

# Memo

## Decision to use the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine: COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group (CV TAG) recommendations

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**Date:** 12 July 2021

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**To:** Joanne Gibbs, Director of National Operations, COVID Vaccine Immunisation Programme

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**Cc:** Dr Ashley Bloomfield, Director-General of Health  
Allison Bennett, Manager, System Enablers, System Strategy and Policy  
Dr Caroline McElnay, Director of Public Health

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**From:** Dr Ian Town, Chief Science Advisor

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**For your:** Information

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### Purpose of report

1. To summarise the COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group's (CV TAG) recommendations on the decision to use the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine.

### Context

2. In February 2021, CV TAG advice was sought for use of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for people who were 16 years and over, following Medsafe provisional approval. Cabinet agreed that the COVID-19 Immunisation Programme proceed with the roll out of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine.
3. It was noted that further advice would be provided to Cabinet on each vaccine candidate as they became available for use (following Medsafe approval), without knowing if a future vaccine was going to be more suitable or effective. In order to make decisions given the uncertainty, a Decision to Use framework was developed.
4. Medsafe has now provisionally approved the Janssen COVID-19 Vaccine and advice is being prepared on its use as part of New Zealand's Vaccine and Immunisation Programme.
5. The Ministry's Policy team sought clinical and scientific advice from CV TAG on the use of the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine in New Zealand. This advice should be considered as part of the Decision to Use Framework and alongside policy considerations on the sequencing of the COVID-19 Immunisation Programme.

## Recommendations

6. CV TAG has discussed the use of the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine and noted the information provided in the Medsafe Data Sheet.
7. Overall, CV TAG advised that there is no current indication for the widespread use of the Janssen within the vaccine current strategy, which is based on the Pfizer vaccine.
8. CV TAG noted that:
  - a. It could be challenging to communicate the benefits versus the risk of this vaccine in New Zealand, where we have little community transmission.
  - b. The Janssen COVID-19 vaccine could be considered at an individual level, where the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine is not suitable, e.g., anaphylaxis or other rare side effects following the Pfizer vaccine.
  - c. It is still unclear whether this is a true one-dose vaccine. Janssen is conducting trials testing two doses of the vaccine and this data will shed light on whether a second boost dose is required for better protection.
  - d. This vaccine may be less effective against circulating variants of concern.
  - e. There should be a precaution about thrombosis with thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS), noting the advice in the Data Sheet about this rare side effect seen mainly in women under 60 years of age.
9. Having a supply of the Janssen vaccine in New Zealand is prudent as a potential alternative to the Pfizer vaccine for some individuals and as a contingency measure should Pfizer deliveries be delayed, or should an outbreak occur.

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Dr Ian Town

**Chief Science Advisor and**

**Chair of the COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group**