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Integrated Prevention and Control of Seasonal Respiratory Infections in Aotearoa New Zealand: next steps for transformative change

Amanda Kvalsvig

University of Otago

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4184-001X>

Lucy Telfar Barnard

University of Otago

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5246-4873>

Jennifer Summers

University of Otago

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3156-0479>

Michael G. Baker

University of Otago

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1865-1536>

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Abstract

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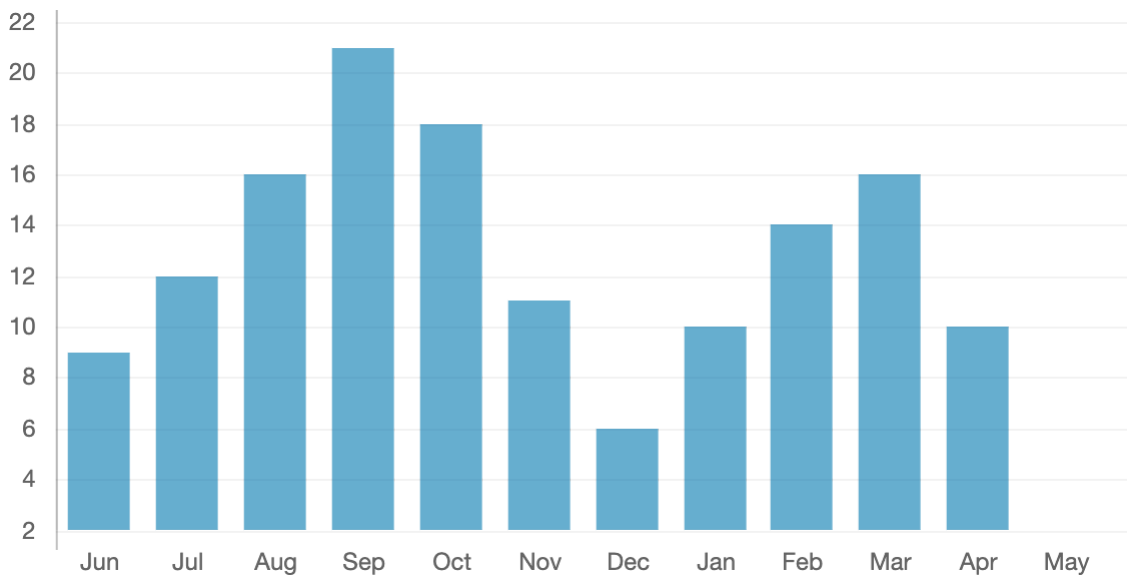
Public health measures that successfully eliminated the spread of Covid-19 in Aotearoa New Zealand during 2020 also profoundly reduced the normally high seasonal burden of non-Covid infectious diseases. One outcome of this extraordinary year was that life expectancy in New Zealand actually increased during 2020, the first year of this global pandemic. We should not accept or allow a return to previous levels of illness and death during the winter months.

Transformative change will require an integrated approach to infectious disease policy that builds on the knowledge and infrastructure developed during the first two years of the pandemic response. An effective strategy will include generic elements – notably, science-informed strategic leadership, a Tiriti and equity focus, and an upgraded alert level system. We will also need a specific plan for infectious respiratory diseases, including measures to improve indoor air quality, a national

mask strategy, and an enhanced system to deliver vaccinations against seasonal respiratory infections.

Such an approach can have immediate and long-term benefits, protecting New Zealanders from endemic, epidemic and pandemic infections. We face a potentially difficult winter in 2022, with multiple infectious disease threats. There is an urgent need for integrated policy and action to prevent and control both Covid-19 and more familiar winter season respiratory infections. In the future, 2020 should be seen as the watershed year that triggered a transformative improvement in New Zealand's poor track record of infectious disease incidence and inequities.

Downloads



Author Biographies

Amanda Kvalsvig, University of Otago

Amanda Kvalsvig is an epidemiologist with a special interest in Covid-19 and other infectious diseases; she also has a background in clinical paediatrics.

Lucy Telfar Barnard, University of Otago

Lucy Telfar Barnard is an epidemiologist, specialising in interactions between respiratory disease, cold climate and poor housing.

Jennifer Summers, University of Otago

Jennifer Summers is a senior research fellow, specialising in epidemiology, public health and medical statistics.

Michael G. Baker, University of Otago

Michael Baker is a public health physician and professor in the Department of Public Health; he is a member of the Ministry of Health's Covid-19 Technical Advisory Group and is a leading expert in New Zealand's Covid-19 response.

The Institute for Governance and Policy Studies, School of Government at Victoria University of Wellington

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VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF
WELLINGTON
TE HERENGA WAKA