



Immunisation Guidelines for

# Early Childhood Services and Primary Schools

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Early childhood services and primary schools have an important role in protecting the health and wellbeing of the children in their care. A proven way of preventing disease is immunisation. Immunisation is particularly important for early childhood services and schools as diseases can easily spread where many children spend time close together.

This booklet explains the requirements that the Health (Immunisation) Regulations 1995 place on staff and boards of trustees of early childhood services and primary schools.



## Immunisation

While nearly all children are immunised, many have not completed the course needed to get the full benefit of immunisation. The 2005 National Immunisation Coverage Survey found that 91 percent of children got their first immunisation, but only 77 percent were fully immunised by the age of two years. The national immunisation coverage target is 95 percent of children fully immunised by the age of two years. Parents are encouraged to make sure their child has completed their immunisations before starting at an early childhood service or school. The requirement to provide an Immunisation Certificate means that parents and the doctor review and may update a child's immunisation.

Parents remain free to choose whether or not to immunise their child, but they must make a choice. Those who choose immunisation need to ensure that their child is fully immunised to ensure protection.

# The Childhood Immunisation Programme

Immunisation is available, free of charge, to protect children from serious diseases – hepatitis B, diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough), tetanus, Hib (*Haemophilus influenzae* type b, which was the most common cause of meningitis before the Hib vaccine became available), polio, measles, mumps, rubella, pneumococcal and human papillomavirus (girls only).

Immunisation involves giving a vaccine that is injected. The vaccine is a modified form of the virus or bacteria that causes the disease. The vaccine prepares the immune system to produce antibodies and special cells which will fight the disease before it develops into a more serious illness.

The early childhood immunisations are given at six weeks, three months, five months, 15 months and four years, before starting school. It is important that children complete their immunisation course to get full protection. Other immunisations are given at year 7 and 8 levels at school or by their general practitioner or practice nurse.

More detailed information on immunisation, including the risks of the diseases compared with the risks of immunisation, is available in the *Childhood Immunisation* booklet (code HE1323) available from the public health service.



## The Health (Immunisation) Regulations 1995

These regulations require all early childhood services and primary schools to keep an Immunisation Register for children born from 1 January 1995. A register is a tool to help reduce the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases in early childhood services or primary schools as well as the wider community. It also encourages completion of immunisation for the many children who have not received all the recommended immunisations, but are not opposed to immunisation.

## The Immunisation Certificate

The certificate shows whether a child is fully immunised or not. If not, it shows which, if any, of the diseases the child is protected against. The certificate must be completed and signed by the child's doctor or practice nurse. The certificate is completed at age 15 months and again after the immunisation at 4 years is given, before the child starts school.

The certificate is the only source of information that can be used when entering the child's status on the register.

The Immunisation Certificate can be found towards the back of the Well Child-Tamariki Ora Health Book given to parents of every child at birth. If the book is lost, parents and caregivers can get another book or separate certificate from their doctor or nurse. A book and/or certificate can be obtained at any time for a child, including for those born overseas.

## Responsibilities under the regulations

The regulations cover all early childhood services and primary schools, including independent schools and Kura Kaupapa Māori. Early childhood services and schools must keep a register where they copy the information from the certificate. Only information from the certificate can be recorded on the register, and exactly as shown on the certificate. If the child's certificate is not shown, then this is recorded. However, parents can be asked to contact their child's doctor or practice nurse so the child can have their immunisations brought up to date and/or a certificate completed.

## The School Immunisation Register

Copies of the Immunisation Register are available from the nearest public health service. Early childhood services and schools may choose to develop their own Immunisation Register but the same information must be recorded so that the children's immunisation status can be quickly found. The information should be transferred when the child moves to another early childhood service or primary school. Names of children who have left can be removed from the register. Enrolment software can also be used, when suitably modified, as an immunisation register.

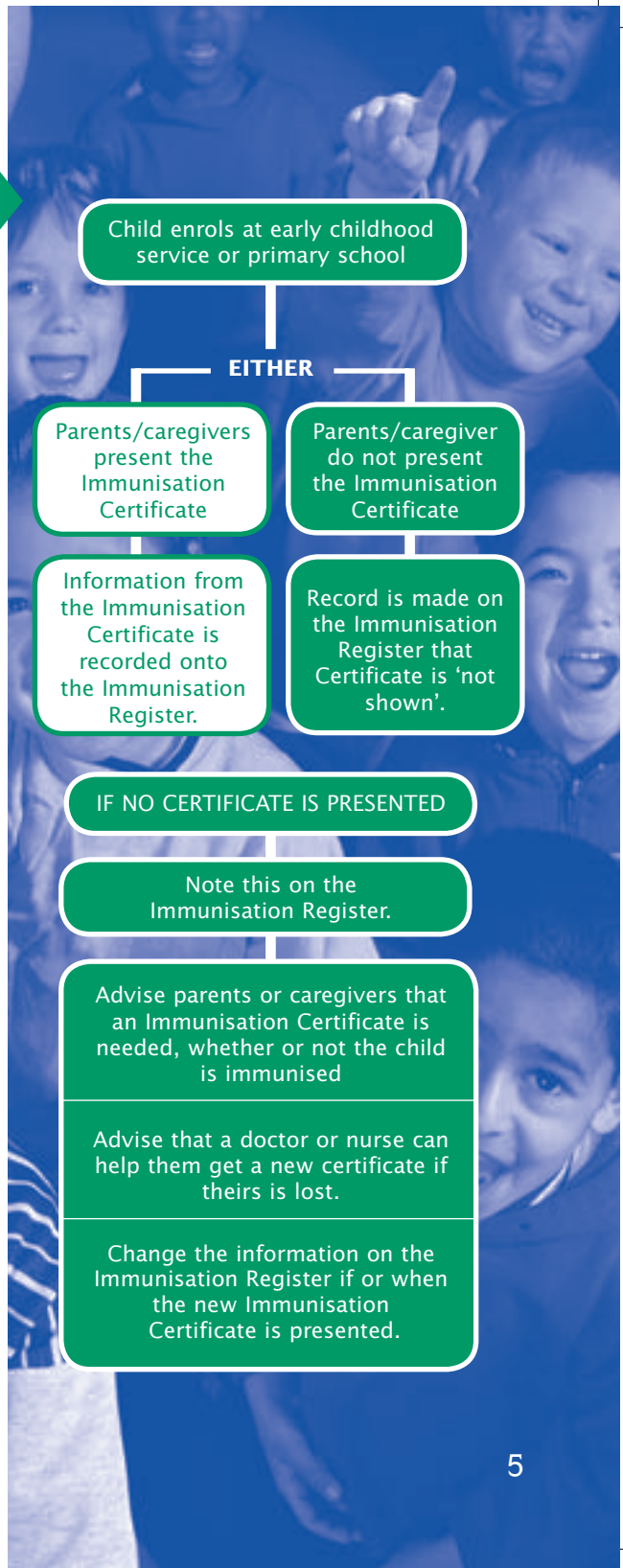
## Completing the school immunisation register

The early childhood service or primary school has the responsibility to ensure that the parent or caregiver of a child is requested to provide the Certificate and to record the information from the Certificate (or the fact that it was not shown) on the Register.

## The National Immunisation Register

All children born in New Zealand are given the opportunity to enrol on the National Immunisation Register (NIR).

This provides a record of a child's immunisations. This does not affect the requirement to keep a school immunisation register. For further information on the NIR, talk to your doctor, public health service or access information on the Ministry of Health website. [www.moh.govt.nz/immunisation.html](http://www.moh.govt.nz/immunisation.html)



# Outbreak Control

If a child in an early childhood service or primary school develops a vaccine-preventable disease (except tetanus), then all other children who are not protected are at risk.

In case of an outbreak of one of these diseases, early childhood service or school principals and the Medical Officer of Health have the authority to require that the child with the illness remain at home, to prevent the spread of infection\*.

The Medical Officer of Health may also contact the parents or caregivers of unimmunised children and ask them to keep the child at home till the infectious period has passed. The authority to keep children at home if they can spread disease has been in place for many years, but is not used often.

Doctors are required to notify the Medical Officer of Health if they suspect that a person has a notifiable disease, which includes all of the immunisation schedule diseases. The Medical Officer of Health, or authorised agent, can look at the early childhood service or school Immunisation Register to identify children who are not immunised, or do not have an Immunisation Certificate.

Parents or caregivers of these children will be contacted by the Medical Officer of Health. Immunisation will be recommended to protect the child and prevent the spread of infection.

Unimmunised children exposed to diphtheria, measles and whooping cough under certain circumstances are required by regulation to be excluded from an early childhood service or school. When the Medical Officer of Health has identified those who should stay at home, it then becomes the responsibility of the parents and the Principal of the early childhood service or school to secure compliance.

\* Under the Education Act 1989, section 19 and the Health (Infectious and Notifiable Diseases) Regulations, 1966, regulation 14.



# Privacy

Early childhood services and primary schools are required to maintain confidentiality of information recorded on the Immunisation Register.

Parents or caregivers have the right to view information recorded only about their own children. The information must remain confidential to the parents/caregivers of each child. Information for a particular child should be copied and given to the parent or caregiver, or it can be shown while covering the information of other children, so that it remains confidential.

Only the Medical Officer of Health, or authorised agent, may view the information on the register without parental consent. The Education Review Office (ERO) may check to ensure that the format of the register complies with the regulations.

## What is the School Immunisation Register?

- It provides information about the immunisation status of each child.
- It is the responsibility of the early childhood service or school to maintain an Immunisation Register.

## Who is allowed to look at the register?

- The Medical Officer of Health or their authorised representative, or authorised parent or caregiver (parents are allowed to view their own child's records only).

## What form should the register take?

The register must be in a form which records or stores information electronically or by other means and can be readily inspected or reproduced in a usable form.

Supplies of the recommended Immunisation Register form, code HE1111 are available from the health education resource provider at the nearest local public health service.

## Responsibilities

There are no penalties imposed on parents or caregivers who choose not to immunise their children. The regulations cannot be used to prevent a child being enrolled at an early childhood service or school.

Compliance with the regulations (ie, keeping a register for all eligible children in an appropriate format) will be included in the ERO general audit of early childhood services or schools. The ERO may comment on the service or school's compliance.

What happens if the early childhood service or school does not record immunisation information on the Immunisation Register?

It will make it harder to identify children who may be unprotected and at risk of vaccine-preventable disease.

Non-compliance with the Health (Immunisation) Regulations 1995 may be recorded during the ERO accountability review.

*If every child in a school of 500 children had not been immunised and there was an outbreak of measles, nearly every child would come down with measles. Twenty children would get pneumonia. There is a 25 percent chance that one child in the school would develop encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) as the result of measles.*

*If every child in the school was immunised correctly with MMR vaccine, on average there would be one case of encephalitis caused by the immunisation every 2000 years.*

From *Understanding Childhood Immunisation*,  
Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services, Australia.

### For further

## information

### about immunisation:

- Get a copy of *Childhood Immunisation* (code HE1323) and other resources from the health education resource provider at your local public health service
- Speak to your local public health service
- Visit the Ministry of Health Website at [www.moh.govt.nz/immunisation.html](http://www.moh.govt.nz/immunisation.html)
- Call the Immunisation Advisory Centre (IMAC) toll-free on 0800 IMMUNE (0800 466 863)
- Call the Healthline on 0800 611 116.