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# How to protect under-5s against Omicron

Hamilton Press · 2 Feb 2022 · 5 · JO LINES-MACKENZIE

Those under the age of 5 don't have the option of the Covid-19 vaccination to help them through the pandemic.



So how do parents protect them as Omicron looms?

Waikato District Health Board's medical officer of health Dr Felicity Dumble said she understands the anxiety that families with young children will be feeling.

The best defence started with other members of the household.

"Things we can do is make sure everybody in a child's household are fully vaccinated, and please make sure those eligible that are school age get theirs as well, so we can protect those that can't be vaccinated."

The advice is the same for all communicable diseases, to try and control the spread.

"That would be personal hygiene, so wash your hands regularly, cough and cold etiquette – so sneezing or coughing into your elbow, using tissues and disposing of them appropriately."

Pregnant women are encouraged to get vaccinated for two sorts of benefits.

"For the unborn baby, so they get some protection that is passed down from mum to baby even while they're in the womb.

"It also means when the baby is born the mum already has some protection on board to reduce the risk of her picking up Covid and therefore reduce the chance of passing it on to her child."

Dumble said there have been cases of those under 5 years old catching Omicron.

"We have sadly seen it appearing in statistics overseas, which is why it's very important to ask these questions of what can we do to keep them safe."

It also helps to be as healthy as possible as that will give people some degree of protection from communicable disease.

"So having a healthy diet, getting exercise, getting some sunshine, they are all really important, but the best way to protect yourself if you are able to is to get vaccinated."

Dumble said prior to Omicron arriving in New Zealand, Covid-19 has already impacted Kiwi children, which she said was very noticeable before the ability to vaccinate those between 5 and 13 years old.

"It's great we now have that option to offer that age group the protection of a vaccine and we have seen benefits of that."

Whānau whina Plunket's Dr Jane O'Malley also said it was ensuring there were layers of protection around the vulnerable. This includes staying home if you or your child are sick, and not letting people who are sick visit.

"Check with friends and family before they visit that they don't have a cough, sore throat, runny nose, loss of smell or taste or a fever, and that they are fully vaccinated and boosted against Covid-19."

Also wear a mask, while out and encourage visitors to wear a face mask when at your home.

"Keep your home well ventilated by opening windows, especially if you have visitors. Use exhaust fans in the kitchen and bathroom. Opening a window for 15 minutes will ventilate the average-sized room."

People should make sure they are using the NZ Covid tracer app and if you create a QR code for your home you can ask all visitors to scan in.

While it may be overwhelming for parents who might want them to ride out the virus locked at home, O'Malley said people have to be careful of being in close quarters, whether at home or in public locations.

"Home is where we are often the closest together with others for long periods of time, and perhaps where we are less careful about maintaining public health measures."

But it is important to safely maintain social connections.

"Try meeting with friends and family outdoors – it's a great way to connect with each other with nature, while keeping yourself and your tamariki as safe as possible."