



Should Immunisation against Measles be Compulsory?

The Ministry of Health is concerned that an unusually high number of children in Auckland have been affected by an outbreak of measles. The reason given for the outbreak is that the immunisation rate is below the optimal 95 percent, which would make it much less likely that the infection spreads. Measles may be accompanied by serious health risk in a small proportion of infected people, risks that are more common than side effects from the measles vaccine itself.

This raises the question of whether measles immunisation should be compulsory for all children, or at least require a medical certificate of exemption, which would give health professionals the opportunity to inform parents of the relative risks of measles as against side effects of immunisation; or whether the current policy of letting parents choose for themselves should continue.

Research New Zealand decided to establish whether New Zealanders felt that immunisation against measles should be compulsory for all children, whether a doctor's certificate of exemption should be required for children not immunised, or whether parents should be free to choose for themselves.

Some 29 percent of the sample believed that immunisation of children should be compulsory; the same proportion, 29 percent felt that a medical certificate of exemption should be required of children not immunised against measles, and 39 percent felt parents should be free to choose for themselves whether or not to have their children immunised.

In the age group most likely to have families, those 35–54 years old, 22 percent favoured compulsory vaccination, while 33 percent felt a medical certificate of exemption should be provided for children not immunised, and 43 percent felt parents should be free to choose for themselves. However, in the age group most likely to have families with babies and very young children, 18–34 years, some 46 percent believe parents should be free to choose.

The lowest proportion of respondents who feel immunisation against measles should be compulsory are those in the Lower/Central North Island, at 19 percent.

There is also a clear pattern by income group in that 22 percent of those in the middle income group, earning between \$40,000 and \$79,999 per annum, favour compulsory immunisation, compared with 46 percent who believe parents should be free to choose.

The Research New Zealand poll of 500 people aged 18 and over, who are employed or self-employed, was conducted by telephone on 6–9 July 2011. The maximum margin of



error for the sample as a whole is +/- 4.6% (at the 95% confidence level). The data has been weighted to ensure it is an accurate representation of New Zealand's general population. The poll was not taken on behalf of any organization, but as part of Research New Zealand's monthly survey of attitudes and opinions.

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Table 1:

Q16. Measles has become a more common childhood disease, because fewer than 95% of children are vaccinated against it. However, some 3 – 5 percent of children infected with measles suffer side effects, some very serious. Do you believe that...

	Base =	Total	Male	Female
		500	250	250
		%	%	%
Vaccination should be compulsory for all children		29	33	26
It should be compulsory unless a medical certificate exempting the child has been issued		29	28	30
Parents should be free to choose		39	37	41
Don't know		3	2	3
Total		100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Table 2:

Q16. Measles has become a more common childhood disease, because fewer than 95% of children are vaccinated against it. However, some 3 – 5 percent of children infected with measles suffer side effects, some very serious. Do you believe that...

	Base =	Total	18-34 years	35 to 54 years	55 years and over
		500	91	181	228
		%	%	%	%
Vaccination should be compulsory for all children		29	32	22	37
It should be compulsory unless a medical certificate exempting the child has been issued		29	19	33	32
Parents should be free to choose		39	46	43	28
Don't know		3	3	2	3
Total		100	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.



Table 3:

Q16. Measles has become a more common childhood disease, because fewer than 95% of children are vaccinated against it. However, some 3 – 5 percent of children infected with measles suffer side effects, some very serious. Do you believe that...

	Total	NZ European/ Pakeha	Maori/Pacific	Other
Base =	500 %	374 %	58 %	68 %
Vaccination should be compulsory for all children	29	28	28	36
It should be compulsory unless a medical certificate exempting the child has been issued	29	32	21	21
Parents should be free to choose	39	38	48	38
Don't know	3	2	2	5
Total	100	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Table 4:

Q16. Measles has become a more common childhood disease, because fewer than 95% of children are vaccinated against it. However, some 3 – 5 percent of children infected with measles suffer side effects, some very serious. Do you believe that...

	Total	Upper North Island	Lower/Central North Island	South Island
Base =	500 %	217 %	90 %	193 %
Vaccination should be compulsory for all children	29	30	19	33
It should be compulsory unless a medical certificate exempting the child has been issued	29	24	35	31
Parents should be free to choose	39	42	44	34
Don't know	3	4	1	2
Total	100	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.



Table 5:

Q16. Measles has become a more common childhood disease, because fewer than 95% of children are vaccinated against it. However, some 3 – 5 percent of children infected with measles suffer side effects, some very serious. Do you believe that...

	Total	Under \$40,000	At least \$40,000 but less than \$80,000	\$80,000 or more	Don't know/refused
Base =	500	181	150	137	32
	%	%	%	%	%
Vaccination should be compulsory for all children	29	34	22	30	36
It should be compulsory unless a medical certificate exempting the child has been issued	29	24	28	38	14
Parents should be free to choose	39	40	46	29	46
Don't know	3	1	5	2	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Total may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

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