

## Media release

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### Independent Safety Experts - further endorsement of Meningococcal vaccine

The safety of New Zealand's Meningococcal B vaccine (MeNZB™) has been further endorsed by independent experts who found no safety concerns after looking at data relating to more than 525,000 doses being administered.

Meningococcal B Immunisation Director Dr Jane O'Hallahan says the Ministry has in place a world class safety monitoring system which produces data that is analysed by international and national experts and they again have confirmed the MeNZB™ vaccine's safety. "It's further confirmation of what we knew from the clinical trials. To date in the programme more than 210,000 children and young people have had more than 525,000 doses of this vaccine.

The MeNZB™ vaccine was developed to control the current epidemic of meningococcal B in New Zealand. The vaccine is being offered free to everyone under the age of 20 years in New Zealand. It takes three doses of the vaccine to gain the protection offered by the vaccine.

On average, over the last five years, 10 people per week have contracted meningococcal disease. On average, over that same period, approximately one person has died every three weeks from meningococcal disease. While it is not always possible to identify the strain that caused a case of meningococcal disease, of all the confirmed cases of meningococcal disease in New Zealand the epidemic strain accounts for about 75 percent.

The latest safety monitoring shows that parents and people deciding whether they should vaccinate their children can have confidence in the safety of this vaccine. At the serious end of the adverse reactions scale, we've only had one case of anaphylaxis, which is likely to have been caused by the vaccine, from the 580,000 doses delivered. The young person was treated appropriately and made a full recovery," Dr O'Hallahan says.

Anaphylaxis is a very rare allergic reaction that some people have to medicines, vaccinations, food products and bee stings.

"The well-publicised recent cases of the disease around the Wellington region highlights that this epidemic is not going away on its own and there is no knowing where and when it will strike. The MeNZB™ vaccine is the best way to help protect against the epidemic strain of meningococcal B disease, but it is important to remain vigilant. There are other strains of meningococcal disease and no vaccine is 100 percent effective. The vaccine plus continued vigilance is the best protection," Dr O'Hallahan says.

This disease is a vicious killer that knows no racial or socioeconomic boundaries. Everyone should seek to provide their children with this protection and at the same time stay alert of signs and symptoms.

The monitoring programme is three-pronged:

- 1) All hospital admissions and emergency department consultations at Auckland City and Middlemore hospitals for people aged between 4 weeks and 20 years are looked at, and all admissions and consultations for Under 5s at Whangarei hospital are monitored daily.
- 2) Every death of a person under the age of 21 is looked at to see if the person has been vaccinated within the previous 90 days, and the cause of death is reviewed. No deaths have been attributed to the vaccine.
- 3) The Centre for Adverse Reaction Monitoring received 429 reports of adverse events following MeNZB<sup>TM</sup> vaccination between July 2004 and the end of March this year. Skin reactions, injection site reactions, fever and gastrointestinal symptoms account for the majority of adverse reactions.

A copy of the Independent Safety Monitoring Board report is available at [www.immunise.moh.govt.nz](http://www.immunise.moh.govt.nz)

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