

16 November 2023

c174485

Colin Whiting

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Tēnā koe Colin

Thank you for your request of 16 October 2023 to the Department of Corrections – Ara Poutama Aotearoa, requesting information about clause 9 exemptions from the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Vaccination) Order 2021. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

As an organisation, our top priority is safety – of the public, our staff, visitors to our sites and the people we are managing in prisons and the community. Corrections had a number of controls in place to minimise risks relating to the transmission of COVID-19, including health screening for every person who enters a prison. The secure and controlled nature of the prison environment means we were able to quickly isolate prisoners as required and restrict their movements.

People in prison are some of the most susceptible to COVID-19, due to many being vulnerable due to existing health conditions, and the ease of transmission that COVID-19 could have had in the prison environment. Internationally, we have seen the devastating impact of COVID-19 in prison environments, with many prison staff and prisoners becoming seriously unwell, and a number of deaths occurring.

Since March 2020 we put in place extensive plans to manage any risk to our staff or the people we manage, and we have continued to refine these plans in order to do everything we can to keep our staff and the people we manage safe from COVID-19. This includes robust infection prevention and control plans, with detailed record keeping for both staff and visitors to our sites to enable fast and thorough contact tracing – including the use of proximity detection technology to assist with contact tracing.

This infection and control measures that were implemented included mandatory vaccination requirements for staff and visitors, as well as the use of thermal cameras to screen for high temperatures, health screening on entry, contact tracing, separating new arrivals for their first 14 days, and the use of personal protective equipment.

You requested:

*1 : How many exemptions were given by the 'Department of Corrections' to Corrections staff, under clause 9 of the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Vaccinations) Order 2021 (version as of 25 Oct 2021) ? As quoted below.*

Under clause 9, the Chief Executive authorised 220 Corrections staff to return to work following their recovery from COVID-19. It is important to note that public health guidance discourages vaccination for six months following an infection of COVID-19. More information can be found on the Ministry of Health website at <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-vaccines/recommended-timing-gaps-different-covid-19-vaccines/getting-covid-19-vaccine-if-youve-had-covid-19>

*2: Also how many exemptions were given by the Department of Corrections to staff working in Prisons for private contractors, under clause 9 of the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Vaccinations) Order 2021 (version as of 25 Oct 2021) ? As quoted below.*

No exemptions were given by Corrections to private contractors under clause 9 of the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Vaccinations) Order 2021.

I trust the information provided is of assistance. I encourage you to raise any concerns about this response with Corrections. Alternatively, you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Ngā mihi



Leigh Marsh  
National Commissioner