

Whānau Āwhina Plunket's advice for protecting young tamariki against COVID-19

Whānau Āwhina Plunket's nurses are fielding an increasing number of queries from concerned parents wanting to know how to keep their preschool tamariki safe when they are not eligible for the COVID-19 vaccination.

Acting Chief Nurse Karen Magrath says there are many ways to keep under 5's as safe as possible, especially while COVID-19 cases are rising rapidly throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

"Protecting everyone, but especially our youngest tamariki who can't get vaccinated from COVID-19, involves using what we call 'layers of protection'," Ms Magrath says.

"The more layers of protection such as all eligible household members being vaccinated, and everyone doing their bit by mask wearing and washing hands, the safer our tamariki will be. If you are breastfeeding it is safe to continue. In fact, there is evidence it helps protect pēpi."

While children under 5 are not yet eligible for vaccination, their parents, caregivers, grandparents, aunts, uncles and older siblings are – and the best protection is for everyone else in the household who is eligible to get their vaccinations.

"Our nurses, Kaiāwhina, health workers and PlunketLine nurses are always happy to give information and advice about the vaccine – so make sure you're talking with health professionals you trust if you have questions."

Ms Magrath says it's still vital to keep up all the good wellness habits we've developed during the pandemic.

"First and foremost, stay home if you or your tamariki are sick, and call Healthline on 0800 611 116 for advice on testing. This will help prevent the spread of the virus in the community," she says.

"Check with friends and family before they visit that they don't have any symptoms, and that they are fully vaccinated and boosted. With visitors, you might also want to request they wear a mask when they're at your place, and make sure you open doors and windows while they're there.

"Also on the home front, keep your home well ventilated by opening windows and turning on extractor fans if you have them – especially when everyone is home, or you've got people around."

Ms Magrath says while there's no need to hunker down and stay at home unless anyone in the household is sick, following all health advice when out and about helps keep everyone safe.

“Wear a mask wherever you go, preferably a medical mask – the ones you can buy over the counter at your local pharmacy or supermarket.

“Keep your distance. Physical distancing does not mean social distancing – you can still be social while maintaining a distance of at least two metres in public places. We can make the most of the summer weather and try catching up with friends and family outdoors – it’s a great way to connect with others and with nature while keeping yourself and your tamariki as safe as possible.”

Ms Magrath says being vigilant about applying layers of protection at home, as well as when out and about, will help keep our young pēpi and tamariki safe.

“It’s important to wash and dry your hands often especially if you have been in a public place, after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing and using the bathroom and before eating. Use hand sanitiser if you can’t get to a tap.”

“You are most vulnerable to a COVID-19 infection when you are in close contact with other people, whether at home or in public locations.

“It has been a very long couple of years with lots of different rules to follow, and things do keep changing which is stressful. It is important to support each other through this next phase of COVID, and to keep doing everything we can to keep our pēpi, tamariki and whānau healthy and happy”

Ms Magrath says PlunketLine – Whānau Āwhina Plunket’s free parent helpline and advice service – is available to all families, whānau and caregivers 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

“Remember, if you have any concerns about anything to do with your pēpi and tamariki, you can speak to a registered nurse any time, day or night.”

For more information on keeping tamariki safe, visit plunket.org.nz/COVID-19

Protecting everyone, but especially our young preschool tamariki who can’t get vaccinated from COVID-19, involves using **layers of protection**:

- make sure adults and eligible children in your household are fully vaccinated
- stay home if you or your tamariki are sick, and call Healthline on 0800 611 116 for advice on testing
- don’t allow people to visit if they are sick
- check your visitors are fully vaccinated and boosted against COVID-19
- wear a mask wherever you go, preferably a medical mask – the ones you can buy over the counter at your local pharmacy or supermarket
- encourage or require visitors to your home to wear a face mask
- keep your home well ventilated by opening windows, especially if you have visitors. Use extractor fans in the kitchen and bathroom if you have them
- wash your hands often, with soap, for 20 seconds, then dry your hands completely
- wash and dry your hands if you have been in a public place, and after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing, or using the bathroom and before eating
- use hand sanitiser if hand washing isn’t an option.

ENDS

For more information please contact:

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