

S Robinson
fyi-request-19418-ce31c6b4@requests.fyi.org.nz

Tēnā koe S,

Your Official Information Act request, reference: H202208095

Thank you for your email of 18 June 2022 requesting information relating to a vaccine advertisement. Please note that on 1 July 2022, the National Immunisation Programme transferred from the Ministry of Health to Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act). You requested the following:

“An MoH advertisement in a local newspaper states -

“Protect them for life. Immunise”

“COVID-19 vaccinations are available for tamariki aged 5-11.”

Is the MoH claiming that COVID-19 vaccinations protect for life?

Along with my previous request could you also please provide the evidence to allow this claim to be made.”

In the advertisement that you are referring to, Te Whatu Ora is promoting immunisation as a lifelong journey. Immunisation is the most effective way to actively protect a child from preventable diseases throughout their life. The tagline, “Protect them for life. Immunise.” refers to the immunisation programme as a whole-of-life programme. It was designed to encourage parents and caregivers to take steps to protect the children in their care, to prepare them for life. The campaign was developed to cover the concept of childhood immunisations and was not specific to a single vaccine. Rather, it provides an overarching message which could be used for different vaccinations. For example, measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR), polio, COVID-19, human papillomavirus (HPV) and whooping cough.

The tagline, “Protect them for life.” was developed to have a dual meaning. The word ‘life’ can be the time between being born and death, or the experience of being alive. Protection from infectious diseases includes being less symptomatic from the disease, through to preventing severe illness or even death. The advertisement shows tamariki experiencing their lives and the numerous ways in which adults aim to protect them from harm.

Immunisation is well established to protect people from the consequences of infectious diseases by preventing the spread of disease within communities or reducing the severity of illness if it occurs. Some vaccinations may give people lifelong protection, especially in the context of herd immunity (that is, no disease circulating in the community) – examples include the MMR, hepatitis A and polio vaccines. Other vaccines may need booster shots throughout life due to the way the human immune system interacts with the disease in question. This includes vaccines for tetanus, influenza, and COVID-19. The level of protection provided by a vaccine depends on the vaccine and the recipient’s immune system. Many vaccines such as measles, hepatitis A, polio and tetanus protect over 96% of those immunised and for some vaccines the effect is over 99%.

The COVID-19 virus can be unpredictable. While COVID-19 generally has milder effects in children, with symptoms being similar to a cold, some children become severely ill and require hospitalisation. Tamariki can also have rare complications such as Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome (MIS-C) that may require intensive care. Tamariki can also suffer long term effects (known as long COVID), even after mild cases of COVID-19. The paediatric Pfizer vaccine is highly effective against symptomatic COVID-19. That means if immunised children do develop COVID-19, they are far less likely to fall seriously ill and less likely to transmit the virus to others. Immunising tamariki also helps protect whānau members and the wider community who are at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19.

The clinical trials in 5 to 11-year-olds with a paediatric Pfizer vaccine showed the vaccine was 90.7% effective against getting COVID-19 symptoms, and no participants developed severe COVID-19. Medsafe is the responsible agency for approving the use of all medicines and vaccines in New Zealand. They only approve a vaccine in Aotearoa once they are satisfied it has met strict standards for safety, efficacy, and quality. Further information on the safety and efficacy of the Pfizer vaccine in 5 to 11-year-olds can be found on the Ministry of Health website here: www.health.govt.nz/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccine-children-aged-5-11#data

We are aware from our research that some people will continue to choose not to vaccinate themselves or their children for a variety of reasons. Our public awareness campaigns may not always resonate with everyone. Te Whatu Ora continues to focus on developing engaging and appropriate advertising content that supports the vaccination programme and encourages as many parents and caregivers as possible to make informed choices for their children. For these reasons, Te Whatu Ora is satisfied that the advertisement is appropriate, not misleading and the campaign will continue.

I trust the information provided is of assistance. Should you have any concerns with this response, I would encourage you to raise these with Te Whatu Ora at: hnzgovernmentservices@health.govt.nz

Alternatively, you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Information about how to do this is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or by phoning 0800 802 602.

As this information may be of interest to other members of the public, Health NZ has decided to proactively release a copy of this response on Te Whatu Ora's website. All requester data, including your name and contact details, will be removed prior to release. The released response will be made available here.

Nāku iti noa, nā



Astrid Koornneef
Director
National Immunisation Programme