

Memo

The use of COVID-19 vaccines in children younger than 16 years: COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group (CV TAG) recommendations

Date:	25 March 2021
To:	Joanne Gibbs, Director of National Operations, COVID Vaccine Immunisation Programme
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 outline the COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group's recommendations for the use of COVID-19 vaccines in children younger than 16 years.

Context

2. The only COVID-19 vaccine currently available in NZ is the Pfizer vaccine, which is approved by Medsafe for use only in people aged 16 years and above.
3. There has been and continues to be a very low incidence of COVID-19 disease in NZ and the likelihood of moderate to severe disease following infection with SARS-CoV-2 in children between 12-15 years, although very low, is comparable to 16-18 years.
4. In a community setting, children under 5 years of age are less likely to acquire and transmit infection than older children and adults.
5. As at March 2021, data on the safety and effectiveness of Pfizer and other COVID-19 vaccines in children under 16 years of age are limited.
6. CV TAG noted that based on specific studies and extensive clinical experience with other non-live vaccines in children 12-15 years of age, such as Human Papilloma Virus Vaccine (HPV – Gardasil9) and Hepatitis B, the most likely scenario is that immune responses in this age group will be more robust than in those aged 16-18, however, data from specific studies suitable for Medsafe review are expected by the end of 2021.

Recommendations

7. The CV TAG recommends that:
 - a) Given the current epidemiology and risk profile of COVID-19 in NZ, routine vaccination of children under 16 years of age in the absence of specific data is not justified.
 - b) In an outbreak setting, if a community-wide vaccination strategy was implemented, extending the age criteria for vaccination to include children of high-school age (year 9

and above) could be justified at the discretion of the local public health authority. This recommendation is based on experience in NZ and elsewhere showing that older children may play a role in community transmission.

- c) Given the current epidemiology and risk profile of COVID-19 in NZ, routine vaccination is not recommended for children who may be viewed as high-risk for COVID-19 complications based on the presence of co-morbidities. This is because there is no data to suggest this is necessary, particularly in a low-incidence population like NZ.
- d) Recommendations should be reviewed when safety and efficacy data on COVID-19 vaccines in children becomes available in the context of the population strategy for COVID-19 immunisation programmes in NZ.



Dr Ian Town

Chief Science Advisor and

Chair of the COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group