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Hon Annette King

19 July 2004

First children receive Meningococcal B vaccine

Prime Minister Helen Clark and Health Minister Annette King are today visiting family doctors in Mangere in support of the first day of the \$200 million MeNZB™ vaccine programme.

Helen Clark and Annette King's visit is to promote the government's programme for the free immunisation of all babies, children and young people aged between six months and 20 years against meningococcal meningitis. They are being accompanied by Ministry of Health director-general Dr Karen Poutasi and Meningococcal Vaccine Strategy director Dr Jane O'Hallahan.

The programme is beginning in Counties-Manukau and in parts of Auckland District Health Board's area and will be rolled out across New Zealand over the next year.

Helen Clark and Annette King are also visiting public health nurses in Manukau City who are about to begin the immunisation campaign in local schools.

"Today is the day New Zealand starts the fight back on the ground against this appalling disease," Helen Clark and Annette King said.

"We must remember the many New Zealanders who have been killed or disabled by this appalling disease since the New Zealand epidemic began in 1991.

"We owe it to their memory and to all New Zealanders to do our very best to stop this disease in its tracks in New Zealand.

"The vaccination campaign has been made possible by the magnificent work of many people who have been dedicated to developing a vaccine and implementing the immunisation campaign throughout the country.

"Among those deserving special mention are the clinical trials team of UniServices at Auckland University, led by Professor Diana Lennon, the more than 1700 children and families from all around Auckland who participated in the clinical trials, and those families involved in the current trial for under six-month olds."

"Thanks are also due to Environmental Science and Research scientists, led by Dr Diana Martin, the team at vaccine manufacturer Chiron, led by Dr Philipp Oster, the team at Counties-Manukau District Health Board, led by Nettie Knetsch, Wiri Central School staff, children and parents, who have helped develop printed material, the Ministry's National Immunisation Register team, a number of advisory groups, including the Auckland Regional Steering Committee and the National Rollout Advisory Group, the Ministry's public health team, including the core strategy team led by Dr Jane O'Hallahan, the Ministry of Education, principals, teachers and other staff, the Immunisation Advisory Centre, led by Dr Nikki Turner, the National Meningitis Trust and the New Zealand Meningitis Trust, and thousands of nurses, doctors and clinicians who will be vaccinating New Zealand's children.

"Rolling out the vaccine and the immunisation campaign has been a collaborative effort. Everyone involved can feel proud of their achievements and the part they played," Helen Clark and Annette King said.