



Waitematā
District Health Board
Best Care for Everyone

DHB Board Office

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Dear [REDACTED]

Re: OIA request - Number of healthcare workers who have contracted measles, whooping cough or flu

Thank you for your Official Information Act request received 22 October seeking information from Waitematā District Health Board (DHB) about the number of health workers who have contracted vaccine-preventable diseases.

Before responding to your specific questions, it may be useful to provide some context about our services to assist in the interpretation of the information provided.

Waitematā DHB serves a population of more than 630,000 across North Shore, Waitakere and Rodney areas, the largest and one of the most rapidly growing DHBs in the country. We are the largest employer in the district, employing around 7,500 people across more than 80 different locations.

In addition to providing services to our own population we are also the metropolitan Auckland provider of forensic psychiatry, child disability services, child community dental services and community alcohol and drug services.

We proactively encourage our staff to ensure they are vaccinated to protect themselves, their patients and the public. We offer MMR and other vaccinations for free to all staff.

In response to your specific questions, please see the following:

- 1. How many DHB health workers have contracted vaccine-preventable illnesses such as measles, whooping cough or flu while employed by DHBs in the past decade?**

Under the Privacy Act, this is confidential patient information which, as an employer, we do not have access to. To provide some context, all a GP is legally required to write on a medical certificate is that the person is unfit for work between the given dates, not whether it is illness or injury-related.

An employer cannot ask a GP or other medical professional for an employee's medical records, or information about an employee's health, without permission from the employee. Furthermore, employers cannot request that an employee discloses information about any health conditions that arise during employment.

Therefore, we are declining this element of your request under Section 18(g) of the Official Information Act as the information requested is not held by Waitematā DHB.

You have the right to seek an independent review of this decision by contacting the Office of the Ombudsman via www.ombudsman.parliament.nz.

2. Whether those workers had been vaccinated.

As you will know from your own news reports, there have been three health workers at Waitematā DHB who have reported as having contracted measles this year. Due to the small number of staff involved, their identities will be known amongst other staff and the local community. Disclosing information regarding their vaccination status would intrude on their privacy. We do not believe the importance of knowing their vaccination status outweighs the importance of protecting their privacy.

Therefore, we are declining this element of your request under Section 9(2)(a) of the Official Information Act, to protect the privacy of natural persons.

You have the right to seek an independent review of any of the decisions taken in providing this response by contacting the Office of the Ombudsman via www.ombudsman.parliament.nz.

3. How many patients, if any, have contracted vaccine-preventable illnesses from health workers or other patients while in hospital in the past decade.

Influenza is the only vaccine-preventable disease that meets the case definition for hospital-acquired infections. Unwell visitors and staff could possibly have been a source of cross-transmission of influenza virus within our hospital but this is only anecdotal.

The following influenza cases were patient-to-patient cross-transmission as, epidemiologically, they were able to be linked by time, place and strain of influenza.

This information is contained in our year-end reports, which are publicly available in Waitematā DHB Hospital and Community (HAC) meeting minutes on our website. Please note, there is no influenza data prior to 2014.

Year	Number of hospital-acquired influenza cases
2014	0
2015	6
2016	5
2017	104
2018	34
2019 (Jan-Sept)	102

The main factors for the increases in hospital-acquired influenza rates in both 2017 and 2019 are due to the increased influenza activity in the community in these years and the mutation of the influenza virus as reported by ESR's (the Institute of Environmental Science and Research) Influenza Intelligence reports. In 2018, there was a low rate of influenza cases nationally.

Waitematā DHB, like other agencies across the state sector, supports the open disclosure of information to assist the public's understanding of how we are delivering publicly-funded healthcare.

This includes the proactive publication of anonymised Official Information Act responses on our website from 10 working days after they have been released.

If you feel that there are good reasons why your response should not be made publicly available, we will be happy to consider this.

Yours sincerely



Fiona McCarthy
Director Human Resources
Waitematā District Health Board