

### Welcome

Welcome to the first Counties Manukau/Eastern Corridor MeNZB™ Newsletter. We aim to update you regularly on this very ambitious and worthwhile project.

### Background

New Zealand is in the 13<sup>th</sup> year of a Meningococcal B epidemic. The Government has committed \$200m to tackle the epidemic and the Ministry of Health (MoH) has responded by establishing a Meningococcal Vaccine Strategy.

The strategy includes development of a vaccine specific to the strain of meningococcal disease affecting New Zealanders. The vaccine will be offered free to all New Zealanders aged 19 years and under.

Subject to regulatory approval the national immunisation campaign is expected to begin in primary, intermediate and secondary schools in South Auckland and in the Eastern Corridor suburbs of Glen Innes, Hamlin, Mt Wellington, Otahuhu, Panmure Basin, Pt England and Tamaki in terms two, three and four.

### Toddler Vaccine Trial Results

Findings released today from the Meningococcal Vaccine Trials show further evidence that the vaccine is safe and vaccinated toddlers mount an immune response against New Zealand's epidemic strain of meningococcal disease. These are encouraging results,

according to principal investigator Professor Diana Lennon.

The trials, conducted by the University of Auckland in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Chiron Corporation of California are progressing well. New Zealand is still in the grip of a Meningococcal epidemic which has resulted in over 5000 cases and over 200 deaths since 1991. The results of the MeNZB™ vaccine were presented today at the WHO/UNICEF Workshop on the expanded programme on Immunisation in the Pacific in Auckland.

This arm of the continuing clinical trials involved 300 toddlers from all over Auckland who were aged between 16 to 24 months. They were each given three doses of vaccine at six weekly intervals. Their blood was tested at four to six weeks after each immunisation and shows a good antibody response. The vaccine was well tolerated with some side effects such as soreness at the vaccine site passing after a day or two for most toddlers.

The principal investigator of the trials, Professor Diana Lennon, who is Professor of Community Paediatrics at Auckland University, says that she is pleased that the vaccine is proving to be safe and immunogenic in the people we have tested so far. "This vaccine offers the best hope for overcoming an epidemic which carries such a huge cost, especially with our babies and young people", she said.

Trials involving toddlers are just one part of a long and rigorous evaluation looking at differing sectors of the New Zealand population.

Trials involving adults, children aged 8 to 12 years of age, toddlers aged 16 to 24 months of age and babies aged 6 to 8 months of age have been completed while trials involving babies at 6 to 10 weeks of age began in January.

The recruitment of the volunteers for the children's trials has been a long process, enlisting the support of Plunket, Maori and Pacific health providers, public health, school and community nurses and general practitioners. Pending regulatory approval, the national immunisation programme which will aim to vaccinate all New Zealanders aged 19 years and under is expected to begin in South Auckland in the middle of the year.

### Primary Care

PHO provider and community consultation has begun and a General Practice Advisory Group has been set up.

Primary Care education will begin shortly, with training packages and resources specifically designed for providers. We will keep you informed of progress.

### Community Effort

The recruitment of the volunteers for the children's trials has been a long process, enlisting the support of Plunket, Maori and Pacific health providers, public health, school and community nurses and general practitioners. Special efforts are being undertaken to engage the Maori and Pacific communities due to the high incidence of meningococcal disease in these communities.

The Meningococcal B Immunisation Campaign would like to thank all groups who have taken part in the children's trial.

## National Advisory Group Update

A recently established advisory group is bringing valuable advice and guidance to the planning of the proposed meningococcal B nationwide immunisation programme.

The National Roll Out Advisory Group was established early this year to provide advice and make recommendations to the Ministry of Health on the planning, preparation and implementation of a roll out of the MeNZB™ vaccine.

The group has a predominantly Māori and Pacific membership to reflect the disproportionate burden that meningococcal disease has on these communities and is chaired by the Deputy Director-General of Public Health, Dr Don Matheson.

Members also represent District Health Boards and bring experience from primary health and public health areas. Their advice will assist the Meningococcal Vaccine Strategy project team to reach the highest possible vaccination coverage among groups who are most at risk of meningococcal disease - Māori, Pacific and children from low socio-economic communities.

It is expected that the group will meet regularly and provide specific advice on issues such as the project's design, delivery models, workforce capacity, communication, resources and evaluation.

## Contact Us

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