

20 October 2021

By email: [REDACTED]
Ref: H202114604

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) on 19 October 2021 regarding COVID-19. I shall respond to each part of your request in turn.

There is no requirement under the Act for agencies to create new information, provide an opinion or compile information it does not hold. However, in endeavouring to provide reasonable assistance, the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) is providing the following information.

The Unite Against COVID-19 website has a series of frequently asked questions you may find useful here: <https://covid19.govt.nz/covid-19-vaccines/get-the-facts-about-covid-19-vaccination/covid-19-vaccination-your-questions-answered/>.

- *The use of the PCR test for covid and its accuracy for identifying covid. Why it's the best test to use.*

Information regarding PCR testing and its efficacy can be found at the following links:

- <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/assessment-and-testing-covid-19/how-covid-19-testing-works>
- <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/assessment-and-testing-covid-19/covid-19-test-results-and-their-accuracy>
- <https://www.esr.cri.nz/our-services/testing/novel-coronavirus/>

Pubmed link to PCR testing studies:

- <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=covid+19+laboratory+diagnosis>

The beneficial use of facemasks

The Ministry constantly reviews international studies and evidence on mask wearing in the community setting. Our current advice aligns with that of the World Health Organization (WHO): [https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)-outbreak](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/advice-on-the-use-of-masks-in-the-community-during-home-care-and-in-healthcare-settings-in-the-context-of-the-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov)-outbreak).

As part of reviewing international evidence, the Ministry considers other advice from international organisations including Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States, Public Health England, the European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, Australian jurisdictions and a range of scientific and medical journals.

The information is collated through Ministry specialist technical advisory groups whose membership include a variety of expert professions such as infection prevention and control, public health, infectious diseases, microbiology and primary care. When reviewing evidence, we ensure it is applicable to the current New Zealand situation and can be applied in our context. Please refer to the below previously released responses regarding masks:

- www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202006250_20_oct_2020.pdf.
- www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/information-release/h202008732_15_dec_2020_0.pdf.

Some publicly available studies you may be interested in can be found here:

- https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/csu_23_july_2021_delta_-_viral_load_and_incubation_period_masks_and_hepa_filters_impact_on_aerosols.pdf.
<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/pdfs/mm7027e1-H.pdf>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/pdfs/mm7027e1-H.pdf>
- https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/csu_23_july_2021_delta_-_viral_load_and_incubation_period_masks_and_hepa_filters_impact_on_aerosols.pdf

The Ministry also regularly updates the Science News page for up to date information regarding COVID-19 and the vaccine: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-resources-and-tools/covid-19-science-news>.

- *The safety of the Pfizer vaccine – short medium and long term*
- *The possible risks of using the Pfizer vaccine*
- *The proof (research) that Pfizer is safe for pregnant women – at all or any stage in gestation.*
- *The Pfizer vaccine period of effectiveness*
- *The effectiveness of Pfizer in preventing contracting covid and reducing the harm if covid is contracted*

Preliminary results from studies carried out by researchers have shown that two doses of the Pfizer vaccine can substantially reduce transmission of the virus:

https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/science_updates_7_may_2021.pdf.

However more data is required to understand the extent of the effect that vaccination has on transmission of the Delta variant. A summary of currently available data can be found on the [US CDC science brief page](#).

The COVID-19 chapter of the Immunisation Handbook provides references to scientific studies conducted regarding COVID-19 and the vaccine: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/immunisation-handbook-2020/5-coronavirus-disease-covid-19>

Medsafe also publishes up to date information regarding the Comirnaty vaccine, including its clinical efficacy and safety: <https://www.medsafe.govt.nz/profs/PUArticles/June2021/Spotlight-on-Comirnaty-vaccine.html>. The following links may also be useful to you:

- Information regarding the approval process of the vaccine can be found here: <https://www.medsafe.govt.nz/COVID-19/vaccine-approval-process.asp>
- Information regarding the efficacy and safety of the vaccine can be found here: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/about-covid-19/covid-19-about-delta-variant>
- The Ministry also regularly updates the Science News page for up to date information regarding COVID-19 and the Vaccine: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-resources-and-tools/covid-19-science-news>.

More studies and research regarding the vaccine can be found on PubMed here: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>.

Please refer to part 4.6 of the Comirnaty datasheet for information regarding pregnancy: <https://www.medsafe.govt.nz/profs/Datasheet/c/comirnatyinj.pdf>.

Pfizer is currently running a study on pregnant woman; some details can be found here - <https://www.clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT04754594?term=NCT04754594&draw=2&rank=1>

There is limited data available about the outcome because the trial is still running. It is important to remember that all medicines contain risk and benefits, however real world evidence of the use of the vaccine in pregnant woman to date suggests that the benefits are likely to outweigh the risks. Some further information can be found here: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/covid-19-vaccination-shared-decision-making-guide-for-women-who-are-pregnant-breastfeeding-or-planning-pregnancy>

- *That Ivermectin – human variety – is dangerous to be used for those with Covid*

There is currently one medicine containing ivermectin approved for use in New Zealand. The medicine is called Stromectol, and it is approved for several clinical indications. However, these indications do not include the treatment of COVID-19. More information about Stromectol including the expected side effects of use, and the company that is registered as its sponsor can be found in the New Zealand data sheet here: <https://www.medsafe.govt.nz/profs/Datasheet/s/Stromectoltab.pdf>.

More information on the regulation of medicines for the treatment of COVID-19 can be found on our website at: <https://www.medsafe.govt.nz/COVID-19/medicine-approval-process.asp>.

WHO does not recommend the use of ivermectin to treat patients with COVID-19 outside of clinical trials <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-therapeutics-2021.2> ; and that the Ministry has no plans to promote its use for treatment of COVID-19.

- *The advice/recommendations around booster shots of Pfizer and timing of those boosters. And will one be needed every 6/12 months???*

This information is still under active consideration. Therefore, this part of your request is withheld under section 9(2)(f)(iv) to maintain the constitutional conventions that protect the confidentiality of advice tendered by Ministers and officials.

- *The process used to ensure that the Medsafe harm register captures any (if any) harm from dose one or two of the Pfizer vaccine.*

Detailed information on adverse effects following immunisation (AEFI) is published on the Medsafe website every week, including whether the AEFI occurred after the first or second dose. Scroll to the bottom of this page (www.medsafe.govt.nz/COVID-19/safety-report-30.asp) and click on the link under “Latest listing of all cases received”.

The Centre for Adverse Reactions Monitoring (CARM) at the University of Otago undertakes pharmacovigilance in New Zealand under contract to the Ministry. There is more information about its work at: <https://nzphvc.otago.ac.nz/reporting/>. Anyone – doctor, nurse, government agency, district health board or member of the public – can report an AEFI and both CARM and Medsafe continue to encourage everyone to make reports. The form to do so is available at: <https://report.vaccine.covid19.govt.nz/s/>.

- *That the vaccine is still needed by those who have recovered from contracting covid.*

Please refer to this link: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-how-vaccine-works#doses>.

This explains that after the second dose of the Comirnaty vaccine, the antibody levels were higher than those seen after the first dose, and higher than those seen after natural infection.

You may also find this information useful, please refer to this page for information: <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccine-health-advice>.

- *The treatment of those who contract covid both in those in hospital and those well enough to not require hospital treatment.*

As COVID-19 is a viral illness, there is no specific treatment. Most people who develop COVID-19 will recover fully while isolating at home or in managed isolation and quarantine and they do not require hospitalisation. Supportive treatment with fluid, rest, and antifever medication is useful in aiding recovery and can be successfully managed by a general practitioner (GP). A GP is best placed to provide care for those who are recovering from COVID-19 at home, as they are familiar with underlying conditions that may impact recovery and can manage these appropriately.

For patients who are hospitalised with serious cases of COVID-19, there is currently one Medsafe approved medication which is dexamethasone. It is an anti-inflammatory medication that is indicated in the treatment of COVID-19 for patients who require supplemental oxygen therapy. You can find the Medsafe datasheet for the approved medicine here: www.medsafe.govt.nz/profs/Datasheet/d/Dexmethsonetab.pdf .

Medical practitioners are permitted to use any medicine for a particular patient in their care at their discretion; however, unapproved medicines have not been evaluated by Medsafe for safety and efficacy. If your healthcare professional chose to prescribe other agents to treat a patient with COVID-19 it would be their responsibility to ensure that they are aware of any safety issues and that they communicate the risks and benefits to their patients. See: www.medsafe.govt.nz/COVID-19/medicine-approval-process.asp.

The Ministry is aware that therapeutics will have a role to play in managing the pandemic for people who are not vaccinated. Medicines and other ways to treat and manage patients who

have COVID-19 are being continually developed and researched. You can find more information on COVID-19 treatments on the Ministry of Health website here: www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/about-covid-19.

- *Is Pfizer consistent, in so far as quality control, that is each vial has the same content.*

Each vial contains 6 doses.

- *Why is outside (outdoors) safe and inside (indoors) not, as far as contracting covid is concerned.*

As noted above, the Ministry does not undertake research. However, several studies about this aspect of COVID-19 transmission can be found at:

- <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33585671/>
- <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33249484/>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7873670/>

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.

Nāku noa, nā



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