

- Vaccination / Virus

Vaccinating children does more than protect adults — Study

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Covid-19 is not just a “mild infection” for our tamariki, according to a new international study on children who caught the virus.

The study — published in Journal of American Medical Association (Jama) Network Open this week — followed more than 3000 children who tested positive to the virus from 10 countries, including New Zealand, Canada and the United States.

It aimed to find out how frequently children infected with the virus experienced severe outcomes such as neurological or respiratory trouble and what were the risk factors.

Nearly a quarter of those observed required hospitalisation, four died, and 3 per cent experienced severe outcomes within two weeks of being admitted to an emergency department.

Study author Professor Stuart Dalziel, from the University of Auckland, told Morning Report the 3 per cent who experienced severe outcomes would have been admitted to intensive care units with blood pressure or respiration supported.

“That’s something we need to bear in mind when immunising our children. We are immunising our children to actually protect them from severe outcomes of Covid-19.”

The research found that children at highest risk of developing complications from Covid-19 infection were those who experienced symptoms from four to seven days, those older than five years, or had preexisting chronic conditions.

With vaccinations for ages five to 11 due to start next week, the findings dispelled the myth children were being vaccinated solely to protect adults, Dalziel said.

“There is a perception that Covid19 is only a very mild infection in children. However . . . we are seeing greater numbers of children being infected and presenting to hospital worldwide,” he said.

Researchers also found children deemed healthy at an initial emergency department visit rarely deteriorated significantly after the first visit.

Dalziel hoped the study would help emergency doctors better understand which children are likely to experience complications from their infection.