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**Engagement update – 19 August 2021**

Here’s an update of recent developments as we roll out the free COVID-19 vaccination. You’re welcome to share all or part of this information in a way that works for your communities.

**Vaccine programme resumes**

The COVID-19 vaccination programme resumed today (Thursday 19 August) throughout New Zealand, operating under alert level 4 conditions.

This will look a bit different - with vaccination sites operating under alert level 4 conditions our capacity will be reduced due to physical distancing requirements and other safety measures.

The reduced capacity means we may need to postpone some appointments. If we need to postpone your appointment you will be contacted by the Ministry of Health, your District Health Board or healthcare provider. If you don’t hear from us, please come to your appointment as scheduled.

The 40+ age band is open from today  – anyone in that age band can now visit [bookmyvaccine.nz](http://scanmail.trustwave.com/?c=15517&d=8NCc4WOSbOkSEuKzxz9CsuhywiUfH-nFZUO8GbicZA&u=http%3a%2f%2fbookmyvaccine%2enz) or phone the COVID Vaccine Healthline 0800 28 29 26 to book. Or check with your GP or pharmacy, as they may be taking bookings directly.

**12 –15-year-olds can be vaccinated with their family**

Young people aged 12–15 will be able to join parents or caregivers getting their vaccination, making it easier for families to get vaccinated together.

Medsafe gave provisional approval for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for 12–15-year-olds in New Zealand in June. The government has now approved the vaccine for use for 12–15-year-olds.

From Friday 20 August, as parents or guardians become eligible to book their vaccine, they can also book any 12–15-year-olds in their family or whānau.

People who already have a booking may be able to add to an existing booking or make an additional booking for their 12-15-year-old.

There are several ways young people aged 12–15 and their family or whānau can get their vaccine, including:

* at a community vaccination hub
* at a GP or community pharmacy offering the vaccine
* at other community-based sites such as faith-based locations or marae.

At this stage, the COVID-19 vaccine willnot be available to children through their school-based vaccination programme. We will keep you updated on any changes in that area.

To make or change a booking:

* go to BookMyVaccine.nz
* phone the COVID Vaccination Healthline 0800 28 29 26, (8am-8pm, 7 days a week).

If you’ve already booked directly with your GP or pharmacy, talk to them about adding family members.

**Vaccine rollout passes 2.5 million doses**

By midnight on Tuesday (17 August) we had given more than 2.5 million vaccine doses – 1,655,598 first doses and 954,415 second doses.

You’ll find regularly updated [vaccine information](https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-data-and-statistics/covid-19-vaccine-data) on our website.

**Recent update on gap between vaccine doses**

Last week, the vaccine rollout was accelerated so more people could have their first does of COVID-19 vaccine sooner. The standard gap between first and second vaccine doses is now 6 weeks or more (effective 12 August). This is an important part of New Zealand being prepared for a possible outbreak of the more infectious Delta variant of the virus.

If you have already had your two doses closer together than six-weeks, you have received great protection against COVID-19.

If you have vaccinations booked that are less than six weeks apart, you can keep your second appointment or choose to change it. For example, people with specific clinical treatment plans (such as those about to commence immunosuppressive treatment) or those at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 like border workers may be advised to have their doses with a shorter gap. The two doses must be given at least 21 days apart.

We also know people travelling overseas may require their doses sooner. This is okay too – it’s better to get two doses of the vaccine before travelling if possible.

The important thing is that you get two doses to be fully vaccinated.

To make or change a vaccine booking, go to [BookMyVaccine.nz](file:///\\WMNTFP\Group\COVID-19%20%20Vaccine%20Immunisation%20Project\7.%20Stakeholder%20engagement\Sector%20Engagement\BookMyVaccine.nz) or phone the COVID Vaccine Healthline on 0800 28 29 26. New bookings now default to six-weeks between first and second doses. If you’ve booked with your GP or pharmacy and want to change your appointment, contact them.

Information about the change is also available in alternate formats on our website:

[Easy Read](https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-resources-and-tools/covid-19-accessible-information/covid-19-easy-read-information): **Update about the gap between the COVID-19 vaccines**

[New Zealand Sign Language](https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-resources-and-tools/covid-19-accessible-information/covid-19-new-zealand-sign-language): **Change to the recommended vaccine dose gap**

[Large print and audio](https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-resources-and-tools/covid-19-accessible-information/covid-19-large-print-and-audio): **Change to recommended vaccine dose gap**

**Reconnecting New Zealanders**

The change in the recommended gap between vaccine doses was announced at the Reconnecting New Zealanders to the World forum. You can watch or read more about this forum, which explored vaccination, safe borders, safe travel and public health habits, on the [Unite against COVID-19 website](https://covid19.govt.nz/reconnecting-new-zealand-to-the-world/).

**Group 4 age bands opening sooner**

Increasingly, the Group 4 age bands are opening as more vaccination sites open (including many general practices and pharmacies). If your age band hasn’t yet opened, you can register your details on [bookymyvaccine.nz](https://bookmyvaccine.covid19.health.nz/) to get a text or email when it does open. Everyone aged 12 and over will be able to book from 1 September.

**NHI number optional when booking**

You can book your vaccine if you are in Group 1, 2 or 3 or an open age band in Group 4, you don’t need to wait for an invitation. It’s a good idea to have your national health number (called your NHI or National Health Index number) ready to make the booking process quicker, but it’s not essential to provide one. You’ll find your number on a prescription, x-ray or test result, or a letter from the hospital.

**Applying for an early vaccine**

People travelling overseas for specific reasons, to countries that are not designated quarantine-free travel zones, can apply for early access to the COVID-19 vaccine. Applicants may need to provide their reason for travelling, to ensure it meets the criteria.

You’ll find more information on the [Ministry of Health](https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-getting-vaccine/covid-19-applying-early-vaccine-travel-overseas) website.

**What’s in the vaccine?**

If you want to know what’s in the Pfizer vaccine and what’s not, there’s useful information on our website. This includes a full list of vaccine ingredients and a video about how the vaccine works. The Pfizer vaccine doesn’t contain any live, dead or deactivated viruses. There are no animal products in it either.

Have a look at our [COVID-19: How the vaccine works](https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-how-vaccine-works) web page.

A recently released video NZ Vaccine facts: what is an mRNA vaccine? also looks at the vaccine. It’s the third in a series of eight videos being released over the next few weeks.

You’ll find the [NZ Vaccine Facts](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvwEBGntcGmFcCL8_JscJK9rzeghzYqfF) series on YouTube.

**Why larger arms need a larger needle**

If you’re a larger person with larger arms, you may have been given vaccines with a longer needle than someone smaller than you.

That’s because a longer needle gives vaccinators a better chance of getting the vaccine where it needs to go. The Pfizer vaccine is an intramuscular injection, meaning the needle needs to be able to get deep into the muscle in your upper arm.

Most, but not all, vaccines are injected into muscle, as muscle tissue contains important immune cells. Injecting the vaccine into muscle tissue allows those immune cells to sound the alarm to other immune cells to get to work.

Some people are larger because they have a lot of muscle, while others have a lot of fat, but vaccinators will make a call on what size needle to use depending on the arm in front of them.

This is an edited version of an article, [Why larger arms need a larger needle for the Covid-19 vaccine](https://interactives.stuff.co.nz/2021/the-whole-truth-covid-19-vaccine/#/1202271934/why-larger-arms-need-a-larger-needle-for-the-covid-19-vaccine). It’s part of [The Whole Truth](https://interactives.stuff.co.nz/2021/the-whole-truth-covid-19-vaccine/#/) a COVID-19 fact checking series on the Stuff website written with the support of an expert advisory panel.

It is common for people to display some angst towards needles. But most people appreciate the benefits of vaccination. Having a conversation with the person and encouraging them to say why they are having the vaccination helps strengthen their commitment. IMAC has a useful[factsheet](file:///C:\Users\rbowie\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\6CYEO81I\IMAC_Needle_Phobia_Factsheet_20210809.pdf%20(immune.org.nz)) that provides recommendations around managing vaccinations of people who are fearful of needles.

**Upcoming vaccine events**

In Wellington, Autism NZ has organised four vaccine events at its Petone site, in collaboration with Capital & Coast District Health Board (CCDHB). Two successful ‘first dose’ events were held last weekend, with two ‘second dose’ events planned for September. You’ll find more information [here](https://m.facebook.com/AutismNewZealand/photos/a.169537629789454/4185612404848603/?form=MY01SV&OCID=MY01SV).

In the greater Wellington region, Capital & Coast District Health Board has 26 accessible vaccination events planned over the next three months to help make getting the COVID-19 vaccination easier and more accessible for people with a disability, impairment, or long-term health condition.

In total, CCDHB has organised 42 accessible events, with 16 already held. They offer longer appointment times, more space to move around, information in large print, Easy Read and New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL), with friendly staff available to talk to people and answer questions. Everyone 16 years and over who has a disability, impairment or long-term health condition can book to attend and have their COVID-19 vaccination. From Friday morning (20 August), as parents or guardians become eligible to book for a vaccination, they can also book in a vaccination for any 12 - 15-year olds in their whānau.

More than 130 people had their vaccine at two earlier events, held in Johnsonville in early August. The morning clinic focused on general accessibility, and was also low sensory, with the lights dimmed and sunglasses available. The afternoon clinic was tailored for the deaf community, had NZSL interpreters available and featured circular seating in the observation area (instead of rows) for easier visual communication.

Find out more, including how to book to attend and get the vaccine, [here](https://www.rph.org.nz/public-health-topics/vaccinate-greater-wellington/disability-events/).

Further north, there’s a week-long COVID-19 vaccination clinic underway in Whanganui, with the focus very much on the Pasifika community.

The Cook Islands Community Hall on Gonville’s Puriri Street is Whanganui’s latest vaccination hub.

The clinic will run all week from 10am to 5pm. Just turn up at the clinic or book an appointment by phoning 0800 28 29 26 or online at [BookMyVaccine.nz](file:///\\WMNTFP\Group\COVID-19%20%20Vaccine%20Immunisation%20Project\7.%20Stakeholder%20engagement\Disability%20and%20Older%20persons%20sector\Disability%20Engagement%20Group\bookmyvaccine.nz)

Let us know of similar events so we can share details in upcoming newsletters. Just email [rebecca.sellwood@health.govt.nz](mailto:rebecca.sellwood@health.govt.nz)

**How to spot misinformation**

COVID-19 is a hot topic at the moment, and some people may use it as an opportunity to scam people or spread inaccurate information. Protect yourself and others by knowing how to spot misinformation.

Helpful tips from CERT NZ (established by the Government to improve cyber security):

* Ask yourself where the information is coming from, and what the author wants you to believe.
* Just because an article looks good or reads well does not mean the quality of the information in it is reliable. Many sources of misinformation are well produced.
* Before sharing a story it’s important to check if it’s credible. You can do this by checking where the original story appeared, who is promoting it, and what other people are saying. For instance, do a Google search of the information or the organisation it has come from, and read what trusted reliable sources (such as academics or the mainstream media) say about it.

[Find out how to report a COVID-19 scam or misinformation](https://www.cert.govt.nz/individuals/common-threats/covid-19-vaccine-scams/report-covid-19-vaccine-scams-or-misinformation/) on the CERT NZ website.

**Getting the right information about the COVID-19 vaccine is important.**You can get accurate and trusted information at [www.covid19.govt.nz](https://covid19.govt.nz/covid-19-vaccines/), [www.health.govt.nz](https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines), and [karawhiua.nz](https://karawhiua.nz/)

Ngā mihi,

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Covid-19 Vaccine and Immunisation Programme (CVIP)

Manatū Hauora **|** Ministry of Health