

4 March 2022

D B Letter

By email: fyi-request-18455-6ede4e29@requests.fyi.org.nz
Ref: H202201172

Tēnā koe

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) on 5 February 2022 for information regarding vaccination status and COVID-19 related deaths. Your request is responded to in turn.

Is vaccination status an important consideration when determining cause of death in deceased covid cases?

The number of COVID-19 related deaths posted on the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) website is the number of people who had COVID-19 infection at the time of death, regardless of the cause of death.

For the purposes of recording the underlying cause of death, the World Health Organization's (WHO) rules and guidelines are followed. These rules and guidelines are set out in the ICD-10, Volume 2 Instruction Manual. An electronic version of the Instruction Manual can be found under the Info Tab on the WHO website here: www.icd.who.int/browse10/2019/en#/.

The WHO has issued additional guidance for classifying deaths from COVID-19 infection, which can be found here: www.getinthepicture.org/news/who-publishes-international-guidelines-classifying-covid-19-cause-death. These guidelines are followed by the Ministry's mortality coding team for classifying New Zealand COVID-19 deaths. In line with guidance from the WHO, vaccination is not considered as part of the classification process.

In addition, vaccination status is not recorded on death certificates.

Does vaccination status change the way in which deceased patients are determined to be deaths as a result of covid-19 and in which way might this be so?

Could you please provide me with example copies of death certificates used in training for determining cause of death vaccinated with covid-19 and unvaccinated with covid-19.

Data regarding COVID-19 deaths is provided to the Ministry by the Public Health Units, via the district health boards (DHBs). Where a person is diagnosed with COVID-19 and receiving medical care, and they later die, in most cases those deaths will be signed off by the attending medical practitioner. Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(g)(i) of the Act, as the information requested is not held by the Ministry and there are no grounds for believing it is held by another agency subject to the Act. You may wish to contact the DHBs directly for more information.

Please note, the Chief Coroner has advised that if a person dies from the effects of COVID-19, the death is treated as a death from natural causes (much like a death from influenza) and as such would not be reported to a coroner. However, if the cause of death is not known, or the death may have been caused by an adverse reaction to medication (such as a vaccine), a coroner will take jurisdiction and investigate the cause and circumstances of the death.

Under section 28(3) of the Act you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by calling 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Ministry of Health website at: www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Robyn Carey', with a horizontal line underneath.

Robyn Carey
Chief Medical Officer
Office of the Chief Clinical Officers