

Immunisation

What this is about...

Improving immunisation coverage to levels that will be protective for both the individual child and the whole community is probably the most cost-effective treatment available in the health sector, especially as it costs more to care for sick children in hospital than it does to vaccinate them.⁸⁸

What did we find ?

Reliable regional or city wide data of incidence of immunisation is not available, highlighting a significant gap in data. However, in 1996 the Northern Regional Health Authority commissioned an immunisation coverage survey in Auckland and Northland.⁸⁹ The survey estimated that 63.1% of children were fully immunised by age 2 years; a modest but not statistically significant increase on the 55.4% coverage estimated in a 1992 survey. It also found that Maori and Pacific Islands children were less likely to be fully immunised at age 2 years compared to other children (44.6% and 53.1% respectively, compared to 72.3%).

The survey results indicate that immunisation coverage may be improved by measures which facilitate physical access to immunisation services, promotion of the first immunisation event, promotion of the use of Well Child Health Books and Immunisation Certificates, and greater use of opportunistic immunisation.

Factors which reduce immunisation coverage include transience of families, access to, affordability and appropriateness of primary health care, awareness and education, and socio-economic status. Immunisation programmes which have successfully targeted 'hard to reach' children have the following features in common:

- provider commitment
- a locally developed, systematic approach
- good information systems
- well developed teams
- culturally appropriate workers, or the ability to link with appropriate community workers
- a capacity to visit children at home.

Parents' opposition to immunisation also impacts on immunisation coverage. However, successive surveys show that less than 5% of parents are opposed to immunisation. Therefore, it is possible that there is a big group of people who would agree to immunisation but who are not being offered the service in ways that encourage uptake.⁹⁰

88 National Health Committee. Action on immunisation of New Zealand's 'hard to reach' children. News and Issues 15. www.nhc.govt.nz

89 Rainger, W., Solomon, N., Jones, N. et al. 1998. Immunisation coverage and risk factors for immunisation failure in Auckland and Northland. The New Zealand Public Health Report. 5 (7).

90 National Health Committee. Action on immunisation of New Zealand's 'hard to reach' children. News and Issues 15, www.nhc.govt.nz