

9 July 2020

By email: [REDACTED]
Ref: H202003599

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) on 20 May 2020 for:

"1 What information the Ministry of Health or any entity it funds makes available to medical practitioners who are responsible for providing flu vaccinations to members of the New Zealand public, about any risk factors or other harmful effects from the influenza vaccine?"

2 What if any other information is available to New Zealand medical practitioners about the risks and possible harmful effects of influenza virus for people who may be exposed to coronavirus and how those risks should be balanced bearing in mind that New Zealand was recently shutdown due to concerns about possible harm from covid-19?"

3 What information does the ministry of health require or request from medical practitioners who give patients the influenza vaccine to receive information about any harmful effects including any subsequent harm or death from coronavirus?"

4 What if any research is being done in New Zealand into the risks for people who have been exposed to the influenza vaccine and who are subsequently exposed to other respiratory viruses including the coronavirus that causes covid-19.

5 If this attached research has not yet been considered by the Ministry of Health, what steps does the Ministry now intend to take to avoid unnecessary risk of harm to New Zealanders who are most susceptible to covid-19?"

What did we learn from Tamiflu?"

Information in response to your queries is outlined below.

"1 What information the Ministry of Health or any entity it funds makes available to medical practitioners who are responsible for providing flu vaccinations to members of the New Zealand public, about any risk factors or other harmful effects from the influenza vaccine?"

Information in response to this part of your request is publicly available on the Ministry website at the following links:

- Immunisation Advisory Centre's flu kit: <https://www.influenza.org.nz/resources>

- The Immunisation Handbook includes information on who is recommended to receive an influenza vaccination: <https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/immunisation-handbook-2017>. Please note, the Handbook also details circumstances in which clinicians should not provide certain vaccinations.
- https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/immunisation-handbook-2017-2nd-edition-mar2018-v8.html#_Toc21503001
- Influenza information designed for health professionals: https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/immunisation-handbook-2017-2nd-edition-mar2018-v8.html#_Toc21503001
- Data sheets about each approved vaccine: <https://www.medsafe.govt.nz/profs/datasheet/datasheet.htm>.

"2 What if any other information is available to New Zealand medical practitioners about the risks and possible harmful effects of influenza virus for people who may be exposed to coronavirus and how those risks should be balanced bearing in mind that New Zealand was recently shutdown due to concerns about possible harm from covid-19?"

There is no specific information provided to New Zealand medical practitioners regarding this part of your request. There is a growing body of literature in the academic journals, which New Zealand practitioners can access to assist them with understanding any risks of exposures to both influenza virus and COVID-19. It is well understood that more serious illness may arise in people who are infected with both viruses, or with people who have underlying medical conditions.

"3 What information does the ministry of health require or request from medical practitioners who give patients the influenza vaccine to receive information about any harmful effects including any subsequent harm or death from coronavirus?"

Health care professionals and consumers are encouraged to report adverse events following immunisation (AEFIs) to the Centre for Adverse Reactions Monitoring (CARM), which is part of the New Zealand Pharmacovigilance Centre. Pharmaceutical companies also submit adverse event reports. For more information on this topic, please see Section 1.6 of the Immunisation Handbook at the following address: https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/immunisation-handbook-2017-2nd-edition-mar2018-v8.html#_Toc21503001.

"4 What if any research is being done in New Zealand into the risks for people who have been exposed to the influenza vaccine and who are subsequently exposed to other respiratory viruses including the coronavirus that causes covid-19."

The Ministry does not hold any information about research being done in New Zealand into the risks for people who have been exposed to the influenza vaccine and who are subsequently exposed to other respiratory viruses, and we have no grounds for believing that the information is either held by another agency subject to the Act. As such, this part of your request is refused under section 18(g) of the Act.

"5 If this attached research has not yet been considered by the Ministry of Health, what steps does the Ministry now intend to take to avoid unnecessary risk of harm to New Zealanders who are most susceptible to covid-19?"

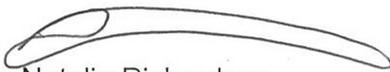
The Ministry is implementing the 'Elimination strategy for Aotearoa New Zealand' which is aimed at eliminating the COVID-19 virus. This includes border controls and a series of requirements for all New Zealanders (such as: entering New Zealand to be in 14 days of isolation, surveillance testing, encouraging good hygiene, physical distancing, environmental cleaning etc). Further information on this strategy can be found at: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-current-situation/covid-19-elimination-strategy-aotearoa-new-zealand>.

These specific strategies will help avoid unnecessary risk of harm to all New Zealanders, including those most at risk from serious infection from the COVID-19 virus.

I trust this information fulfils your request. Under section 28(3) of the Act you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Ministry of Health website.

Yours sincerely



Natalie Richardson
Director
COVID-19 Response

Released under the Official Information Act 1982