

8 June 2021

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Ross Francis

By email: [fyi-request-15415-2c249xxx@xxxxxxxxxxx.org.nz](mailto:fyi-request-15415-2c249xxx@xxxxxxxxxxx.org.nz)  
Ref: H202105506

Dear Ross Francis

### **Response to your request for official information**

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) on 10 May 2021 for COVID-19 vaccine information. Information in response to each part of your request is as follows.

- 1. Other than completing an online education course, what information is supplied to those tasked with administering the COVID-19 vaccine?*
- 2. What new information, if any, has been added to the online education course for May 2021?*

This information is publicly available: [www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines-archived/covid-19-vaccine-information-health-professionals](http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines-archived/covid-19-vaccine-information-health-professionals)

- 3. The (April 2021) online education course states that "a slightly increased risk of a severe allergic response in individuals who have had a previous anaphylaxis-type reaction needs to be balanced against the risk of SARS-CoV-2 exposure and severe COVID-19". Unfortunately, the online course doesn't specify the risk of the latter. In May 2021, what is the risk of someone in New Zealand, aged under 50, in excellent health and with no pre-existing conditions, being exposed to COVID-19?*

The risk of someone being exposed to COVID-19 in New Zealand, aged under 50 years, in excellent health and with no pre-existing conditions, is low risk.

- 4. In May 2021, what is the risk of someone in New Zealand, aged under 50, in excellent health and with no pre-existing conditions, dying from COVID-19?*

The risk of someone dying from COVID-19 in New Zealand, aged under 50 years, in excellent health and with no pre-existing conditions, is very low risk.

- 5. Vaccinators are informed of the following: "To date, clinical studies have not investigated the mRNA vaccine in pregnancy...It is recommended to delay vaccination until after delivery". In New Zealand, how many pregnant women, despite being advised to delay vaccination, have received one or two doses of the Pfizer vaccine?*

From the data the Ministry holds, there are 56 women that have a noted in their records the mention of the words "pregnant" or "pregnancy" (plan to get pregnant, possibly pregnant and pregnant). All these women delayed or rescheduled their vaccination. Of this group nine of the women have since received the vaccination. In all cases this was later than the mention

of pregnancy and therefore implies (but cannot be verified with the data available) that pregnancy was no longer a factor at the time of vaccination.

The Immunisation Handbook 2020 outlines the recommendations for pregnant women and the COVID-19 vaccine: [www.health.govt.nz/our-work/immunisation-handbook-2020/5-coronavirus-disease-covid-19#23-6](http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/immunisation-handbook-2020/5-coronavirus-disease-covid-19#23-6).

*6. The online course states: "A few groups of people should not get the vaccine, and some others should consult with their doctor or follow special procedures". Which groups should not get the vaccine, and who should consult with their doctor or follow special procedures? What special procedures should be followed?*

Advice for specific groups and health conditions is publicly available at: [www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines-archived/covid-19-vaccine-advice-specific-groups-and-health-conditions](http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines-archived/covid-19-vaccine-advice-specific-groups-and-health-conditions).

*7. The online course states: "The safety and efficacy of the mRNA-CV in children and young adults aged less than 16 years of age have not yet been established". Has anyone under 16 received one or two doses of the Pfizer vaccine in New Zealand?*

Vaccination data is publicly available and is updated regularly: [www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-data-and-statistics/covid-19-vaccine-data#age](http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-data-and-statistics/covid-19-vaccine-data#age)

*8. To date, what have been the most serious adverse reactions to the Pfizer vaccine, in New Zealand and overseas?*

The side effects, reported adverse events and allergic reactions to the Pfizer vaccine in New Zealand are publicly available at: [www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccine-safety-and-approval/covid-19-vaccine-side-effects-and-reactions](http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccine-safety-and-approval/covid-19-vaccine-side-effects-and-reactions). The Ministry does not hold information on serious adverse reactions to the Pfizer vaccine overseas therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act.

*9. How many people have declined to be vaccinated because the vaccinator was unable to answer their question(s) about the vaccine?*

*10. The online course states: "Health professionals who are ambivalent about COVID-19 vaccination should endeavour to resolve their concerns before being involved in the community rollout". How many health professionals have expressed concerns about the COVID-19 vaccine or vaccination? How many health professionals have declined to be involved in the community rollout and how many have chosen not to be vaccinated against COVID-19?*

The Ministry does not hold this information and there are no grounds for believing this information is held by another agency subject to the Act. These parts of your request are therefore refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act.

*11. The online course states: "A trusted health professional recommendation is the key to vaccine acceptance". Is a trusted health professional recommendation, with respect to vaccine acceptance, more important than informed consent?*

*12. Vaccinators are told: "Some [people] may be ambivalent or hesitant about the COVID-19 vaccine...If the person is clearly against vaccination there is usually little benefit in time spent arguing." If someone is hesitant about getting the vaccine, could they be asked to leave (without being vaccinated) because the vaccinator is uncomfortable answering their questions? How many people have declined to be*

vaccinated because they did not have the information necessary to make an informed decision?

13. The online course states: "We would expect COVID-19 vaccines to provide protection for longer than 2 months, although exactly how long for, remains unknown at this stage". What action, if any, does the Health Ministry intend to take in the event that the vaccine offers little or no long-term protection?

While the Act enables people to request official information from the Ministry, there is no obligation to create information in order to respond to requests, nor is the Ministry obliged to provide an opinion. For this reason, these parts of your request are refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act, as the information is not held by the Ministry or another agency subject to the Act.

14. A recent report in *The Lancet* concluded:

"Publicly available data from the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccine trials suggest an imbalance in the incidence of Bell's palsy following vaccination compared with the placebo arm of each trial. Combining data from both trials, among nearly 40000 vaccine arm participants, there were seven Bell's palsy cases compared with one Bell's palsy case among placebo arm participants...the observed incidence of Bell's palsy in the vaccine arms is between 3-5-times and 7-times higher than would be expected in the general population."

<https://scanmail.trustwave.com/?c=15517&d=zcCY4AOKNHKJWTTsCKoJc-OCSzl-mLcDTVEYLX59Hq&u=https%3a%2f%2fwww%2ethelancet%2ecom%2fjournals%2flainf%2farticle%2fPIIS1473-3099%2821%2900076-1%2ffulltext>

Are intended recipients of the vaccine in New Zealand routinely informed of possible side-effects or adverse reactions, or do intended recipients have to ask for such information? What information, if any, is being provided to recipients about the observed incidence of Bell's palsy in vaccine trials?

Like all medicines, the COVID-19 vaccine may cause side effects in some people. Most side effects are mild and don't last long. All individuals receiving the vaccine are informed of the potential side effects at the time of their vaccination. There is also publicly available information regarding the potential side effects on the Ministry website:

[www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccine-safety-and-approval/covid-19-vaccine-side-effects-and-reactions](http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccine-safety-and-approval/covid-19-vaccine-side-effects-and-reactions).

Under section 28(3) of the Act you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: [info@ombudsman.parliament.nz](mailto:info@ombudsman.parliament.nz) or by calling 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Ministry website at: [www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests](http://www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests).

Yours sincerely



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**COVID-19 Vaccine and Immunisation Programme**