

# Hon Chris Hipkins

MP for Remutaka

Minister for COVID-19 Response

Minister of Education

Minister for the Public Service

Leader of the House



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ASE

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Ref. CH204175

Dear ASE

Thank you for your correspondence of 3 December 2021 about the safety of the Pfizer COVID-19 (Comirnaty) vaccine.

You can find accurate and timely information about COVID-19 and vaccines on the Ministry of Health website at [www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines](http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines). Additionally, the Immunisation Advisory Centre (IMAC) has an in-depth FAQ on COVID-19 vaccines, which is available at [www.covid.immune.org.nz/faq](http://www.covid.immune.org.nz/faq)

Researchers have studied and worked with mRNA vaccines for decades. This includes studies for vaccines against flu, Zika, rabies and cytomegalovirus (CMV). Scientists have also researched past coronavirus infections (SARS and MERS). Once scientists identified the coronavirus that causes COVID-19, they could quickly adapt the technology for COVID-19. Although it is relatively new technology, please be assured that this vaccine has gone through all the usual safety checks and regulations. This includes international clinical trials to help demonstrate the efficacy and safety of the vaccine. The Pfizer vaccine is being used worldwide and monitored continually for effectiveness and safety.

Clinical trials could recruit large numbers of volunteers faster than usual because of the worldwide interest and concern about COVID-19. Some clinical trials could also be done simultaneously instead of one after the other, meaning they could quickly determine whether the vaccine was effective in a short amount of time – under normal circumstances, this could take many months or even years. The vaccines have been developed very quickly but without shortcuts in the necessary processes or compromising safety.

All medicines and vaccines, including the Pfizer vaccine, are assessed according to the same requirements through a detailed approval process. Medsafe assesses medicine and vaccine applications against internationally established criteria. These criteria include guidelines published by the EMA (European authority), the FDA (USA), Health Canada, the TGA (Australia) and the International Conference on Harmonisation (ICH). The stringent requirements vaccines must meet to be approved remain in place under emergency circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Medsafe streamlines the assessment process without compromising the integrity of the process or the vaccine's safety. You can find more information about the vaccine evaluation and the approval process at [www.medsafe.govt.nz/COVID-19/vaccine-approval-process.asp](http://www.medsafe.govt.nz/COVID-19/vaccine-approval-process.asp).

It is important to note that the vaccine has been shown to be 95% effective against symptomatic COVID-19, seven days after receiving two doses. The risk of getting infected is reduced and, if you do get COVID-19, it means you could have no symptoms or may have fewer, milder symptoms and may recover faster. You are also less likely to transmit the virus to others. More information on how the Pfizer vaccine protects you can be found at

[www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccine-effectiveness-and-protection](http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccine-effectiveness-and-protection).

Like all medicines, the Pfizer vaccine may cause side effects in some people. Our experience in New Zealand, and internationally, shows that the side effects are generally mild and short-lasting. Please be assured that Medsafe continues to monitor the use of the Pfizer vaccine in New Zealand, including analysing reports of potential side effects. Regularly updated summaries of any adverse effects from the vaccine can be found at [www.medsafe.govt.nz/COVID-19/vaccine-report-overview.asp](http://www.medsafe.govt.nz/COVID-19/vaccine-report-overview.asp)

I also note your concern for human rights violations regarding the Pfizer vaccine. I can assure you that every policy the Government has announced regarding COVID-19 measures has been considered in the context of the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990. Based on the public health advice provided, the Government's view is that the measures taken, including vaccine mandates, are proportionate, reasonable, and justified, given the risk to the country. Please be assured that these measures have not been introduced to curtail New Zealander's freedoms or rights but rather to protect vulnerable people from being exposed to COVID-19 and potentially losing their lives.

Finally, I note your concern regarding the privacy and confidentiality of medical information. You may be assured to know that it is an offence for a business to collect or sell the details from *My Vaccine Pass* and use them for purposes outside the COVID-19 response. These measures do not undermine New Zealanders' right to be fully informed, and all individuals have the right to remain unvaccinated for whatever reasons they choose. That said, vaccination remains our strongest and most effective tool to protect New Zealanders against infection and disease.

Thank you again for writing.

Yours sincerely



**Chris Hipkins**  
**Minister for COVID-19 Response**