

Memo

Recommendations on use of mRNA Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine with respect to patients receiving immune checkpoint inhibitor (ICI) therapy: COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group (CV TAG) recommendations

Date: 17 March 2021

To: Joanne Gibbs, Director of National Operations, COVID-19 Vaccine Immunisation Program

Cc: Dr Ian Town, Chief Science Advisor

From: Sue Gordon, Deputy Chief Executive COVID-19 Health Systems Response

For your: Information

Purpose of report

1. To update the COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group's recommendations on the use of the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for individuals receiving immune checkpoint inhibitor (ICI) therapy.

Context

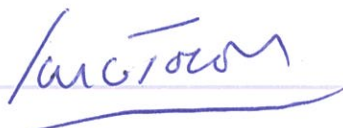
2. Following Medsafe's provisional approval of the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine (Comirnaty, BNT162b2) for people 16 years and over on 3 February 2021, the COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group (CV TAG) met on 4 February 2021 to advise on the decision to use the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine.
3. At that time, the CV TAG advised that patients receiving the immune checkpoint inhibitors (ICIs) Pembrolizumab, Nivolumab, Ipilimumab or Atezolizumab should get advice from their specialist in relation to receiving the Pfizer vaccine.
4. Subsequently, the CV TAG, including representatives from the Te Aho o Te Kahu, Cancer Control Agency and the Immunisation Advisory Centre (IMAC), met on 09 March 2021 to determine whether the advice for patients receiving ICI therapy should be amended.
5. In December 2017, Medsafe alerted IMAC about the possibility of an interaction between the influenza vaccine and ICIs. This was added as a precaution in the immunisation handbook, as there was little data at the time. More recent evidence, including a recent systematic review of studies evaluating influenza vaccines and patients receiving ICIs, tends to show that influenza vaccines are generally safe.¹

¹ Desage AL, et al. Vaccination and Immune Checkpoint Inhibitors: Does Vaccination Increase the Risk of Immune-related Adverse Events? A Systematic Review of Literature. Am J Clin Oncol. 2021 Mar 1;44(3):109-113

6. The CV TAG noted that there is strong evidence that inactivated vaccines, in general, are safe for cancer patients. However, there is limited data specifically with regards to the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine and oncology populations.

Recommendations

7. The CV TAG recommends that:
- a. The precautionary advice to patients receiving ICIs with regards to the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine should be removed from all training materials.
 - b. The Ministry should remove the precautionary advice from public-facing material.
 - c. Professional groups be notified accordingly via Te Aho o Te Kahu, Cancer Control Agency.



Dr Ian Town

Chief Science Advisor and

Chair of the COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group