novavax to confirm the delivery schedule and rollout start date. Any updates will be publicly communicated.

In the meantime, work is underway to prepare for the use of Novavax across New Zealand. This includes workforce training and ensuring logistics measures are in place to ensure that those who want to be vaccinated with the Novavax vaccine will have this option.

More information on New Zealand's purchase of COVID-19 vaccines is available at: www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccine-strategy-planning-insights/covid-19-purchasing-vaccines.

4) Is Medsafe or the MOH currently or planning to approve any other COVID-19 vaccines for NZ such as Moderna?

Medsafe has recently received an application for Moderna's vaccine, Spikevax. This is undergoing assessment. Medsafe is unable to provide a timeline for a decision on approval at this stage.

5) *What is the purpose of prescriptions for people that want AstraZeneca boosters?*

The use of the AstraZeneca vaccine should be in accordance with official recommendations. There is no requirement for a prescription to receive the AstraZeneca vaccine as a primary dose.

The use of the AstraZeneca vaccine as a booster is regarded as off-label (that is, unapproved) for that purpose, which means an authorised prescriber should be involved in the decision to administer it. The Ministry has published an AstraZeneca policy statement. The table on page 12 of this document outlines the administration requirements. The policy statement is available at: www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/covid-19-astrazeneca-vaccine-policy-statement-clinical-criteria-guidance-24dec2021-1.2.pdf.

Under section 28(3) of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by calling 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Ministry of Health website at: www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases.

Yours sincerely



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