



News article

Ministry of Health welcomes the NZ Royal Commission COVID-19 Lessons Learned Final Report

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The Ministry of Health welcomes the publication of the NZ Royal Commission COVID-19 Lessons Learned Final Report, and the opportunity to strengthen our preparation for a future pandemic.

The Ministry is the Lead Response Agency to the Royal Commission's Final Report, which was presented to Parliament today, supporting Health Minister Simeon Brown as Lead Response Minister.

The Ministry's Deputy Director-General, Public Health Agency, Dr Andrew Old says the Ministry will now work with other public service agencies to prepare advice for the Government on responding to the report's recommendations.

'I want to thank all staff from across the health system and beyond who were part of the COVID-19 response, including those that gave evidence to the Inquiry,' Dr Old says.

'I also want to acknowledge the many New Zealanders that gave evidence to the Inquiry about the disruption and suffering they experienced during the pandemic, both because of the virus itself as well as the public health measures introduced to respond to it. As the Inquiry notes, both the pandemic and the response have left scars.

'Phase Two of the Inquiry assessed additional aspects of the response, looking at certain areas in more depth, and has implications across government. We will take time to carefully consider

these findings and how they can inform our collective ongoing work to strengthen New Zealand's preparedness for future pandemics.

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'The Commission found that, overall, New Zealand did well in responding to the pandemic, and the decisions taken and methods used during the COVID-19 response were considered and appropriate. In particular, the report highlighted the process for approving COVID-19 vaccines and monitoring safety was robust and effective.

'But it also highlighted areas where the actions of public servants fell short. Specifically, the report highlights a situation where the Commission found expert advice regarding COVID-19 vaccine mandates for 12–17-year-olds was delayed in being provided to Ministers or was not clearly communicated to the public in a timely way by the Ministry of Health.

'We acknowledge the Commission's finding that this was a significant failing. We recognise the importance of timely, evidence-based communication for maintaining public trust and confidence. In this instance, the standard was not met. We will be reflecting carefully on this finding, including reviewing our processes to assure ourselves that our advice is being delivered clearly and consistently.

'In this case, the advice was specifically about whether it was justified to impose a vaccine *mandate* on this age-group, based on the relative risk to health. The advice was not about balancing the overall benefits and risks of the Comirnaty COVID-19 vaccine for this age group. The Comirnaty COVID-19 vaccine remains approved for use in New Zealand, and in many countries, for this age group.

'Vaccination, including for COVID-19, remains a critical tool for protecting the health of New Zealanders. With New Zealand currently experiencing a rise in COVID-19 in the community, I encourage eligible people, and particularly those at greater risk of poor outcomes from COVID-19 to consider an additional dose.'

Additional information

- People aged 12 to 15 are eligible for a single initial dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Individuals aged 12 to 15 at high risk of severe illness, or who are pregnant, can get additional doses.
- If you are 30 years of age and over, you can also have an additional dose regardless of the number of vaccines you have already had.

- Additional doses are especially recommended for some groups, including people aged over 65, Māori and Pacific peoples over 50, residents in aged care or those with severe immunocompromise. To find out more about additional doses and eligibility at [Health New Zealand's website](https://www.healthnz.govt.nz/health-topics/immunisations/vaccines-aotearoa/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccine-boosters)[↗] (<https://www.healthnz.govt.nz/health-topics/immunisations/vaccines-aotearoa/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccine-boosters>).
- The Royal Commission was established on 9 December 2022 to examine New Zealand's response to COVID-19 and identify the lessons learned that should be applied in future.
- In November 2024, the Government announced an expansion on the scope of the Royal Commission of Inquiry to include a review of the key decisions taken by the Government in New Zealand's response to COVID-19 during 2021 and 2022.
- The final report can be found on the [Commission's website](https://www.covid19lessons.royalcommission.nz/)[↗] (<https://www.covid19lessons.royalcommission.nz/>)

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