

PHARMACY IMMUNISATIONS Q+As

20 January 2012

What has changed?

Some pharmacists will be able to offer influenza immunisations before and during the winter influenza season in 2012. Most New Zealanders choose to get their influenza immunisation from their GP and there is no reason to think that would change. Many people can also get influenza vaccines through workplace immunisation schemes. Offering influenza immunisation through pharmacies provides another option.

Has this happened before?

In 2011 a small number of pharmacies in Auckland, Waikato and the Bay of Plenty were able to offer influenza immunisations towards the end of winter. This followed a successful two year trial in Waikato where a community pharmacy provided influenza immunisation to individuals who were eligible for a subsidised immunisation but wouldn't normally get one.

How many people were vaccinated by pharmacists last year?

From August 2011, 22 pharmacists were authorised as vaccinators and they administered around 400 doses of influenza vaccine over three months. For 2012, the Ministry expects 30-50 pharmacists will apply. In 2011 nearly one million doses of influenza vaccine were distributed for the whole influenza immunisation programme across the country.

Will I need a doctor's prescription?

No. Influenza vaccines are prescription medicines, but Medical Officers of Health can authorise people to give immunisations without a prescription if they are satisfied that the person can carry out emergency treatment, knows how to safely handle immunisation products and equipment, has sufficient knowledge to ensure a patient can give informed consent and has interpersonal skills. This is how most workplace and school immunisation programmes operate. Pharmacists offering immunisations will do so only with the approval of their local Medical Officer of Health.

Who else is able to vaccinate?

The same process is used to authorise vaccinators who deliver immunisations outside GP clinics including in workplaces and schools, some Outreach Immunisation Services, and some Well Child Services.

What training is required to become an authorised vaccinator?

Vaccinators need to have completed the same immunisation training that other immunisation providers complete. Their clinical expertise and experience is assessed and their authorisation must be approved by a Medical Officer of Health. The requirements are set out in the Immunisation Handbook

(<http://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/appendices-v2.pdf>).

What if someone has a reaction to a vaccine?

Temporary reactions are common, such as pain at an injection site, but serious reactions following immunisation are rare. Authorised vaccinators are trained to safely manage and treat reactions and handle vaccines correctly. People should wait for 20 minutes after receiving an immunisation so that any allergic reactions can be treated quickly by trained health professionals.

Are there any additional requirements that Pharmacist vaccinators must meet?

Pharmacists providing influenza immunisations:

- Will only provide privately purchased influenza vaccines (that have been approved by Medsafe).
- Will notify the individual's GP so they know they have been immunised. In future, this will be able to be done through the National Immunisation Register.

Does this happen in other countries?

Pharmacists in the UK and USA give vaccinations for some adult booster immunisations, travel and influenza immunisations.

What will it cost?

Immunisations given by pharmacists are not subsidised so people will need to pay the cost of the vaccine as well as the cost of visit to receive it. For people over 65 and others with certain risk factors, influenza immunisation is free from the start of March to the end of July but only GPs will be able to give subsidised immunisations.

Where can I find out more information about influenza immunisation?

More information about influenza and influenza immunisation is available at

<http://www.fightflu.co.nz/>

More detail is also provided in the Immunisation Handbook

[http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/Files/immunise-handbook/\\$file/15Influenza.pdf](http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/Files/immunise-handbook/$file/15Influenza.pdf)

BACKGROUND

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 has adopted an approach that the requirements for pharmacists should not be different from the requirements that apply to other health professionals seeking to become authorised vaccinators, or from 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 individual vaccinator.

Appendices 3 and 4 of the Immunisation Handbook describe the guidelines and standards for vaccinators and for organisations offering immunisation services

(<http://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/appendices-v2.pdf>). They cover:

- informed consent,
- safety and privacy,
- links with other primary care,
- opportunistic health promotion at the time of immunisation, and
- communication to other health services linked to the individual.

There are four significant barriers to pharmacists claiming subsidies for influenza immunisations. Influenza vaccines are explicitly excluded on the Pharmaceutical Schedule; the National Immunisation Register isn't yet set up to receive influenza vaccine notifications; DHBs have not agreed a pharmacy immunisation subsidy rate; and mechanisms for greater collaboration among GPs and other primary care providers are still being developed.

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