

18 February 2008

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To: General Practitioners, Practice Nurses and Health Professionals
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Subject: Brief Update – pertussis (whooping cough), measles and influenza

Many of you will have seen media reports about pertussis. This fax is to provide you with a brief update about pertussis, as well as some information about measles and this season's influenza vaccination campaign.

Pertussis (whooping cough)

Numbers of reported pertussis cases, particularly in Auckland, Waikato and Canterbury, are increasing. This reinforces the continued importance of the management of confirmed cases, and of immunisation against this infection.

Babies are most at risk from complications, but pertussis also circulates in the adult population with notifications for 2007 showing the highest number of cases was in over 20-year-olds.

If you suspect your patient may have pertussis please do a nasopharyngeal swab to confirm the diagnosis. It is also important that household members are provided chemoprophylaxis when the household includes any child under 12 months of age who has received fewer than three doses of pertussis vaccine. Pertussis is a notifiable disease and it is essential to notify suspected and confirmed cases to the local Medical Officer of Health (see case definitions in table below).

Consider exclusion of the infected person from school or work until they have received at least five days of a 14-day course of erythromycin, or exclude for three weeks from the date of onset of typical paroxysms of cough.

To stop this disease spreading and to ensure that the free pertussis-containing vaccines give the best protection to those most at risk, it is important that babies and children get their immunisations on time at 6 weeks, 3 months, 5 months, 4 years and 11 years of age. Please ensure that immunisations are offered to babies and children in your practice on time and that catch-up immunisation is offered to those who are overdue for their vaccinations.

More information about pertussis is available in the *Immunisation Handbook 2006*.

Clinical description	Probable case	Confirmed case
A disease characterised by a cough lasting longer than two weeks, and one or more of the following; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Paroxysms of cough ○ Cough ending in vomiting or apnoea ○ Inspiratory whoop 	Cough lasting longer than two weeks and one or more of the following; paroxysmal cough, cough ending in vomiting or apnoea, inspiratory whoop, for which there is no other known cause.	A clinically compatible illness that is laboratory confirmed or that is epidemiologically linked to a confirmed case.

Measles

In 2008 there was a total of 12 notified measles cases nationwide, but last month alone there four measles cases in Otago and one in Wellington. In these cases the disease appears to have been contracted overseas.

We would ask you to encourage parents and caregivers to ensure that their children are up-to-date with the Measles-Mumps-Rubella (MMR) immunisations. This is particularly the case for families intending to travel overseas, but also relevant for other families.

The Measles-Mumps-Rubella vaccine offered at 15 months and four years of age is 90-95% effective in protecting against measles. About 86% of New Zealand two-year-olds have had the first dose, a rate below the 95% threshold needed to prevent future epidemics.

More information about measles is available in the *Immunisation Handbook 2006*.

Influenza

The 2009 Influenza immunisation resource kits, which include vaccine order forms, are being sent to general practices this month. Surgeries are encouraged to place vaccine orders now to ensure they have supplies available to start clinics in March. The television promotional campaign starts on April 12.

Local and international research has shown that the single most important factor in a person agreeing to an influenza immunisation is the recommendation from their health professional. You can reduce hospitalisations and deaths from influenza by making a recommendation to all your patients who are 65 years and over and those under 65 with a relevant chronic medical condition, that it would be a good idea to get the influenza vaccine, and that it is available free to them.

Influenza vaccine (Fluvax and Vaxigrip) is funded for eligible groups from early March till 30 June 2009.

The National Influenza Strategy Group is also encouraging health professionals to get immunised. New Zealand has comparatively low levels of influenza immunisation uptake among its health workforce. By getting immunised against influenza you reduce the spread of this serious disease, including to your own family.

Further information is available at www.influenza.org.nz

If you have any queries for the National Immunisation Programme team, please contact immunisation@moh.govt.nz For technical advice, please contact the Immunisation Advisory Centre (IMAC), www.immune.org.nz 0800 IMMUNE or 0800 466 863.

Yours sincerely

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