

DOT-POINT BRIEF FOR MINISTER OF DEFENCE**VACCINE MANDATES****Purpose**

1. The purpose of this brief is to provide Defence talking points in relation to the MBIE Vaccine Mandate Cabinet paper and matters applicable to members of the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) and Defence Areas.

What is the NZDF currently doing?

2. To date the NZDF has directed the application of a range of force health protection and control measures within the Govt Alert Level system. These have been developed through centralised internal risk assessment processes. These measures have been designed to protect the force and preserve the NZDF's ability to deliver outputs, specifically operations, emergency response and national contingency tasks, while managing potential COVID-19 impacts. The emphasis has been on reducing the likelihood of COVID-19 entering an NZDF place and NZDF camps and bases and reducing the impact should an infectious case occur. Reducing the impact of COVID-19 on the NZDF workforce is central to output delivery, force preparedness and wider resilience. Measures have included:

- Daily screening of those entering the workplace for symptoms and exposure risk.
- Workplace environments set up to manage distancing and ventilated spaces where possible.
- Workforce separation through bubbles and shift management to reduce exposed numbers.
- Masks and communal area management to reduce exposures.
- Minimising movement between areas of different risk and limiting external contacts, for example, limiting visitors to Defence Areas.
- Internal vaccination programme making COVID-19 vaccination available to all NZDF members and employees (including civilian staff).
- COVID-19 vaccination added to all uniformed staff service health readiness requirements.

3. Despite these measures, as case prevalence in the community increases there is an increasing risk of COVID-19 entering an NZDF workplace or communal living and working location. Vaccination status adds an additional assurance that assists in reducing the likelihood of an individual contracting and transmitting COVID-19 in the workplace. Ensuring that all personnel present in any workplace are fully vaccinated is a significantly valuable tool in reducing the likelihood and impact of COVID-19 exposures on NZDF business continuity.

4. Following a operational health and safety assessment based on the prevailing threat situation in Auckland, the Chief of Defence Force (CDF) has now mandated full vaccination status for entry into all Auckland Prescribed Defence Areas. This encompasses all members of the Armed Forces, civil staff, contractors and subcontractors and their employees, volunteer workers and visitors.

Why does the NZDF need to be mandated?

5. The NZDF is a contingent force that responds to short-notice emergencies in NZ and overseas. NZDF capabilities are dependent on the ability of its integrated workforce of 12,700 uniformed and civilian personnel to be able to respond when required. In many cases the NZDF capacity and capability to respond is provided by specialised force elements with limited capacity to replace members who are incapacitated.
6. The NZDF is a 'blended' workforce consisting of uniformed personnel, civilian staff and contractors. It needs to be able to operate flexibly with military personnel ready to move quickly between support and frontline roles and with civilian staff and contractors providing enabling support. COVID-19 presents a very real risk of severely impacting the NZDF's ability to provide this response and its unique set of capabilities by disabling elements of its wider workforce.
7. Business continuity across multiple concurrent integrated workplaces is critical to meet output expectations.
8. The NZDF is unique in that its workforce largely works out of a small number of Defence Areas (Camps and Bases). NZDF Defence Areas are complex workplaces, including international points of entry (a port and two airports) and include accommodation and dining in the same area as the workplace. Large numbers of NZDF personnel (including civilians and contractors) live and work in close proximity, in barracks, with shared ablution and dining facilities, creating a unique environment that is vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19. This means that an outbreak of COVID-19 on a Camp or Base, regardless of the employment group of the source, has the potential to impact a range of capabilities including the ability to operate aircraft and ships and presents a key risk to the NZDF's preparedness and ability to respond.
9. The NZDF is now transitioning to a COVID-19 operating environment management approach with measures put in place to reduce and control the effects of COVID-19 within the NZDF given the expectation of future higher community prevalence. This includes mandated and baselined force health protection measures, updated outbreak management plans, a revised risk assessment and management structure, in addition to a range of continuity provisions. This protection applies across all work places in Defence Areas and all activities conducted by NZDF members and employees.
10. It is assessed that mandatory vaccination status would play a key role in contributing to reducing risk through enhanced force health protection and maintenance of business continuity and output generation.
11. NZDF personnel must be protected from the likelihood of serious illness in the workplace and they should minimise the risk of being a vector to catch and transmit COVID-19 to any vulnerable communities including those they may come into contact with when responding offshore. Protecting the integrated civilian and uniformed workforce through mandating vaccination is seen as significantly mitigating these risks.
12. NZDF's concentration in Camps and Bases presents a different situation to the more widely distributed workforce of other 'frontline' public facing organisations such as Police and Fire and Emergency. Our workforce is closely integrated and given the nature of the viral threat, no real control measures would be effective in separating the risk according to uniformed status or particular role in a Defence Area.
13. We have seen this example in some COVID-19 cases last year, where we had civilian employees in Defence House infected through a transmission chain from a uniformed person deployed on Op PROTECT in Auckland. Viral transmission will create impact due to the nature of the NZDF's integrated working environment regardless of the original exposure point.

14. **Defence House.** While the NZDF is the anchor tenant of Defence House it is a building in which the NZDF works closely in shared spaces with a number of Government agencies including the Ministry of Defence. This Cabinet paper does not ask for Ministry of Defence or other agency personnel to be included in the mandate. There may however be third party consequences imposed by the NZDF.

15. The ability for the Ministry of Defence to require vaccination if required by a third party such as the NZDF is critical. The Ministry works in an integrated way with the NZDF and would need to be able to enter and work in Defence Areas, particularly Defence House, which is their primary place of work. Staff also regularly visit NZDF camps and bases in the regions.

How many people will be impacted?

16. A vaccination mandate would extend to:

- approximately 9,700 Regular Force uniformed staff.
- Approximately 4,000 civilians and contractors (variable numbers but up to 1,000 contractors).
- Approximately 2,800 Reserve Force personnel as part of individual readiness requirements if an individual is to be deployed or if on duty in a Prescribed Defence Area.

17. To prepare for this the NZDF has:

- Enacted a wide range of force health protection measures.
- Required vaccinations as part of health readiness measures for all Regular Force personnel.
- Strongly encouraged and facilitated access to vaccination for Defence civilians, contractors and Reserve Force personnel.
- Mandated vaccination status for entry into all Prescribed Defence Areas in Auckland in response to assessed rising threat levels related to increasing community prevalence.

Now What - Future Plans.

18. Should vaccinated status be mandated for all NZDF personnel including the wider workforce, it is likely that the NZDF will follow a similar employment process to that being applied to sectors of the NZ workforce who are already under a mandated vaccination status.

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