

# Memo

## The use of COVID-19 vaccines during an outbreak: COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group (CV TAG) recommendations

---

**Date:** 12 May 2021

---

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

---

**Cc:** Sue Gordon, Deputy Chief Executive COVID-19 Health Systems Response  
Dr Caroline McElnay, Director of Public Health  
Dr Niki Stefanogiannis, Deputy Director Public Health

---

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

---

**For your:** Information

---

### Purpose of report

1. To outline the COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group's recommendations for the targeted use of COVID-19 vaccines during an outbreak.

### Context

2. The Ministry previously included guidance in the Sequencing Framework about how to prioritise vaccination in an outbreak scenario. Advice to Ministers suggested that in a "controlled outbreak" scenario, depending on vaccine characteristics, there could be an additional provision to prioritise vaccinating groups affected by the outbreak at the local level, such as close contacts and vulnerable populations.
3. On 19 February 2021 and 3 March 2021, CV TAG advice was sought on the use of the Pfizer/BioNTech (Comirnaty) COVID-19 vaccine in an outbreak. CV TAG noted that the vaccine should not be used for post-exposure prophylaxis but can be used as a supplementary public health intervention, commonly referred to as "ring vaccination".
4. A modified version of ring vaccination was introduced early in the vaccination sequencing to decrease the risk of transmission within the Counties Manukau DHB area, which had been identified as a community at risk of infection, transmission and severe outcomes from COVID-19. However, this strategy was not used as a response to an outbreak.
5. The COVID-19 Vaccine and Immunisation Programme (CVIP) will be working with DHBs on some initial contingency planning, including understanding what impact an outbreak would have on how many people they can vaccinate.
6. Enhancement of the vaccination programme in a particular region may impact on the rate of vaccination in other regions and possibly influence the national rate of vaccination. It is very likely that DHBs would need additional support from outside the region to maintain their

current level of vaccination during and outbreak. Moreover, to deliver an increased number of vaccinations in a targeted strategy, there is likely to be a lead-in time for the setting up of new vaccination sites and bringing in support from other regions.

7. Further advice was sought from CV TAG on 11 May 2021. They considered these questions:
  - a) The practical definition of ring vaccination in the context of a COVID-19 outbreak, in New Zealand.
  - b) Whether or not ring vaccination is appropriate in a COVID-19 outbreak and what impact should be expected from such a strategy.
  - c) Taking the above into account, are there specific circumstances where it would be appropriate to consider ring vaccination.
  - d) An assessment of the priority of ring vaccination against maintaining vaccination uptake in other regions.
8. This advice will inform the approach to using the Pfizer/BioNtech (Comirnaty) COVID-19 vaccine in an outbreak, including potential policy options and contingency planning.

## Recommendations

9. CV TAG noted that:
  - The characteristics of the Pfizer/BioNTech (Comirnaty) COVID-19 vaccine mean that it cannot be used in the traditional sense of ring vaccination. However, targeted vaccination can be used to encourage 'community confidence' and increased uptake of the vaccine.
  - Any targeted vaccination should be implemented alongside other public health measures and not as a standalone measure. A protocol should be developed and ready for implementation if we have an outbreak.
  - There is no international data on using the COVID-19 vaccine for targeted vaccination to inform what the trigger point would be for deploying this strategy. The situation in New Zealand means that there may be an opportunity to gain some experience should it be necessary to deploy such a measure.
  - There will be communities with low vaccine coverage, and we will need a protocol to ensure increased coverage while maintaining equity in an outbreak setting. The process of progressively relaxing controls at the border may lead to potential outbreaks in some communities.
10. CV TAG endorsed the approach of targeted vaccination and the development of a protocol to guide its use as part of the contingency plan for such a scenario.
11. It was noted that such an initiative will require additional resources to be deployed to ensure that the mainstream vaccination rollout is not slowed up.

Ian G Town

Dr Ian Town  
**Chief Science Advisor and  
Chair of the COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group**