

# **NATIONAL IMMUNISATION REGISTER (NIR) March 2004**

## **What is the NIR?**

The National Immunisation Register (NIR) is a computerised information system that has been developed to hold immunisation details of New Zealand children.

## **Why do we need the NIR?**

The NIR is a key tool that will assist New Zealand to improve its immunisation rates. Improved immunisation coverage will offer individual protection against vaccine-preventable diseases and protection for the community against recurring epidemics.

The NIR will enable authorised health professionals to quickly and easily find out what vaccines a child has been given (this will include children whose family has shifted or changed healthcare providers). This will help to make sure immunisations are given at the appropriate time. The NIR will also provide a more accurate record of immunisation coverage rates – regionally and nationally. This will enable better programme planning to target populations with the lowest immunisation rates.

## **What information will be held on the NIR?**

The NIR will include the following information: child's name, date of birth, gender, National Health Index number (NHI\*) and ethnicity; parent/guardian details and contact information; nominated health professionals (eg. GP, Lead Maternity Carer and Well Child provider) and immunisations given. It will also be able to record if a parent chooses not to immunise their child for a particular vaccine, or if there are medical reasons not to do so. This information will be collected and updated regularly by authorised healthcare providers.

## **What will be the benefits of the NIR?**

- Providing quick access to a child's immunisation status helping to ensure the child receives the appropriate immunisations at the scheduled time.
- Assisting NIR authorised health professionals to recall individuals overdue for immunisation.
- Sharing information between authorised healthcare providers in order to follow-up children of highly mobile families, immigrant children and those from populations with low coverage rates particularly Maori and Pacific children, and to offer them vaccination. This will also help to ensure that children are linked back to primary health care services.
- Providing local, regional and national immunisation coverage data. This data will help to support programme planning so that resources can be targeted at populations where immunisation coverage is lowest.
- Improved monitoring of vaccine safety and effectiveness.
- Improving access, in the longer term, to immunisation services, increasing coverage rates and reducing immunisation disparities among people of different socioeconomic and ethnic groups.

\* For an explanation of NHI, please see Appendix 1.

## **How will information from GPs be transferred to the NIR?**

**GPs and other vaccination providers with an electronic patient management system (PMS)** will be able to access the NIR through upgraded versions of their current practice management systems. For practices that do not have an upgraded PMS system, a paper-based system will also be operational so that practices can send immunisation information to the NIR. Alternatively, information may be sent to the NIR using a web browser via the Health Intranet.

## **How will the information on the NIR be used?**

Only authorised providers can update or amend the database. The NIR will protect the privacy of consumers and users at all times.

Authorised health professionals will use the NIR to check a child's immunisation status to ensure the appropriate immunisations are given at the scheduled time. In the event of an outbreak of vaccine-preventable disease they may also use the information on the NIR to control the spread of the disease.

District Health Boards and the Ministry of Health will use non-identifiable information from the NIR to assess immunisation rates, develop policy and improve services.

## **Which children's data will be retained on the NIR?**

Only the information of those children born in a District Health Board (DHB) after the NIR is implemented will be entered onto the NIR. These children are known as the 'Birth Cohort'. Migrant children and children born to New Zealand citizens overseas whose date of birth falls within the birth cohort, will be registered at their first point of contact with primary health care providers.

All children immunised as part of the proposed Meningococcal B immunisation programme will have their details recorded on the NIR.

## **Is it compulsory to have your child's details on the NIR?**

During pregnancy and after the birth of their child all parents will be informed about the NIR. An information brochure for parents has been developed. Lead maternity carers (LMCs) have a key role in providing information about the NIR as well as information about immunisation. After birth relevant information about each child will then be added onto the NIR.

Parents may choose to 'opt off' putting any details of their child's immunisations on the NIR. In this case the child's National Health Index number, date of birth, District Health Board and any immunisations already recorded on the NIR will be retained on the NIR so that immunisation coverage can be accurately calculated and analysed.

**Parents may also choose not to immunise their child and this is recorded on the NIR as a declined immunisation event to prevent recalls for this immunisation event.**

All children who participate in the proposed Meningococcal B immunisation programme will have their data entered onto the NIR. If a child receives the proposed Meningococcal B immunisation, there is no 'opt-off' option available. If parents decline the proposed

Meningococcal B immunisation programme, then baseline data about their child i.e. NHI, date of birth and DHB will be retained on the NIR.

### **Will information be added onto the NIR for older children?**

Historical immunisation data about older children will not be added onto the NIR. However if these children participate in the proposed Meningococcal B immunisation programme then details relating **only** to this programme will be included in the NIR.

### **Can parents/guardians access the information held on the NIR about their child?**

Parents and guardians may request their child's immunisation information, or request that information be corrected, at any time, through their health professional. Parents will not be able to access the NIR through their home computer.

### **When will the NIR be implemented?**

The NIR will be implemented nationwide by the Ministry of Health and District Health Boards by the end of 2005. The NIR is expected to 'Go Live' in the greater Auckland region from mid 2004. There will then be a staged roll-out throughout New Zealand

### **How does the NIR relate to the proposed group B meningococcal disease immunisation programme?**

**The Ministry of Health is leading a project to develop a vaccine for the most common strain of meningococcal disease in New Zealand. If clinical trials are successful and regulatory approval is granted, a nationwide immunisation programme will begin from mid-2004. The NIR will be used to record these vaccinations for safety and coverage monitoring.**

### **How long will information be held on the NIR?**

Information will be held on the NIR for the whole of an individual's life plus a further 10 years.

### **What is New Zealand's rate of immunisation?**

New Zealand's immunisation rate is low compared with other OECD countries. This places some children at risk of contracting illnesses such as pertussis (whooping cough) and measles. Disease transmission will be prevented from circulating in a community only when high immunisation coverage is achieved (90-95% of the total population, depending on the disease). At present the immunisation rate is as low as 60% in some populations.

## Appendix 1 National Health Index

The National Health Index (NHI) is a system used by public hospitals and other health and disability support services to assign an alpha-numeric identifier (the NHI number) to people who use their services. Most people know the NHI number as their hospital number; it is the number on their clinical notes and on the hospital identity bracelets.

New Zealand's health professionals have used the NHI for many years, and most people, including those born at home, now receive their NHI number at birth.

The NHI holds information on:

- names and addresses
- ethnicity, gender, date of birth
- New Zealand resident status.

Health professionals use NHI numbers for clinical and administrative purposes. The main purposes of a NHI number are to identify you and ensure your information is correctly associated with your record. In the case of the NIR every vaccination event (and all other information held) is stored against a NHI number. When an authorised health professional searches the NIR he or she is generally searching using the patient's NHI number. It is therefore useful to know your child's NHI number, especially if you are not visiting your usual health professional (your child's NHI number should be recorded in his or her *Well Child Health Book*, which is where vaccination histories are currently recorded). [GP can use patient name to search if NHI not known BUT do not need this level of detail here]

More information on the NHI can be found on the Ministry of Health website: <http://www.nzhis.govt.nz/index.html>