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To: Primary Care Teams, Health Professionals

From: Kath Blair, Manager Immunisation

Subject: **Influenza start date and resources, Zoster, Measles, Meningococcal vaccine**

Influenza start date and resources

This year's influenza immunisation programme will be starting early **for eligible patients** as they are at greatest risk of serious illness from influenza. Healthcare workers (including aged care facility staff) are also able to be vaccinated early. Funded vaccination can begin, and claims will be accepted, from 18 March 2020. Afluria Quad, the funded vaccine for adults and children 3 years and over, is now available and distribution has begun. Eligible patients include:

People aged 65 and over, pregnant women, people with certain chronic conditions and young children with a history of severe respiratory illness are at greatest risk of serious illness from influenza this winter. This group should get vaccinated as the highest priority as soon as vaccines are delivered to practices this year.

Healthcare workers are also a priority for vaccination.

People who are not eligible for free vaccination are asked to wait until 13 April 2020 to get vaccinated.

We ask that providers start to make appointments for patients eligible to receive the funded vaccinations from 18 March 2020 and through into early April. DHBs and other employers of healthcare workers should focus on active promotion of staff influenza vaccination programmes.

Influenza vaccine does not protect against COVID-19, however it will help prevent a serious illness that causes hundreds of deaths each winter in New Zealand.

We are aware the sector was expecting the release of influenza vaccines on 1 April, however with COVID-19 management a pressing concern, starting funded vaccination early will maximise the numbers of eligible patients and healthcare workers getting vaccinated. We appreciate that this is a load on general practice at a time when you are already planning your pandemic response, and we appreciate your efforts.

Peak influenza season does not normally arrive until late May or early June. More than 400,000 extra influenza vaccines are being supplied to New Zealand over the amount that were used in 2019, to reflect public interest and a likely increase in demand in light of COVID-19.

The paediatric dose of Afluria Quad for children under 3 years ie 6 to 35 months is expected to be available from 1 April 2020. Please reserve this for eligible children aged 6 to 35 months old.

There is one funded quadrivalent influenza vaccine for 2020.

- Afluria Quad – for adults and children 3 years and over
- Afluria Quad Junior – please reserve this for eligible children aged 6 to 35 months old.

Please ensure all your 65 and older populations are offered annual influenza vaccination. Last year, immunisation rates for Māori and Asian people in this age group continued to be notably lower than for other ethnic groups so we ask that you make a particular effort to address this.

All influenza vaccinations are to be recorded on the National Immunisation Register (NIR). Occupational health providers are expected to notify a person's general practice when they have administered an influenza vaccine so their records can be updated. We recognise that many vaccinations given in an occupational health setting are currently unable to be recorded on the NIR.

The Flu Kit is available online at www.influenza.org.nz with hard copies and other printed resources distributed in the coming weeks.

Zoster Vaccinations

We would like to remind practices the funded Zostavax vaccine continues to be funded until the end of 2020 for all those who were aged 66 to 80 years on 1 April 2018 (or until they turn 81), if they have not already been vaccinated. This is a once-only, not annual, vaccine. PMS systems have been updated as of 18 March to enable dual claiming of zoster vaccine at the same time as influenza vaccines – claims for zoster and influenza vaccines administered before then can be manually claimed for.

Measles

The Ministry is supporting DHBs to plan a measles immunisation campaign for 2020, recognising that some DHBs may need to shift their priorities in response to influenza vaccination and COVID-19. The campaign will be targeted at young adults, aged 15-29, with a focus on Māori and Pacific individuals. PHARMAC has sourced more than 350,000 additional MMR vaccines for the campaign; the vaccines are scheduled to arrive by the end of April 2020. The Ministry will support DHBs to develop local plans for vaccinating this group to ensure the campaign reaches young adults in their communities.

As we advised on 24 February 2020, increased stocks means that last year's prioritisation advice no longer applies. We ask immunisation service providers to continue the focus on ensuring infants receive their MMR vaccinations on time and improving the immunity of 5-14 year olds. This should include the active recall of all children in this age range who have not had any MMR vaccination, as resources allow.

Under PHARMAC's Pharmaceutical Schedule, a maximum of two doses can be given to any person meeting the following criteria:

1. For primary vaccination in children
2. Revaccination following immunosuppression
3. Any individual susceptible to measles, mumps or rubella (which includes unvaccinated adults under age 50)
4. A maximum of three doses for children who have had their first dose prior to 12 months.

Please also ensure that all MMR doses administered are recorded on the NIR, unless the patient specifically requests it not to be recorded. The measles outbreak highlighted the information gap created by the lack of national records for people aged 14 and over and not automatically enrolled on the NIR.

Meningococcal vaccine eligibility

At this time of year, teenagers and young adults may have recently started at boarding school or moved to university hostel accommodation. Teenagers and young adults aged 13 to 25 in a close-living situation such as a boarding school hostel, tertiary education hall of residence, or military barracks are now eligible for a free single dose of meningococcal ACWY vaccine (Menactra). Meningococcal B vaccine (Bexsero) is not funded.

All students aged under 18 years are eligible to receive funded vaccines as per the National Immunisation Schedule regardless of residency status. Students aged 18 years or older must be eligible to receive publicly funded health and disability services in New Zealand to receive funded vaccines, including meningococcal ACWY vaccine.

Individuals who have previously received a dose of meningococcal ACWY vaccine (Menactra or Nimenrix) or two doses of Bexsero do not require a booster dose for 5 years.

The eligibility criteria initially cover all young people aged 13 to 25 in close-living situations – after 30 November 2020 only young people in their first year of such accommodation will be eligible.

If you have any queries about anything in this update, please email immunisation@health.govt.nz