

New Zealand government, media discourage vaccination amid COVID wave

Tom Peters
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New Zealand is currently experiencing a spike in COVID-19 cases, with 50 people hospitalised with the coronavirus in the first week of March and 82 in the second week. Test kits are not freely available, so there is no reliable data on the number of people who have the virus.

Since July last year the Ministry of Health has not provided updates on the number of people dying each week from COVID. It reports there have been 5,630 COVID-related deaths since the pandemic began, up from around 4,500 in December 2024. In other words, COVID is linked to around 1,000 deaths per year—twice as many as influenza.

The vast majority of these deaths occurred after the previous Labour Party-led government, led by Jacinda Ardern, caved in to the demands of big business and abandoned its elimination strategy, which had kept New Zealand almost entirely free from COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021. The virus spread rapidly in 2022, infecting millions of people and overwhelming hospital emergency departments.

The media, the National Party-led government and the entire political establishment have almost stopped talking about COVID, leading fewer people to get regular booster vaccines. While they do not stop the spread of COVID, vaccines can significantly reduce the severity of the virus.

According to official data, nearly 30 percent of people aged over 18 have not received any boosters following their initial vaccination course. Among people over 50 years old, who face greater risks of severe disease from infection, 43.1 percent have not received a second booster.

Auckland University COVID modeller Michael Plank and vaccinologist Helen Petousis-Harris wrote on March 17 that “the current wave likely reflects a

combination of waning immunity, increased indoor contact in schools and workplaces, and the continued evolution of variants that can partially evade existing immune protection.”

The ongoing public health crisis should be addressed by mounting an information campaign on vaccines, offering free COVID tests, and promoting masking, social distancing and air filtration in businesses and public buildings.

None of these steps are being taken. Instead, the government agency Health NZ has released new guidelines aimed at discouraging people from getting regular boosters.

People over the age of 30 are still eligible for a free dose every six months, but Health NZ changed its guidelines on March 11 to say that boosters are “not generally recommended” for healthy adults under 65. People aged 65 to 75 are now advised to get a booster once a year. Only people aged over 75, or who have serious underlying conditions, are advised to continue getting six-monthly boosters.

According to *Newsroom*, “These updates led some pharmacists to assume the new recommendations meant eligibility for the vaccine had changed,” leading to some people seeking boosters being turned away.

Professor Helen Petousis-Harris told the Science Media Centre she was concerned that people may be deterred from getting vaccinated, including those who face higher risks from COVID. She added that for people under 65 years old, getting regular boosters reduced the risk of getting Long COVID.

The debilitating condition—which can impact multiple organs including the lungs and brain—affected 185,000 people in New Zealand during the 12 months ending July 2025, according to the Ministry of Health. The risk of developing Long COVID increases with each

infection.

The government and media, meanwhile, are actively spreading disinformation about the supposed risks of vaccination.

On March 10 a 1,058-page report was released on the second phase of the state's Royal Commission of Inquiry into the response to COVID-19. According to *Stuff*, it “broadly endorsed” the former government's actions—both the initial elimination strategy and its abandonment in favour of what was, essentially, a policy of mass infection. The first phase of the inquiry released its report in late 2024, which also justified the dropping of all public health measures.

Health Minister Simeon Brown, however, denounced the previous government for maintaining lockdowns for too long and spending too much money on the public health response. He added that the inquiry found health officials' “advice relating to applying a two-dose vaccine mandate to 12-to-17-year-olds due to myocarditis risk was not made sufficiently clear when the mandates were introduced.”

In mid-2021 the regulatory agency Medsafe approved two vaccine doses for teenagers, with mandates applying only to a small number working in specific occupations. In December that year, the government's Vaccine Technical Advisory Group told ministers that a second dose for this group “may add an unnecessary risk of myocarditis.”

This media is now attacking Labour leader Chris Hipkins, who was the minister for COVID-19 response in 2021 and 2022, for not publicising and acting on the advice. One article by *Stuff* provocatively asked: “Did the previous government know that their Covid vaccine mandate posed a risk to teenagers, and keep it anyway?”

The *New Zealand Herald's* Ryan Bridge declared on March 27 that there were about 30,000 teenagers who had not yet had their second dose “at the time that the [previous] government reportedly knew that there was a risk to their health from having it.”

Foreign Minister Winston Peters, leader of the right-wing NZ First Party, told the *Herald*: “It is an outrageous situation where many tens of thousands of children and teenagers were exposed to the known risks of having two vaccine doses yet the public, and more importantly the parents, were not told.”

All these statements are deeply misleading.

Myocarditis (inflammation of the heart) is a very rare complication from the COVID-19 vaccine; all the scientific evidence demonstrates that young people face a much greater risk of developing myocarditis—and many other severe and potentially fatal conditions—from COVID-19 infection.

A study published by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in April 2022, based on data from millions of children and adults, concluded: “The incidence of cardiac outcomes after mRNA COVID-19 vaccination was highest for males aged 12–17 years after the second vaccine dose; however, within this demographic group, the risk for cardiac outcomes was 1.8–5.6 times as high after SARS-CoV-2 infection than after the second vaccine dose.”

For this teenage cohort, myocarditis or pericarditis occurred in approximately 50 people per 100,000 after COVID-19 infection, compared with 22 people per 100,000 after a second dose of the vaccine.

According to Health NZ data, 6,661 children and teenagers have been hospitalised with COVID and 28 have died of COVID-related causes.

The media and politicians have buried these facts. The government is preparing to follow the criminal policies of the Trump administration in the US, and other governments, which are restricting access to life-saving vaccines. While it starves the healthcare sector of funding, placing profits ahead of lives, the ruling class is working to undermine basic public health principles.



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