

Memo

Priority groups for vaccination among 12- to 15-year-olds: COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group (CV TAG) recommendations on the use of the Pfizer vaccine

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

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From: Dr Ian Town, Chief Science Advisor

For your: Information

Purpose of report

1. To summarise the COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group's (CV TAG) recommendations on priority groups for Pfizer mRNA COVID-19 vaccination among 12- to 15-year-olds.

Context

2. In June, CV TAG advice was sought for the use of the Pfizer mRNA COVID-19 vaccine for children aged 12 to 15 years, following the provisional approval for use in this age group by Medsafe.
3. At that time, CV TAG recommended that the rollout continue to focus on the existing population groups aged 16 years and over, and that any decision to use the COVID-19 vaccine in the 12- to 15-year-old age group should reflect that priority.
4. Generally, children have a lower risk of poor health outcomes from COVID-19 than adults. Internationally, a number of peak bodies, such as the US CDC, recommend that everyone 12 years and over should be vaccinated to help protect against COVID-19, in the context of widespread community transmission in the US.¹
5. In Australia, the TGA has approved the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for ages 12 to 15 years.² On 2 August 2021, the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) provided recommendations for vaccinating adolescents and children aged 12 to 15 years. ATAGI recommended that 12- to 15-year olds with specified medical conditions that increase their risk of severe COVID-19 be prioritised for vaccination (these conditions included asthma, diabetes, obesity, cardiac and circulatory congenital anomalies, neuro-developmental disorders, epilepsy, immunocompromised individuals, and trisomy). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders aged 12 to 15 years were also prioritised, as well as all adolescents and

children aged 12 to 15 years in remote communities. ATAGI deferred a decision on whether to vaccinate all 12 to 15 year olds, and they expect to make that decision in the coming months.

6. In late 2020, the UK's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) advised that only children at very high risk of exposure and serious outcomes, such as those with severe neuro-disabilities in residential care, should be offered vaccination.² On 19 July 2021, the JCVI issued an update to their advice, stating that *"At the current time, children 12 to 15 years of age with severe neuro-disabilities, Down's syndrome, underlying conditions resulting in immunosuppression, and those with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD)..., severe learning disabilities or who are on the learning disability register are considered at increased risk for serious COVID-19 disease and should be offered COVID-19 vaccination"*.⁴
7. Furthermore, JCVI recommended that vaccination be offered to children and young people who have immunocompromised people in their household: *"JCVI advises that children and young people aged 12 years and over who are household contacts of persons (adults or children) who are immunosuppressed should be offered COVID-19 vaccination on the understanding that the main benefits from vaccination are related to the potential for indirect protection of their household contact who is immunosuppressed."*⁴ The recommendations from JCVI were made in the context of widespread community transmission.
8. Additionally, a North American study has found that 83% (40/48) of children in intensive care with COVID-19 had co-morbidities.⁵ These were mostly "medically complex" (including long-term dependence on technological support, such as tracheostomy), immunosuppression/malignancy, or obesity.
9. The Ministry's Policy team sought clinical and scientific advice from CV TAG on the use of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for priority groups who are 12 to 15 years of age. This advice will be considered as part of the Decision to Use Framework and alongside policy considerations on the sequencing of the COVID-19 Immunisation Programme.

Recommendations

10. CV TAG met on 20 July, 27 July, and 3 August 2021 to discuss the use of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine in priority groups among 12- to 15-year-olds, within the COVID-19 Immunisation Programme.
11. **CV TAG noted that:**
 - a. Aotearoa New Zealand's focus in the sequencing approach is on coverage of those most at risk of COVID-19 i.e., personal protection of individuals that may be more likely to be exposed to COVID-19 or experience severe health outcomes.
 - b. The current recommendations are made in the context of the very low prevalence of COVID-19 in Aotearoa New Zealand. The recommendations may need to be reviewed in the event of new community transmission or outbreaks in Aotearoa New Zealand.
12. **CV TAG recommends that:**
 - a. Children and young people aged 12 to 15 years should be vaccinated if they are at high risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19. Those at high risk include 12- to 15-year-olds with severe neuro-disabilities that require residential care, and those who

are about to undergo long-term immunosuppression, such as solid organ transplant candidates prior to transplant.

- b. Children and young people aged 12 to 15 years who are household contacts of persons (adults or children) who are immunosuppressed should be offered vaccination noting that the main benefits from vaccination are related to the potential for indirect protection of their household contact who is immunosuppressed.
 - c. As part of outbreak management, vaccination should be offered to 12- to 15-year-olds in the affected area.
 - d. The COVID-19 vaccine should not be routinely administered to children and young people aged 12 to 15 years of age, at this time. Children and young people have a low risk of severe disease or death due to COVID-19 compared to adults, and, given the low prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 infection in Aotearoa New Zealand, there is currently a low risk of exposure.
 - e. CV TAG will make recommendations for use in all children in the 12 to 15 years age group at a later date, following a review of emerging information on several issues including:
 - i. the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines in adolescents as observed in overseas vaccination programmes;
 - ii. the incidence, risk factors and outcomes of cases of myocarditis after receiving the Pfizer vaccine in this age group.
 - iii. the updated advice from peak bodies internationally, including the updated advice from ATAGI on vaccinating children expected in the coming months.
 - f. Consideration should be given to equity and whānau-based approaches and ensuring that other childhood immunisation programmes are not compromised, e.g., measles and HPV vaccination.
13. CV TAG will continue to monitor all relevant information and will update their recommendations as further evidence and peak body recommendations become available.

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Chief Science Advisor and

Chair of the COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group

References

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