

MEDIA RELEASE - 11/04/2024

PSNZ Stands Against Changes to Free Influenza Vaccine Eligibility

Te Kahui Matai Arotamariki o Aotearoa, the Paediatric Society of New Zealand (PSNZ), opposes the recent government decision to alter the eligibility criteria for free influenza vaccinations. The modifications have resulted in the discontinuation of funded vaccines for children under 12 and for Māori and Pacific peoples aged between 50 and 65.

Dr Owen Sinclair, President of PSNZ and National Immunisation Taskforce Chair, expresses his concern, “Influenza is deadly and expensive, but vaccines and prevention are safe and cheap. It is much cheaper to stop illnesses in the first place than treat their effects.” Sinclair adds, “Targeting those at higher risk is money well spent; saving just a handful of costly ICU admissions could pay for the entire program.”

This policy change disregards the professional advice and advocacy of PSNZ members who, understanding the epidemiological and population health benefits, have consistently supported the expansion of influenza vaccination coverage.

Key Points:

- **Opposition to Funding Cuts:** PSNZ opposes the recent eligibility changes for free influenza vaccines, highlighting the decision's potential to exacerbate the seasonal influenza burden.
- **Epidemiological Impact:** Influenza significantly strains New Zealand's health system annually, with children, Māori, and Pacific communities being among the most affected due to higher rates of transmission and severity.
- **Economic Perspective:** Removing funding for these key demographics will not only fail to conserve resources but will likely increase healthcare costs associated with the treatment of influenza complications.

PSNZ urges the government to re-evaluate the changes and advocates for a healthcare strategy that prioritises preventative measures to safeguard the health of children in Aotearoa and its most vulnerable populations.

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Contact:

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