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Independent experts to advise Government on post-vaccination future

HON CHRIS HIPKINS

HON DR AYESHA VERRALL

COVID-19 Response | Health

The Government is acting to ensure decisions on responding to the next phase of the COVID-19

pandemic are informed by the best available scientific evidence and strategic public health advice.

"New Zealand has worked towards an elimination strategy which has been successful in keeping our people safe and our economy in good shape," Minister for COVID-19 Response Chris Hipkins said.

"One of our strengths has been our commitment to constantly learn and adapt.

"The next phase of the pandemic poses significant challenges, including the emergence of new variants, but it also provides us with new opportunities," Chris Hipkins said.

"As the COVID-19 vaccine programme ramps up in the second half of the year, the Government will face a number of decisions regarding our border and public health settings," Associate Minister of Health Dr Ayesha Verrall said.

"A strategic public health advisory group has been set up to provide independent advice and analysis to the Government, informed by their expertise in epidemiology, infectious diseases, public health, and modelling on these future decisions.

"The Government will be seeking their advice on issues such as how much of our population needs to be vaccinated before we can relax our border settings, evidence for transmission blocking properties of the vaccine, strategic public health controls when the borders reopen and public health responses to any new variants that aren't covered by our current vaccine options.

"The Ministry of Health will support the Group's work and share any information that would be useful to them. The Group will work alongside Sir Brian Roche's COVID-19 Independent Continuous Review, Improvement and Advice Group, especially around health protections post vaccine.

"The members will also have a public facing role. Once advice has been considered, they will need to communicate the science behind any changes to New Zealand's border settings," Dr Ayesha Verrall said.

The Group will report to the Minister for COVID-19 Response, Chris Hipkins via Associate Minister of Health (Public Health) Dr Ayesha Verrall, who will be meeting the members regularly.

The Group's chaired by Professor Sir David Skegg, and made up of the following members:

- Dr Nikki Turner
- Prof Philip Hill
- Dr Maia Brewerton
- Prof David Murdoch
- Dr Ella Iosua

Rodney Jones (Special Advisor)
- Shaun Hendy (Special Advisor)

Observer: Dr Ian Town

"Sir David is a highly respected epidemiologist and public health physician. He has served as a special adviser to Parliament's Epidemic Response Committee during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sir David has also been an advisor to the World Health Organization in Geneva for more than three decades," Dr Ayesha Verrall said.

"Dr Nikki Turner is a specialist in immunisation, primary healthcare and preventative child health. Professor Philip Hill is an epidemiologist with expertise in infectious diseases and research. Dr Maia Brewerton is the lead clinician at the Department of Clinical Immunology and Allergy at Auckland Hospital. Dr Ella Iosua is a biostatistical expert at the University of Otago. Professor David Murdoch is an infectious diseases expert and the Dean of the University of Otago, Christchurch.

"Rodney Jones and Professor Shaun Hendy have been appointed as Special Advisors to the Group to assist with any modelling work that's required.

"Professor Hill is also a member of the COVID-19 Independent Continuous Review, Improvement and Advice Group. He will be instrumental in making sure the two groups complement each other and their priorities align.

"The Group's term runs until 1 June 2022," Dr Ayesha Verrall said.