

# Briefing

## Ministerial Direction: Eligibility for publicly funded COVID-19 Immunisation

**Date due to MO:** 11 February 2021      **Action required by:** 15 February 2021

**Security level:** IN CONFIDENCE      **Health Report number:** 20210174

**To:** Hon Andrew Little, Minister of Health

**Copy to:** Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall, Associate Minister of Health  
Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of COVID-19 Response

### Contact for telephone discussion

| Name                 | Position  | Telephone |
|----------------------|---|-----------|
| Dr Ashley Bloomfield | Director-General of Health                          | S9(2)(a)  |
| Maree Roberts        | Deputy Director-General, System Strategy and Policy |           |

### 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 Withdrawn |  |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:

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**Security level:** IN CONFIDENCE      **Date:** 11 February 2021

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Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of COVID-19 Response

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## Purpose of report

1. This report seeks your approval of the attached Ministerial Direction, which would enable everyone in New Zealand, regardless of immigration status, to be eligible for publicly funded COVID-19 immunisation.

## Recommendations

We recommend you:

- 1 **Note** that as directed, we have consulted with the District Health Boards (DHBs) on the draft Ministerial Direction to make everyone in New Zealand eligible for COVID-19 immunisation
- 2 **Note** that we did not receive a significant amount of feedback from DHBs, but responses were supportive
- 3 **Note** that the statutory prerequisites for making the Ministerial Direction have been met
- 4 **Approve and sign** the attached *COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility Direction 2021*, which could commence from 15 February 2021 at the earliest **Yes/No**
- 5 **Agree** that your office arranges to present a copy of the direction to the House of Representatives. **Yes/No**

Dr Ashley Bloomfield  
Director-General  
**Ministry of Health**  
Date:

Hon Andrew Little  
**Minister of Health**  
Date:

# Ministerial Direction: Eligibility for publicly funded COVID-19 Immunisation

## Cabinet has agreed in principle to expand eligibility for COVID-19 immunisation to everyone in New Zealand

2. You previously agreed in principle to expanding eligibility for COVID-19 immunisation to everyone in New Zealand, regardless of immigration status [HR20202320 refers]. Cabinet subsequently also agreed in principle to this proposal. This would, in effect, expand coverage to include most:
  - a. people on student visas
  - b. people on visitor visas
  - c. adults on temporary work visas or who are Australian citizens that will be in New Zealand for less than two years
  - d. people who are in New Zealand unlawfully.
3. The latest estimates from January 2021 suggest this could include up to approximately 270,000 people.
4. To enable this policy, we proposed that you pursue a standalone direction on COVID-19 Immunisation Eligibility under section 32 of the New Zealand Public Health and Disability Act 2000 and section 103 of the Crown Entities Act 2004. You previously agreed that we could begin consultation with DHBs on this [HR20202330 refers].

## As directed, we have consulted with DHBs on the proposed changes, and...

5. As directed, we provided the District Health Board (DHB) Chairs, Chief Executives, and General Managers of Planning and Funding with the draft Ministerial Direction for their comment. We noted in our letter to them, that the cost for the immunisation events would be met by the Ministry of Health as part of an agreed structure for various funded immunisation service models.
6. Within the time given, we received responses from Auckland DHB and Lakes DHB, who both noted their support of the proposal.
7. In addition, there are DHB representatives on the COVID-19 Immunisation Programme Steering Group, who were earlier consulted on the development of the proposal.

## We recommend that you issue the attached Ministerial Direction

8. We have **attached** for your approval the proposed Ministerial Direction, *COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility Direction 2021*, which would expand access to COVID-19 vaccination to everyone in New Zealand. Subject to your agreement, it can come into force from 15 February 2021 at the earliest.
9. The Direction is made in accordance with section 32 of the New Zealand Public Health and Disability Act and section 103 of the Crown Entities Act 2004. The statutory prerequisites for making the Direction have been met:

- a. the Direction specifies persons who are eligible to receive services funded under the New Zealand Public Health and Disability Act in relation to COVID-19 vaccination
  - b. the DHBs have been consulted on the Direction
  - c. it does not direct DHBs in relation to any statutorily independent function.
10. We have included a clause that the Direction would expire on 31 December 2021, which is when current funding for the COVID-19 Immunisation Programme ends. We will review the eligibility policy later this year and provide advice to you in due course on whether to extend or amend the Direction.
11. As previously advised, we would also provide advice on the eligibility policy at the same time as any border changes that are expected to significantly increase visitor numbers [CAB-21-MIN-001 refers].

## Equity

12. As was seen with the 2019 Measles Outbreak, community transmission of infectious diseases can occur among groups who are not normally eligible for immunisation, potentially putting the individuals, their whānau and their community at risk.
13. Ensuring that everyone can access COVID-19 immunisation for free will help us to provide more equitable protection from the risk of COVID-19 for everyone in New Zealand. As a result, it will help us to uphold the COVID-19 Immunisation Strategy principles of equity and equal concern. It also supports our global responsibility to help end the pandemic.
14. Expanding eligibility will be particularly important for those who would otherwise not be eligible that are working in potentially high-risk roles or otherwise at risk to COVID-19.

## Next steps

15. Subject to your agreement and as per the requirements in the Crown Entities Act 2004, the following steps must be completed as soon as practicable:
- a. We will publish the Ministerial Direction in the *Gazette*.
  - b. We will update communications collateral to explicitly state who is eligible for COVID-19 vaccines.
  - c. Your office will need to arrange to present a copy of the direction to the House of Representatives.

ENDS.