

Preparing our communities for winter

We are reaching out to organisations to ask for support to increase immunisation rates and protect Aotearoa New Zealand from illnesses this winter.

Increasing our immunisation coverage is the best prevention strategy to protect our communities from illnesses this winter. The northern hemisphere has reported a severe flu season, and Aotearoa New Zealand is currently experiencing a pertussis (whooping cough) epidemic. Please use the following messages to support your conversations and help us ensure people know the importance of immunisation, what immunisations they are eligible for and where these can be accessed.

Influenza immunisation

The flu (influenza) is not the same as a common cold. It is a more serious disease that can cause severe illness, hospitalisation, and death. Those who are higher at risk of serious complications of a flu infection include young children, older people, people that are pregnant, people with chronic health conditions such as diabetes and those who are immunocompromised. Yearly immunisation is the best protection against flu infection and helps prevent the spread of disease to others.

The 2025 flu vaccine is free for some people

It is important that those who are eligible are made aware that they can receive this vaccine for free. The 2025 flu vaccine is free for people at higher risk of getting very sick, including*:

- people aged 65 years and over
- people aged 6 months and over who have a long-term medical condition like diabetes, asthma, or a heart condition
- pregnant people
- tamariki (children) aged 4 years and under who have been hospitalised for respiratory illness, or have a history of significant respiratory illness
- people who have serious mental health conditions or who are who are currently accessing secondary or tertiary mental health and addiction services.

*The complete eligibility criteria can be found on [PHARMAC's website](#).

It is also important that health care staff working with communities who are at high risk of severe illness from influenza receive their annual flu vaccination and are up to date with their other immunisations. Eligible employers of non-Health NZ health care workers can claim the cost of vaccinating their patient-facing staff against influenza via the [Reimbursement Portal](#).

Other immunisations to protect our communities

Whooping cough immunisation

Whooping cough is a highly contagious respiratory disease that is particularly dangerous for babies who have not been fully immunised. More than half of babies under 12 months old who catch whooping cough need to go to hospital. Immunisation during pregnancy is the best way to protect the baby until they can start their own immunisations at 6 weeks of age. Aotearoa is experiencing a whooping cough epidemic, so it is important that pregnant people are offered this vaccine or know how to access it for free and that infants receive their immunisations on-time.

COVID-19 immunisation

COVID-19 can cause severe illness, hospitalisation, and death, especially in those who are older, who have chronic medical conditions, or who are immunocompromised. Everyone aged over 5 years is encouraged to ensure they are fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Everyone over the age of 30 years old are eligible for additional doses and people who are at higher risk of severe illness – including those aged over 65 years and those who have underlying health conditions – are recommended to receive an additional dose every 6 months. The COVID-19 and flu vaccines are safe to receive at the same time and can be offered together to provide good protection against viral illnesses this winter.

Measles immunisation

Measles can be very dangerous, especially to unvaccinated children, and can cause serious complications and death. It is highly contagious, and a single case can cause a widespread outbreak. New Zealand is at very high risk of a measles outbreak, due to our low immunisation rates and ongoing measles outbreaks overseas. It is important to ensure everyone is offered the vaccine if they are not fully immunised or immune. People who are unsure of their immunisation status should be directed to contact their healthcare provider, who can check their records for them.

More information about eligibility for funded immunisations can be found at info.health.nz/immunisations. Those who had their childhood vaccines overseas should also ensure they are up to date with all recommended immunisations in New Zealand.

What your organisation can do to support immunisation

Use opportunities to talk about individual and whānau immunity

Immunisation protects those who are at most risk and can prevent transmission to others who may be especially vulnerable. When engaging with health consumers, consider taking the opportunity to talk about how to prepare for illnesses this winter and any immunisations that can protect them and their whānau. If someone is receiving a vaccine, please ask to check their records to identify and offer any other vaccines they are eligible for.

Promote immunisation in your community

- Printed posters and leaflets for the flu campaign and a range of other immunisations can be ordered for free from [Blue Star](#) – consider ordering some to have at your site or practice. Digital formats can also be downloaded and shared from [HealthEd](#) or the [NIP Dropbox](#). Social media tiles to promote flu vaccination can be accessed in the [Dropbox](#).
- Consider creating awareness by sharing information on seasonal illness and immunisation through your professional networks or by communicating directly with your community. The [Immunisation Advisory Centre](#) website hosts supportive resources for health professionals including videos, webinars, and factsheets.
- Consumers can be directed to [our website](#) to learn about immunisations for all family members.

Assist your community to make bookings for their vaccinations

- Immunisations can be accessed at GPs, pharmacies, Hauora Māori & Pacific health providers. Some sites may accept walk-ins. People can contact their healthcare provider to book an appointment or find a local immunisation provider on [Healthpoint](#).
- People can be directed to the [booking website page](#) to find many ways to book vaccinations, including online or over the phone at 0800 28 29 26 (8.30am – 5pm, Monday to Friday).
- Consider other ways of supporting your community to receive vaccines, such as by booking vaccines for those needing assistance or linking with local services. If your community has specific needs, you can contact your local District for support.