



MEDIA RELEASE

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Port workers' vaccination a milestone towards protection

Front-line Port Nelson and Port Marlborough workers will be the first in our region to receive COVID-19 vaccine, starting on 1 March and 3 March respectively.

The people they live with will also be vaccinated and, with the two doses required for all parties and three weeks required in between doses, the complete programme will take several weeks.

Dr Nick Baker, Nelson Marlborough Health Chief Medical Officer, describes the event as a significant milestone in New Zealand's fight against COVID-19.

"This is the first phase of New Zealand's largest-ever immunisation programme, and the much-anticipated next crucial phase in our fight against COVID-19.

"Our frontline port workers, such as pilots and stevedores, can potentially come into direct contact with crew on international vessels. This makes them some of the most vulnerable members of our community in terms of their exposure to the virus.

"They, alongside MIQ cleaners, the nurses who undertake health checks in MIQ, security staff, customs and border officials, airline staff and hotel workers, have worked tirelessly to keep all New Zealanders safe and are rightly the first to receive the vaccine," Dr Baker says.

Approximately 400 port workers from the Nelson Tasman region and 1000 people who they live with will be offered the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. In Marlborough, approximately 100 port workers from the Marlborough region and 300 people who they live with will be offered the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. This vaccine was approved by Medsafe (the New Zealand Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Authority) in early February and has been transported in special containers to the South Island from the ultra-low temperature (ULT) storage facility in Auckland.

The Ministry of Health, which is leading the COVID-19 immunisation programme, has worked closely with Nelson Marlborough Health (NMH) to launch the programme in our area. This first round of vaccinations will be delivered by trained vaccinators from Nelson Bays Primary Health, Marlborough Primary Health and Māori health provider Te Piki Oranga. These organisations are hosting education sessions for workers and the people they live with, before vaccination begins.

"The next group of people to be offered vaccination, will be many frontline healthcare and disability workers, plus those most at risk from COVID-19, such as older people or those with medical conditions that make them vulnerable if infected," Dr Baker says.

“We appreciate our community will want to know when they’ll be able to get their vaccine. While we can’t confirm the exact timeframe we have been assured that there will be enough vaccine for everyone in our region, so no-one will miss out.

“We appreciate that people will have questions about the vaccine. It’s important that people get the information they need to make an informed decision from reliable sources – I encourage people to talk to their GP, practice nurse, Māori healthcare provider or other healthcare professional about vaccination if they have questions. If they prefer to do their own research, there is some very useful information on the Unite against COVID-19 and Ministry of Health websites. A national campaign aiming to inform people about vaccination and the options available to them is due to start soon,” Dr Baker says.

Hugh Morrison, Port Nelson’s Chief Executive, has high praise for the port’s border workers and others who are being tested either weekly or fortnightly for COVID–19.

“While the tests are not painful, they are not necessarily comfortable. To regularly turn up for testing as our team has done is a credit to how seriously they take the responsibility to keep their families, mates, and community safe.

“Port Nelson has been working with NMH to help facilitate the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccinations here at the port. We are very pleased that our frontline border workers will now have access to the COVID-19 vaccine.

“Port Nelson fully supports the government and local health organisations in their approach to the vaccine roll-out. We will be supporting all our team to get vaccinated by ensuring they have access to information and expertise to make their personal decisions. I will certainly be taking the opportunity to vaccinate once it is my turn,” Hugh Morrison says.

For more information about the vaccine roll-out, or about the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine: www.health.govt.nz/our-work/covid-19-vaccines or email covid19media@dpmc.govt.nz