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Workplace vaccination requirements extended to cover Police and NZ Defence Force

HON MICHAEL WOOD(/MINISTER/HON-MICHAEL-WOOD)

Workplace Relations and Safety (/portfolio/labour-2020-2023/workplace-relations-and-safety)

- With the support of the organisations, additional vaccination requirements will cover sworn members, recruits and authorised officers of the New Zealand Police, and all New Zealand Defence Force staff.
- First doses of the vaccine for workers in these organisations are required by 17 January 2022, and second doses by 1 March 2022.
- These groups are added to the list of sectors covered by vaccination, which includes MIQ and border work, healthcare, education, and prisons.

Workplace Relations and Safety Minister Michael Wood announced today that workplace vaccination requirements will be extended to include the New Zealand Police and Defence Force in preparation for the transition to the new COVID-19 Protection Framework on 3 December 2021.

Ministers have worked with Police and Defence Force leadership on this, and there is broad support for the decision.

"Vaccination is our greatest tool in keeping New Zealanders safe, so we have extended vaccine requirements to include constabulary, recruits and authorised officers of New Zealand Police, and the armed forces and civilian staff of the New Zealand Defence Force," Michael Wood said.

"So many of the individuals within these organisations have been essential to our COVID-19 response and are already fully vaccinated. But we want to ensure that those who serve and protect our communities on a daily basis can do so without unintentionally spreading the virus," Michael Wood said.

First doses of vaccinations for workers in these organisations will be required by 17 January 2022, and second doses by 1 March 2022.

"We already have a very high vaccination rate in the Police and it makes sense operationally to make it a requirement for the constabulary, recruits and authorised officers who have regular contact with members to be vaccinated. This is about keeping Police safe and the community safe. 92.2 per cent of all Constabulary Police staff have received at least one dose, and 86.5 per cent are now fully vaccinated. As they are often in contact with vulnerable communities, this is the best way that we can protect our Police staff and the public from COVID-19," Police Minister Poto Williams said.

"The NZDF provide critical services to New Zealand, including assisting Police at regional borders, and supporting MBIE in resourcing MIQ facilities. It makes sense that they are included in the mandate and most of the NZDF's Regular Force are already vaccinated. Our defence forces can be deployed at any time to locations where they may come into contact with COVID-19. For example, the recent mission to Afghanistan saw our defence force personnel assisting in the evacuation of New Zealand visa holders, some of whom had COVID," Defence Minister Peeni Henare said.

NZDF uniformed personnel are currently 98.4 per cent fully vaccinated and civilian staff are already 75 per cent fully vaccinated through the NZDF vaccination programme delivered earlier this year. These rates do not include those who may have received vaccinations through the public health system.

"While a number of other sectors have requested additional government vaccination requirements we are not progressing them at this time. Vaccine mandates are very strong legal requirements that have to be carefully considered based on a clear assessment about how justifiable they are, "Michael Wood said.

"An increasingly large proportion of the population is double-dosed with thousands more getting vaccinated every day, and the simple vaccination assessment tool that will be available for businesses in mid-December will help to streamline the process," Michael Wood said.

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