



PRINCIPAL MATTERS

NGĀ TUMUAKI O AOTEAROA

THE MOST RESPECTED AND INFLUENTIAL ADVOCATE FOR NEW ZEALAND'S PRINCIPALS

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President's Message



Kia ora e te whānau

As the first mandatory vaccination milestone approaches, we face the challenge of deploying good process and effective leadership. Our job is to continue to build confidence in a 'science led' approach. It has been an effective strategy and has largely kept the most vulnerable in our community safe. It has helped us avoid the worst ravages of the virus and has protected our unvaccinated populations.

The mandatory vaccination order is a public health measure designed to protect New Zealanders. Government has clarified its expectations that all education workers are to be vaccinated.

Appropriate mitigations exist for those education workers with genuine medical conditions that prevent them from being vaccinated. Next week the Ministry of Health will issue a centralized vaccination exemption process that includes a science-based criteria for conditions warranting an exemption and a process that ensures exemptions are justified and valid.

Any staff member who has a medical condition that qualifies for exemption will be able to seek and gain that exemption. However, we are told that the bar is high because there are very few conditions that would warrant an exemption.

I wrote to Minister Hipkins to clarify the criteria for an exemption. His office responded: *Medical Exemption only applies for a very small number of people in New Zealand. These will be:*

1. *Those who experienced severe reaction to first doses of the Pfizer vaccine – definition of severe will be specified but will require medical evidence of a scientifically valid nature*
2. *Those with proven severe allergy to poly-ethylene glycol*
3. *Those patients within a defined timespan about to undergo a solid organ transplant – for example a live-donor kidney.*

Note, #1 and #2 only apply to the Pfizer so any exemption would not apply to alternative vaccines once these become available.

It is estimated the numbers in #1 and #2 in the country amount to probably no more than 100 people, even smaller for #2.

Education employees must understand that 15 November is fast approaching and for those who are unvaccinated, the options are two-fold: seek and receive a first jab or seek and receive a medical exemption within the official process.

It is important that you are clear about what you will need to do by November 15, if you have unvaccinated staff. NZSTA has issued advice to Boards of Trustees, which, as the designated employer, you will be implementing in good faith.

If there are no alternative duties for an unvaccinated staff member then your Board of Trustees will need to decide about paid or unpaid leave.

NZSTA's advice regarding the rationale for choosing paid or unpaid leave is helpful:

There is no one answer for all your situations and the Ministry of Education information at this point leaves the decision of unpaid or paid leave for Boards to make. This is because principals and Boards need to address all employment matters on a case-by-case basis, including dealing with employees who are vaccine hesitant.

Should an employee show hesitancy but not refusal, a Board could agree to provide paid leave to enable the employee to seek further advice from their medical professional. Any Board considering such an arrangement should also consider how long it would be reasonable to continue paid leave for this purpose.

Remember a staff member can change their mind about being vaccinated up until 1 January so options need to be maintained. This makes it very difficult to plan staffing for the new year. My advice is to focus on the issues that present now while we work with the Ministry of Education and Peak bodies to sharpen advice on dealing with the 1 January deadline.

Some schools have contacted me with concerns about their ability to fully staff their schools after 15 November. The Ministry of Education is aware that under-staffing may occur for some schools, but the over-riding priority is complying with the mandate to have all education workers fully vaccinated.

I suggest that if you anticipate difficulty finding relieving staff to cover students affected by a teacher who has been required to take paid or unpaid leave, you inform your Director of Education and the Secretary of Education of the likelihood of this occurring and seek clarity about the plan for continuity of staffing. Do not wait until 15 November to do this. Do it today!

These are stressful, high-pressure times for principals. The strong relationships you have nurtured with staff over many years, will, in some cases, now be tested. Keep in mind that you are enacting a Government mandate and at all times maintain a respectful and professional attitude with your staff, irrespective of their beliefs about vaccination.

I acknowledge the toll that such high-stakes work is having on you.

Kia kaha

Ngā manaakitanga

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NZPF Notices



NZ Principal Magazine also Online

You and/or your team members can easily access the NZ Principal Magazines online, as an e-magazine or as a PDF. Additionally you can search for a previous issue, an article by title or by the author of the article. All magazines back to Term 1 2012 are available in this format. To view or search click [here](#).

Useful Information



Get COVID-19 ready with FUJIFILM Business Innovation

With schools now operating under changing restrictions, it can be difficult to keep students and visitors informed on current school health and safety measures.

Let FUJIFILM Business Innovation help with your [COVID safety material](#)! Our team can help produce a range of standard or customised material to keep your school community safe. Including QR posters, social distancing floor decals, pull-up banners and more.

Get in touch with our team and tick one more item off your to-do list:

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