

21 June 2021

133 Molesworth
Street
PO Box 5013
Wellington 6140
New Zealand
T+64 4 496 2000

Darren-Edward

By email: fyi-request-15690-95fd1a7b@requests.fyi.org.nz
Ref: H202106871

Dear Darren-Edward

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your two requests under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) on 6 June 2021 for information regarding the COVID-19 vaccine and blood donations.

The Ministry has decided to consolidate your two requests into a single response. Information in response to each part of your request has been provided by the New Zealand Blood Service (NZBS).

“Confirmation regarding people that have received any experimental vaccine; or medical treatment with any medicines relating to the treatment of COVID19; advise if these people have been restricted from giving blood donations; provide date of when restrictions where introduced.”

“Confirmation of restrictions of anyone to donate blood once they have received any experimental vaccine for COVID19.”

The Pfizer vaccine has been approved by Medsafe for use in New Zealand under section 23 of the Medicines Act 1981. NZBS advises that like other non-live vaccines, it asks donors to delay donation until any side effects from the vaccine have been resolved. If a donor has had a vaccine that has not been approved by Medsafe for use in New Zealand, NZBS has a standard 28 day stand down. This deferral has been in place since 16 February 2021. There is more information about this on the NZBS website at: www.nzblood.co.nz/knowledge-hub/covid-19/covid-19-vaccines/.

NZBS advises that it is not aware of any trials of experimental drugs or vaccines being undertaken in New Zealand. If a donor is enrolled in a clinical drug trial using a drug not accepted by Medsafe, they are asked to delay donation for three months.

“Confirmation regarding people that have received any experimental vaccine; or medical treatment with any medicines relating to COVID19; and have donated blood.”

“Number of people with experimental vaccine that have donated blood.”

“Number of people that have received other such medical treatment that have donated blood.”

“Confirmation of people that have received any experimental vaccine for COVID19 that have donated blood.”

NZBS advises that it does not collate data on every vaccine or medication that a donor may have taken, unless it falls within one of the NZBS' deferral criteria to delay donation. Nor has it deferred any donors for any COVID-19 vaccination that has not been approved for use in

New Zealand. For this reason, these parts of your request are refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act, as it is not held by the Ministry or another agency subject to the Act.

“Request for any and all reports into the safety of blood donors that give blood after having any medicines or vaccines related to the COVID19 Virus.”

“Request for any and all reports relating to the potential impact of anyone that is not yet received the experimental vaccine, and they receive blood from a donor that has had the experimental vaccines or medicines approved for the treatment of the COVID19 Virus.”

“Require any and reports regarding the safety of anyone not yet vaccinated that receives a blood donation from anyone already vaccinated and the potential impact of anyone receiving blood from someone already vaccinated for COVID19.”

NZBS advises that it is not aware of any reports in the scientific and clinical literature that suggest any risk to blood recipients following the administration of non-live vaccines against COVID-19, such as the Pfizer vaccine. The major blood provider organisations worldwide have not identified any blood safety risks related to the most used non-live vaccines. 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.

NZBS applies deferrals for any donors that have been treated for COVID-19 (or those at risk through travel or contact with a person with suspected infection). NZBS has asked 260 donors to delay donation for 28 days following COVID-19 infection. NZBS does not collate information about any medications these individuals were treated with at the time of their infection.

“Confirmation of people that have received any blood donation from anyone that has had experimental vaccine for COVID19; their current condition if known, if not known why is this not being observed by the Ministry of Health as a potential medical situation.”

NZBS advises that it only routinely collates data regarding any recent medications or vaccinations that lead to a donor being asked to delay donation. In the case of COVID-19 vaccines, this would apply to donors receiving any vaccine not accepted for use in New Zealand, within 28 days before donation. This is in line with NZBS processes for all other vaccines and medications.

The safety of New Zealand’s blood and blood product supply is always a priority and NZBS defer donors when there is evidence that a drug or condition may negatively affect the quality of the blood transfused.

NZBS has advised the Ministry that it does not document details of every medication or vaccination ever received by donors because this information would be highly complex and would not help NZBS to understand the safety of the donor to donate on any specific day. NZBS processes focus on whether a donor may be at risk of any infection that might be passed to recipients, whether any medications may cause blood transfusions to work less effectively or are known to be unsafe for recipients or might impact the tests that we use to exclude infections. NZBS processes also help to avoid donation for those potential donors whose health may be adversely affected by giving blood (e.g., low iron stores or chronic ill health).

“Require information regarding how long the vaccine lives in the body of anyone vaccinated and how long it may take before it would be safe for anyone unvaccinated to receive safely from someone that has been vaccinated for COVID19.”

The Pfizer vaccine in use is not a live virus and cannot cause infection or live in the body. The vaccine has an exceptionally good safety profile and has been well studied internationally. There is more information at: www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccine-safety-and-approval. You may also want to review the PubMed website of the National Library of Medicine, which is part of the National Institutes of Health. PubMed: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33301246/>.

I trust this information fulfils your request. 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 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.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Nick Allan', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Nick Allan
Manager OIA Services
Office of the Director-General