

# Fever and convulsions in children receiving flu vaccine

The Ministry of Health is aware of reports that some children in Australia who have received the seasonal flu vaccine have experienced febrile convulsions. There have also been some cases in New Zealand. All of the cases are linked to one of the vaccines, Fluvax.

New Zealand used Fluvax in March but supplies are likely to be very low as we shifted to a different supplier after Easter in order to meet demand. As a sensible precaution, until further information is available from Australia we recommend that doctors do not use Fluvax (made by CSL) for children under 5, but use Vaxigrip (made by Sanofi) if it is available.

The Chief Advisor for Child and Youth Health, Dr Pat Tuohy, says "The welfare of children is the Ministry's top priority. There isn't a lot of information at this stage, but as a sensible precaution we recommend that providers avoid giving Fluvax to children under 5 until there have been further investigations. We still recommend that children at higher risk for flu complications get immunised using other brands of the vaccine. Our experience during the 2009 pandemic showed that children are more likely to catch the pandemic strain, and that a number became very unwell."

"Fever is a common reaction to flu vaccines and is part of the immune response.

About 3-4% of children will have a short convulsion if they get a high fever, no matter what the cause. Febrile convulsions are frightening for parents and may result in a short admission to hospital but they do not cause long term harm."

Providers and parents need to be aware that fever following immunisation is common and know how to treat it.

"It's always important for people to keep an eye out for symptoms in the 24 hours after they, or their child, are vaccinated," Pat Tuohy says. "In the event of fever, give an appropriate dose of paracetamol or ibuprofen and keep the child cool - perhaps by reducing the number of layers of clothing and sponging with a damp cloth.

"If it's a high fever, or in rare case if there are convulsions within 24 hours of a vaccination, phone Healthline, or your GP and seek medical advice and assistance." Dr Tuohy said.

It is also important that doctors and parents report adverse reactions to vaccines to the Centre for Adverse Reactions Monitoring

The Australian Chief Medical Officer has recommended that doctors do not use the seasonal flu vaccine for any children under 5 years old. Health authorities in Western Australia have suspended the free seasonal flu vaccination program for children under the 5 after 22 cases of high fevers requiring hospital admission. WA health authorities describe this step as "precautionary" and are reviewing the situation to determine whether the cases are in the expected range of side-effects, or

indicate a problem with the vaccine or a particular batch.

New Zealand has used 265,000 doses of Fluvax (CSL) this year, 273,800 doses of Influvac (Solvay), and 317,660 doses of Vaxigrip (Sanofi). Most of the Fluvax would have been used several weeks ago during March, so the risk of febrile convulsions should be well past by now. More supplies of Vaxigrip are expected next week, once flights from Europe resume.

The Ministry of Health encourages all parents, consumers and healthcare professionals to report all suspected adverse reactions to the Centre for Adverse Reactions Monitoring <http://carm.otago.ac.nz/CARM.asp>.

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