

20 January 2012

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Dear Stakeholder

### **Authorising pharmacists as vaccinators for influenza vaccine in 2012**

We are writing to you and other stakeholders to outline a national guide for pharmacists who wish to apply to give influenza immunisations within community pharmacies. This guide was developed after consultation with stakeholder organisations during 2011, will apply for 2012, and will be reviewed before 2013. An evaluation committee will be established that includes representation from pharmacy, general practice, Medical Officers of Health, and nursing to oversee the evaluation and review of these requirements.

The influenza immunisation season is likely to start in early March 2012, once sufficient vaccine supplies arrive.

The Government has set a clear policy direction for delivering health services within a more integrated model. General practice and community pharmacy are expected to work more closely together to deliver better, sooner, and more convenient services to patients. This is already happening in some places and there are examples of good collaboration between individual health professionals and the respective professional organisations. New approaches to immunisation should encourage clinical integration and collaboration between providers to increase the pool of vaccinators, improve access to immunisation, and deliver improved services. Cooperation and good communication are expected.

The Ministry's approach to the requirements for pharmacists vaccinating is in line with the requirements that apply to other health professionals seeking to become authorised vaccinators and the requirements that apply to influenza immunisations offered in workplaces. Only privately purchased influenza immunisations will be available from pharmacists.

The Medicines Regulations 1984 allow people to be authorised as vaccinators for an approved immunisation programme, which gives them the ability to give a vaccine that is a prescription medicine without needing a prescription. There are two regulatory steps:

- a Medical Officer of Health must approve the immunisation programme, and
- a Medical Officer of Health must authorise each vaccinator.

Appendices 3 and 4 of the Immunisation Handbook describe the guidelines and standards for vaccinators and for organisations offering immunisation services. A copy of the guidelines and standards are included and they can also be accessed

from the Ministry of Health's website. They already cover many of the issues raised by various stakeholders including:

- informed consent,
- safety and privacy,
- maintaining vaccine cold chain,
- links with other primary health care professionals,
- opportunistic health education at the time of immunisation, and
- communication to other health services linked to the individual.

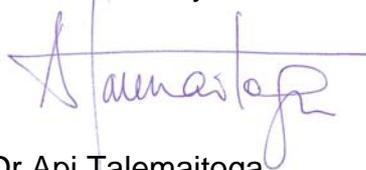
To meet the two regulatory steps, pharmacists will have to apply to become authorised vaccinators, and also seek approval to provide an influenza immunisation programme. Authorisation for vaccinators needs to be renewed every two years. Approvals for influenza immunisation programmes in pharmacies will be for 2012 only, as stakeholders agreed that the guidelines should be reviewed before 2013.

The existing standard 4.5 requires vaccinators to inform an individual's general practitioner or other primary care provider within 5 working days of giving the vaccine if the individual consents. Anyone seeking approval for an influenza immunisation programme will have to describe how this notification will happen, as part of their application. The Ministry intends to record influenza immunisations on the National Immunisation Register in the future but until then, locally agreed methods of informing primary care providers will be used.

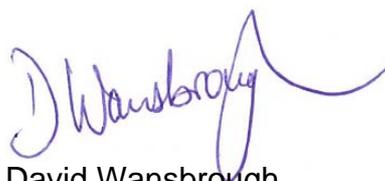
The Ministry will publish this guide and the attached answers to expected questions on its website. The Ministry does not intend to issue a media statement but expects there will be some media interest in these proposals and your organisation may be asked to comment.

The Ministry expects health professionals to use this opportunity to demonstrate an integrated primary health care service and we look forward to your organisation's support to improve integration and collaboration across primary health care.

Yours sincerely



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Enclosed:

- Pharmacy Immunisations Q+As
- Current regulations and standards for authorisation of vaccinators
- Requirements for pharmacists wanting to offer influenza immunisation in 2012