

Briefing

COVID-19 Vaccines - Novavax as a Booster

Date due to MO: 22 June 2022

Action required by: 28 June 2022

Security level: Commercially Sensitive

Health Report number: HR20221015

To:

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister
 Hon Grant Robertson, Minister of Finance
 Hon Andrew Little, Minister of Health
 Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall, Minister for COVID 19 Response
 Hon Nanaia Mahuta, Minister of Foreign Affairs
 Hon Aupito William Sio, Minister for Pacific Peoples
 Hon Peeni Henare, Associate Minister of Health

Contact for telephone discussion

Name	Position	Telephone
Allison Bennett	Acting Group Manager, Public Health System Policy	s 9(2)(a)
Caroline Flora	Acting Deputy Director-General, System Strategy and Policy	s 9(2)(a)

Minister's office to complete:

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Approved | <input type="checkbox"/> Decline | <input type="checkbox"/> Noted |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Needs change | <input type="checkbox"/> Seen | <input type="checkbox"/> Overtaken by events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> See Minister's Notes | <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn | |

Comment:

COVID-19 Vaccines - Novavax as a Booster

Security level: Commercially Sensitive **Date:** 22 June 2022

To: Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister
Hon Grant Robertson, Minister of Finance
Hon Andrew Little, Minister of Health
Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall, Minister for COVID 19 Response
Hon Nanaia Mahuta, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Hon Aupito William Sio, Minister for Pacific Peoples
Hon Peeni Henare, Associate Minister of Health

Purpose of report

1. This briefing seeks your agreement to expand the use of the Novavax COVID 19 vaccine in the National Immunisation Programme (NIP).

Key points

2. Novavax is currently available as part of the COVID-19 immunisation programme as a two dose primary course. Novavax booster doses are currently only available off-label via prescription.
3. Medsafe has now approved the use of the Novavax COVID-19 vaccine as either:
 - a. a homologous booster dose, at least six months following a primary course of Novavax; or
 - b. a heterologous booster dose, at least six months following a primary course of another COVID-19 vaccine.
4. Incorporating Novavax into the NIP without the need for prescription will likely improve COVID 19 vaccine access. This also aligns with current advice from the COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group (CV TAG).
5. If Vaccine Ministers agree, the NIP will implement changes to allow people to access the Novavax vaccine as a booster by 1 July 2022.

Recommendations

We recommend you:

- a) **Note** that the COVID 19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group has confirmed that the Novavax COVID 19 vaccine can be provided without the need for prescription, subject to Medsafe approval as a booster.

- b) **Note** that on 17 June 2022, Medsafe approved the use of the Novavax COVID-19 vaccine as a booster.
- c) **Agree** that the Novavax COVID 19 vaccine be incorporated into the COVID 19 **Yes/No** immunisation programme, without the need for prescription as both:
- i. a homologous booster dose, at least six months following a primary course of the Novavax COVID-19 vaccine; and
 - ii. a heterologous booster dose, at least six months following a primary course of another COVID 19 vaccine (eg, the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine).

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern

Prime Minister

...../...../.....

Hon Grant Robertson

Minister of Finance

...../...../.....



Hon Andrew Little

Minister of Health

...../...../.....

Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall

Minister for COVID-19 Response

23/6/22
...../...../.....

Hon Nanaia Mahuta

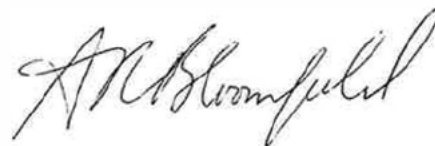
Minister of Foreign Affairs

...../...../.....

Hon Aupito William Sio

Minister for Pacific Peoples

...../...../.....



Hon Peeni Henare

Associate Minister of Health

...../...../.....

Dr Ashley Bloomfield

Director-General of Health

22/06/2022

Proactive Release

COVID-19 Vaccines - Novavax as a Booster

Background

1. Under the COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy agreed by Cabinet in May 2020, New Zealand purchased a portfolio of vaccines, including an Advance Purchase Agreement (APA) with Novavax for its COVID-19 vaccine [CAB 20-MIN 0229 refers].
2. New Zealand purchased 10.72 million doses of Novavax's protein subunit vaccine under the APA, enough for full population coverage for New Zealand and the six countries of Polynesia. On 4 February 2022, Novavax's COVID 19 vaccine was the last vaccine in the portfolio to be granted provisional consent for use by Medsafe, as a primary (two dose) course for adults aged 18 and over.
3. Following Medsafe approval, Cabinet agreed to use Novavax's vaccine in the COVID 19 Immunisation Programme to initially increase uptake of a primary course in the adult population [CAB-22-MIN-0046 refers].
4. Novavax's vaccine has been available from select vaccination centres around the country since 14 March 2022. As of 14 June 2022, 4,145 doses of Novavax have been administered. It was also previously agreed by the CV TAG that Novavax could be provided as a booster dose, off-label via prescription by an authorised prescriber.

Novavax's vaccine has now been approved as a booster

5. On 17 June 2022, Medsafe approved the use of Novavax's vaccine as a:
 - a. homologous booster dose, meaning people who have received a primary course of the Novavax vaccine can receive a dose of Novavax as a booster at least six months after their most recent dose; and
 - b. as a heterologous booster dose, meaning people who have received a primary course of another COVID 19 vaccine, such as Pfizer, can receive a dose of Novavax as a booster at least six months after their most recent dose.

Advice from the COVID 19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group

6. The CV TAG previously provided advice on Novavax as a booster dose and have since confirmed that:
 - a. the existing advice and recommendations on the use of the Novavax COVID 19 vaccine remain
 - b. there is no need for a prescription once Novavax has been authorised as a booster by Medsafe
 - c. the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine continues to be the preferred vaccine for the COVID 19 immunisation programme.
7. Removing the need for a prescription for the use of Novavax as a booster is likely to reduce barriers and improve access to vaccination against COVID-19.

There are implications for the rollout of Novavax's vaccine as a booster

Logistically, there aren't any concerns for the expansion of use

6. To date, Novavax has been made available from up to 98 vaccination sites. The NIP continues to work with DHBs to monitor demand and will increase the number of sites as required, noting that current levels of demand for a primary course limit the necessity of too many sites.
7. It is unknown what demand for Novavax's vaccine will be with its wider availability as a booster. Booster uptake rates in eligible population groups are 72 percent overall, and significantly lower in Māori and Pacific peoples (55.8 percent and 59 percent, respectively).
8. The introduction of Novavax as a booster in the programme (without the need for a prescription) may increase uptake by providing an alternative option to Pfizer's vaccine.
9. Logistically, incorporating the use of Novavax's vaccine as a booster does not create significant complexity. As demand increases, the NIP will continue to increase the number of sites, and there are additional training requirements for vaccinators who would be administering this vaccine. However, the distribution process remains the same. The NIP will also update all sector facing collateral and operational guidelines to support clinics administering Novavax as a booster.
10. Updates are being incorporated into the COVID-19 Immunisation Register (CIR) to enable Novavax's vaccine to be recorded as a booster. The booking system also requires updating, to allow people to book Novavax as a booster.

Appropriate communications will be important for maximising awareness of Novavax's vaccine

11. A communications effort to date has been focused on 'getting boosted' with Pfizer's vaccine, and successfully supported a high level of uptake and understanding of the availability of booster doses.
12. To support the extended use of Novavax's vaccine as a booster, a communications plan will be developed. This will include proactive communications to the public and sector about the availability of Novavax, in addition to updates of all relevant collateral and web content to include Novavax as a booster option. Public information campaigns will continue to focus on the importance of being vaccinated and getting a booster, if eligible.

We have sustained access to Novavax's vaccine to support its use

13. There were 252,000 doses of Novavax delivered in April 2022, with more doses expected for delivery in second half of 2022. Officials are confident there will comfortably be sufficient stock to support wider use of Novavax as a booster (without the need for a prescription). The existing interim delivery schedule for Novavax is outlined below in Table 4.

14. s 9(2)(b)(ii)

Financial Implications

15. There are no financial implications in relation to the use of Novavax's vaccine as a booster dose. All doses are committed to under the existing APA. The costs of distributing and administering these doses will be covered by the existing funding allocated to the Programme.

Equity

16. Ongoing access to COVID-19 vaccines is essential to enable maximum protection for our population, particularly in the context of Omicron and the evolving threat of COVID-19.
17. Māori and Pacific populations have been most affected by COVID-19 in the community to date, making up a disproportionate percentage of cases and hospitalisations and have a lower uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine.
18. Ensuring there are safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines which are accessible in sufficient volumes enables the programme to continue without delay and protect the most vulnerable groups at risk of harm from COVID-19. Providing a choice of vaccine is likely to reduce hesitancy of some individuals and increase overall uptake.

Next steps

19. If you agree to the recommendations in this briefing, officials will progress with the implementation of updated booking and recording systems, and ensuring that distribution of doses is aligned to support an expected increase in uptake.
20. A communications plan will be developed, which includes proactive communications to the public and sector about the availability of the Novavax vaccine, in addition to updates of all relevant collateral and web content to include Novavax as a booster option.
21. Officials are also working with CV TAG to provide updated advice shortly, on:
- a. expanding fourth dose eligibility, including consideration of:
 - i. healthcare workers
 - ii. anyone aged 50 or over
 - iii. anyone with underlying health conditions
 - iv. the latest science rationale and peak body advice
 - v. the most recent update on safety
 - b. use of Novavax as a fourth dose, alongside the Pfizer vaccine.

22. Additional advice is also being considered for the removal of the AstraZeneca vaccine from the COVID-19 immunisation programme, with Novavax now available as a complete secondary option.

ENDS.

Proactive Release