

Human Resource - staff vaccination  
Proactive Release: 15 August 2019



06 August 2019

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Via email

Email: [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

### Official Information Act (1982) Request

I write in response to your Official Information Act request, dated 25 July 2019. You requested the following information:

- **Any information the DHB holds about vaccination/ immunization rates for its health workers, including the various rates for midwives, nurses and doctors working for the DHB.**
- **Any information the DHB holds about trends in vaccination rates for health workers over the previous decade, and whether any measures have been taken to increase uptake.**
- **Any information the DHB holds about vaccination rates for its health workers, specifically from Pertussis/ Whooping cough, seasonal 'flu and MMR.**

For context, CM Health funds and provides healthcare and support services to more than 569,400 people residing in the Counties Manukau region. We employ more than 7,500 staff, and see more than 118,000 presentations at the Middlemore Hospital Emergency Department each year.

As a consequence of delivering these services, each day many of our employees come into contact with a wide-cross section of the community, who are unwell and require health care. This increases the chances for them to be exposed to a range of infectious and transmittable illnesses.

Detail of individual employee vaccination status is private health information, which is provided confidentially, and only held in individual employee files.

We currently only collate information on the employee uptake of Seasonal Influenza vaccination. Our staff influenza vaccination rates, up to 2018 are reported to the Ministry of Health each year. This includes details of uptake by health workforce groupings.

- <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/preventative-health-wellness/immunisation/influenza>

For the current year, as at 19 July 2019, 4,977 CM Health employees had their influenza vaccination for this year, via our annual CM Health campaign. This represents 66% of our total employee headcount. There may be other employees who received the vaccination elsewhere in the health system.

We do proactively support our staff to protect themselves, and our community from the risk of infectious and vaccine-preventable illnesses. We use pre-employment screening, and also routinely offer (at no cost) seasonal influenza and scheduled vaccinations to staff. Employees are offered vaccines as per our Occupational Immunity Screening and Vaccination Policy (**attached**).

Pre-employment Health Screening (PEHS) for all DHB healthcare workers has occurred at CM Health since 2005. Clinical staff and patient-facing staff are screened prior to commencing employment. Our current processes are outlined in the Policy and Procedure documents (**both attached**).

Briefly, pre-employment screening processes for all prospective clinical and non-clinical 'patient contact' staff include the assessment of immunity status to a vaccine-preventable disease (as per the policy). For those 'non-immune' at screening, the vaccine is offered and is free of charge. If vaccination is declined, then the Line Manager is informed, so that they can consider and manage that risk. Prior to commencing work, all employees (who have no record of vaccination) are offered a diphtheria, tetanus and acellular pertussis vaccine.

We have not previously sought to further collate any other information from individual employee records of vaccinations/ immunisations status - to allow us to identify rates or trends of vaccination by workforce groups, or by most types of vaccination, which could enable us to respond as per your request.

We have considered if doing this is feasible within our existing operational capacity, and the impact this would have. To do so, for the period of your request (over the last decade), would be a significant process. This would necessitate a manual retrospective review of individual employee files for our entire current workforce for screening forms, and vaccination status, which can change over time. This would also not be able to include those people who are now no longer employed by us.

We believe that the creation of this information would unduly divert staff from providing direct clinical services. We are in the 23rd week of supporting the national and regional response to the current measles outbreak, and our Occupational Health and Safety service are prioritising using all available resources to managing this, including contact tracing and biological health monitoring for our workforce.

As we do not already hold the information in a readily accessible way, we are declining this element of the request to provide rates and trends by workforce groups and vaccination types; we do this under section 18(f) of the Act – requires substantial collation and research.

We believe the public interest is in knowing that pre-employment screening, and occupational exposure processes and screening of immunity status are in place for all staff, rather than the status for individual uptake of vaccination. Should you wish to revise the scope of your request, we will consider this further.

Occupational Health and Safety Services also conducts targeted health monitoring activity in clinical areas at higher risk of exposure, for example the Emergency Department, to ensure all staff are and remain protected against vaccine-preventable diseases. We have also previously used this approach during other outbreaks, including Whooping Cough (in 2011 and 2017) and Mumps in 2016. In addition,

we are currently providing biological health monitoring currently focussed in our Emergency Department, to ensure that staff (including clinical and allied/ support staff) are protected against measles.

Given the current measles outbreak, we are promoting additional key messages to our employees, including the importance of checking their immunisation status, the greater risk of exposure and the benefits of immunisation. These are consistent with the messages from the Immunisation Advisory Centre and the Auckland Regional Public Health service.

As a part of our usual function in delivering health services, we work closely with the Health Promotion Agency and with Primary Care providers to share material and information on the benefits of immunisation with our wider community, which includes many of our employees. Our midwives, nurses, doctors and pharmacists all play an important role in promoting immunisation.

We also continuously re-iterate to all staff the importance of all Infection Prevention and Control 'Standard Precautions', to reduce the risk of exposure to transmittable diseases.

Attached are copies of the relevant documents:

- CM Health Policy: Occupational Immunity, Screening and Vaccination
- CM Health Policy: Pre-Employment Health Screening (PEHS)
- CM Health Procedure: Pre-Employment Health Screening (PEHS)

I trust this information satisfactorily answers your query. If you are not satisfied with this response you are entitled to seek a review of the response by the Ombudsman under section 28(3) of the Official Information Act.

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

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'F. Apa', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Fepulea'i Margie Apa  
Chief Executive Officer  
**Counties Manukau Health**