

25 January 2024

C176430

Colin Whiting  
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Tēnā koe Colin

Thank you for your request of 6 December 2023 to the Minister of Corrections – Hon Mark Mitchell, requesting information about the staff that were authorised to return to work following their recovery from COVID-19. Your request was transferred to the Department of Corrections – Ara Poutama Aotearoa in accordance with section 14 of the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

As an organisation, our top priority is safety – of the public, our staff, visitors to our sites and the people we are managing in prisons and the community. Corrections had a number of controls in place to minimise risks relating to the transmission of COVID-19, including health screening for every person who enters a prison. The secure and controlled nature of the prison environment means we were able to quickly isolate prisoners as required and restrict their movements.

People in prison are some of the most susceptible to COVID-19, due to many being vulnerable due to existing health conditions, and the ease of transmission that COVID-19 could have had in the prison environment. Internationally, we have seen the devastating impact of COVID-19 in prison environments, with many prison staff and prisoners becoming seriously unwell, and a number of deaths occurring.

Since March 2020 we put in place extensive plans to manage any risk to our staff or the people we manage, and we have continued to refine these plans in order to do everything we can to keep our staff and the people we manage safe from COVID-19. This includes robust infection prevention and control plans, with detailed record keeping for both staff and visitors to our sites to enable fast and thorough contact tracing – including the use of proximity detection technology to assist with contact tracing.

The infection and control measures that were implemented included mandatory vaccination requirements for staff and visitors, as well as the use of thermal cameras to screen for high temperatures, health screening on entry, contact tracing, separating new arrivals for their first 14 days, and the use of personal protective equipment.

You requested, in response to information previously provided by Corrections under the OIA (our reference C174485):

*How many of these 220 Corrections staff given a 7A medical Exemption who returned to work in New Zealand Prisons, remained unvaccinated against Covid19 (zero vaccinations) for the 8 months between November 8th 2021 and July 2nd 2022.*

None. All Corrections staff who received an exemption in accordance with clause 7A of the Covid-19 Public Health Response (Vaccinations) Order 2021 (version as at 25 Oct 2021), had both vaccinations one and two. Exemptions were only granted for boosters.

I trust the information provided is of assistance. I encourage you to raise any concerns about this response with Corrections. Alternatively, you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Ngā mihi

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SM', written in a cursive style.

Sean Mason  
Acting National Commissioner