



## Memorandum

**To/Ki a:** Associate Professor Megan Gibbons, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Division of Health Sciences

**From/Nā:** Working Group on Infectious Diseases Screening and Immunisation Policy Chair, Professor Peter McIntyre

**Date/Te rā:** 17 May 2024

**Re/Te Kaupapa:** **Statement on Te Whatu Ora COVID pre-employment vaccination policy (July 2023)**

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### Background

Te Whatu Ora released a policy on COVID vaccination requirements for new employees in July 2023. The policy also applied to students and trainees, for whom responsibility for compliance rested with their responsible institution. The policy recommended, but did not mandate, that all staff and students in Te Whatu Ora facilities have received at least 3 approved COVID-19 vaccine doses. However, the policy did mandate a risk assessment if fewer than 3 doses had been received to document risk to the individual health care worker of severe disease if they acquired SARS-CoV-2 infection in a Te Whatu Ora facility, with satisfactory fit testing for a N-95 mask also required.

This Te Whatu Ora policy impacted on all Schools within the Division of Health Sciences with students undertaking placements at Te Whatu Ora facilities in any part of New Zealand. A statement indicating how it should be implemented across the Division was issued on August 28<sup>th</sup> 2023. This included N95 mask fit-testing if documentation of 3 COVID vaccine doses was not available.

### Current status

Unfortunately, it has not been possible to obtain official advice about timing of review of the 2023 Te Whatu Ora policy which is not due to be issued until July 2024. The only COVID-19 vaccine available from March 2024 is the XBB1.5 monovalent vaccine. Adults 18 to 29 years who are not at high risk of severe COVID-19 – the vast majority of health science students - are eligible for a third dose using the XBB1.5 vaccine only if they have previously received two doses of a COVID vaccine but have not received a third dose.

Te Whatu Ora facilities have now discontinued universal staff mask-wearing. N95 masks are only used when caring for patients in airborne isolation, and there is no current ongoing program of N95-mask fit testing at most facilities. Therefore, it no longer makes sense to require N95 mask fitting for health science students.

### Updated advice

In accordance with the Infectious Diseases Screening and Immunisation Policy, it is prudent for students undertaking health science courses with patient contact to have received all COVID-19 vaccine doses for which they are eligible. Any students who have not received a third dose are advised to obtain an XBB1.5 vaccine dose if at least 6 months have elapsed since any previous infection. Students who have health conditions putting them at risk of severe disease due to SARS-CoV-2 infection <https://info.health.nz/immunisations/vaccines-aotearoa/covid-19-vaccines/covid-19-vaccine-boosters/> are eligible for additional doses and should obtain specific health advice. Other students are not currently eligible for an XBB1.5 dose.

***Given the long period likely to have elapsed since receipt of a third dose of the pre-XBB vaccine, student health in Dunedin and health advisory services in Christchurch and Wellington will no longer be requiring documentation of COVID-19 vaccine status or arranging mask fit testing.***

*Members of the Infectious Disease Screening and Immunisation Policy Committee:*

Professor Peter McIntyre (HoD Women's and Children's Health and paediatrician specialising in infectious diseases Chair), Professor James Ussher (Department of Microbiology and Immunology and Microbiologist Awanui Laboratories), A/Professor Michael Maze, (Respiratory and Infectious Disease Physician, Christchurch), Dr Brendan Arnold (General and Infectious Disease Physician, Te Whatu Ora Southern), Dr Prue Orchiston (General Practitioner, Student Health Service)

Ex-officio members: Ms Margaret Perley and Ms Melanie Philip Student Health Services