

13 November 2019



Re: Official Information Act request – Number of admissions for measles

I refer to your Official Information Act request dated 15 October 2019 to the MoH and transferred from the MoH to Auckland DHB on 22 October 2019 requesting the following information.

I am requesting under the Official Information Act:

- 1. How many DHB health workers have contracted vaccine-preventable illnesses such as measles, whooping cough or flu while employed by DHBs in the past decade?**
- 2. Whether those workers had been vaccinated.**
- 3. How many patients, if any, have contracted vaccine-preventable illnesses from health workers or other patients while in hospital in the past decade.**

We do not have records to specifically answer your questions but provide the following information in response to Q1-3:

Measles, whooping cough and influenza are highly transmissible infectious diseases. We have infection prevention and control policies in place in our hospitals to prevent transmission to staff and other patients. These measures are called transmission-based precautions and they are used to prevent transmission by direct contact with infected secretions or excretions, inhalation of infectious droplets or inhalation of airborne infectious nuclei. Staff are provided with personal protective equipment to prevent exposure to infectious material. These measures are the main

controls to prevent the spread of infection in the hospital and this is in conjunction with healthcare worker vaccination.

We actively encourage unwell staff members to stay at home, particularly if they have an infectious disease. We have protocols in place for specific infectious diseases.

During the seasonal influenza epidemic, the burden of disease is in the community and for this reason it is not always possible to determine the source unless close contacts (family members, household contacts) have similar symptoms. Measles is highly infectious and during epidemics the source of infection is not always known. Likewise, during whooping cough epidemics the burden of diseases is in the community; few patients are admitted to hospital.

Infection Prevention & Control and Occupational Health & Safety are informed by the Auckland Regional Public Health Service when a person, infectious with a 'notifiable' disease, has been in the hospital workplace – this is usually a patient but occasionally a staff member or visitor. Contact tracing is then carried out to identify patients and staff at risk following this exposure and appropriate measures taken to prevent or mitigate infection in at-risk individuals and the spread of infection within the workplace.

To the best of our knowledge, no healthcare worker who was part of a hospital contact trace over the last decade has contracted measles, mumps or rubella from that contact. The same for chickenpox (this is not a notifiable disease but we do carry out contact traces). We have undertaken 10 whooping cough contact traces in 2019 to-date and we have no record of staff having become infected following these exposures.

In 2019, we have had one staff member and one medical student with documented immunity who subsequently went on to present with clinical measles. A contact trace was performed to identify patients and staff exposed to these two staff members; no secondary cases of measles were detected in the identified staff and patients. There is evidence that the risk of transmission is very low in this situation.

Vaccination

Influenza vaccine is offered to all staff annually, it is not mandatory nor is it 100% effective. We have 84.5% of our largest group of clinical workers (doctors, nurses, midwives, healthcare assistants) vaccinated in 2019. Vaccinated individuals including staff members can still get influenza despite being vaccinated.

Whooping cough requires regular revaccination to boost the immune response.

We make a big effort to vaccinate our healthcare workers and the majority are immune to measles, mumps, rubella and chickenpox. We provide vaccination against pertussis in keeping with national and international guidance and we have achieved very good uptake in our high risk work areas and continue to target these areas.

I trust this information answers your questions.

You are entitled to seek a review of the response by the Ombudsman under section 28(3) of the Official Information Act. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, or an edited version of this response, may be published on the Auckland DHB website.

Yours faithfully



Ailsa Claire, OBE
Chief Executive

