



Summary

Preparations for the nationwide roll-out of the Covid-19 vaccine

The Covid-19 Immunisation Programme (the immunisation programme) is critical to New Zealand's response to, and recovery from, Covid-19.

This is the largest immunisation programme ever carried out in New Zealand. The Government aims to vaccinate as many people as possible, aged 16 and over, by the end of 2021. The Ministry of Health (the Ministry) is leading the immunisation programme, which is being developed and implemented in an environment of continued uncertainty.

We reviewed the roll-out in its early stages to help the Ministry identify improvements and make changes before it rolls out the vaccine to the general population.

Our audit found that New Zealand is in a good position with its contracted supply of vaccines. The Government has secured enough supply to vaccinate all New Zealanders and a number of Pacific countries against Covid-19.

Although nearly 400,000 vaccine doses had been administered at the time our work concluded, a significant scale-up is still required to achieve the Government's overall goals. The Ministry has a high-level plan in place – but at the time of our audit, the plan to extend the roll-out to the general population had not yet been fully developed.

At the time of our audit, significant risks remained with having enough vaccinators; having an improved

distribution model to ensure that vaccine doses are delivered to the right place at the right time to minimise wastage; and ensuring that Māori, Pasifika, people with disabilities, and hard-to-reach communities are supported to access vaccinations.

Information systems are still being developed, including an invitation and booking system and a system to support inventory management and distribution of the vaccine. If everything goes according to plan these will be ready, but only just in time.

In our view, delays in setting up adequate communications channels between the Ministry, district health boards, and primary healthcare providers meant that key stakeholders have not always felt properly informed about their roles in the programme. Some in the sector are still not clear about what their role will be.

Since our audit, the Ministry has made good progress with communications. We recommend that the Ministry continue to improve its transparency when communicating with the public, especially about the uncertainty and challenges ahead.

More work is needed to have contingency plans in place in case of any disruption, such as with the supply of vaccines, not having enough vaccinators, or if there is a further community outbreak of Covid-19.

