

Memo

Decision to use the Pfizer mRNA COVID-19 vaccine for children aged 12 -15 years: COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group (CV TAG) recommendations

Date: 24 June 2021

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

Cc: Dr Ashley Bloomfield, Director-General of Health
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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 the decision to use the Pfizer mRNA COVID-19 vaccine for children aged 12-15 years.

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.
3. Cabinet agreed that the COVID-19 Immunisation Programme proceed with the roll out of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. It was noted that there were no specific exclusions for the use of the vaccine that would materially impact on the Sequencing Framework or the Immunisation Programme delivery.
4. It was also noted at the time that clinical trials had not yet concluded for those under 16 years and that once further paediatric trials are reported that Medsafe would be able to consider broadening the approval conditions for the Pfizer vaccine.
5. Medsafe has recently granted provisional approval conditions for the Pfizer vaccine to include people who are 12 years of age and over.
6. The Ministry's Policy team sought clinical and scientific advice from CV TAG on the use of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for people who are 12-15 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

7. CV TAG met on 22 June 2021 and discussed the use of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine in children aged 12-15 years.
8. CV TAG noted:
 - our focus in the sequencing approach is on coverage of those most at risk of COVID-19 ie, personal protection of individuals that may be more likely to be exposed to COVID-19 and/or experience severe health outcomes
 - our current context relating to the very low prevalence of COVID-19 in New Zealand
 - generally, children have a lower risk of poor health outcomes from COVID-19 infection
 - there is a relatively limited amount of data from the trials as well as limited experience internationally, which makes it difficult to provide certainty about the risks and benefits of vaccinating this age group
 - there is a potential safety signal for myocarditis in people under 30 years who receive mRNA vaccines (e.g., Pfizer/BioNtech and Moderna), which requires ongoing consideration
 - overall, there is not an urgent need to progress with vaccination of this group, but 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.
9. CV TAG recommended that the rollout continue to focus on the existing population groups aged 16 years and over that are at risk of COVID-19 and that any decision to use the COVID-19 vaccine in the 12-15 age group should reflect this current priority.

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Dr Ian Town

Chief Science Advisor and

Chair of the COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group