

Kia ora

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the new Covid-19 risk management proposals.

Vaccination status of support persons

- The vaccination status of support persons should not be a factor in determining risk.
- Christchurch Hospital recently introduced a pathway on the wards taking into account the immunisation status of parents but quickly abandoned it because it was unnecessarily restrictive and limiting for the clinical care for children. This is a significant problem - if children's access to care is limited by these restrictions then, while affecting children across the board, we can expect an even greater impact on Māori and Pacific children and those from deprived families; it may also disproportionately affect rural children.
- We have some experience in this area -- recently a person, subsequently found to be a Covid-19 case, attended one of our clinics with their grandchild where the case, while infected, was in close contact with two of our staff for approximately 30 minutes. During subsequent investigation by our public health service the status of the staff in the clinic was downgraded from "Close contact" to "Casual contact" due to the effective use of PPE by both the support person and staff (surgical masks).

Moderate risk status of unvaccinated patients

- The proposals appear to assume a significantly reduced risk with vaccination - however a recent Lancet paper looking at people with infection in households found there wasn't much difference between transmission rates from vaccinated and unvaccinated.
- The proposal assumes that we will soon be vaccinating 5-11 year olds - this is still to be determined and there are no plans for vaccinating under-fives. This leaves all children under 12 unvaccinated for the foreseeable future and in the moderate risk category which affects all dental encounters – from simple examinations of two-year-olds onwards
- Local epidemiology is a very important factor which has been overlooked in the proposals - most patients, irrespective of vaccine status, would be low risk if we are sitting at traffic light green.

Room stand-downs

- The requirement for single rooms to have stand-down periods and multi chair clinics not is incongruent.
- Appropriate use of PPE – principally surgical – is highly effective in preventing Covid-19 transmission. Room stand-downs will reduce access to care and increase the cost of dental care and inevitably have a negative effect on equity.

While the short time for response has precluded a more comprehensive reply please note that my reply has been prepared after consultation with both medical and dental colleagues.

Ngā mihi nui

Martin

Dr Martin Lee, Dental Specialist

Chief of Service (acting), Older Persons Health & Rehabilitation
Canterbury District Health Board
P. +64 27 226-0362
E. martin.lee@cdhb.health.nz

Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi; engari, he toa takitini – success is the work of many; we do our best work together.