

Dr Rawiri Taonui | Stalled vaccination rates leave Māori vulnerable 26 April 2022



A dramatic slowdown in 5-11yrs tamariki and 18-49yrs Māori vaccinations presents a considerable risk if a more severe variant targeting the young enters Aotearoa.

Current Situation

Omicron cases have steadily declined from a national peak of 29,000 cases on 8 March. Omicron cases peaked in the three Auckland District Health Boards (DHBs) in early March. Other DHBs had peaked by the end of the first week of April.

New daily cases are following a distinction fluctuation between low testing and reporting on weekends and higher testing and reporting on weekdays. Lower Easter and ANZC holiday case numbers reflect this pattern.

A moderate upsurge in numbers occurred in all DHBs after the country moved to the Orange Traffic Light setting on 13 April. Much of the rise has come in Auckland, Christchurch, and Dunedin where post-Orange relaxation of cautionary behaviours such as mask-wearing and social distancing amid urban density have a greater impact.

Hospitalisations returned to over 500 yesterday and active cases have also risen from a low of 53,000 last week back to between 58,500 to 59,300. The number of deaths has decreased but the proportion outside of Auckland is higher than last month. Sixteen of nineteen deaths in the last two days have been outside Auckland.

New cases have settled on a plateau with the 7-day average ranging between 7,500 and 9,700 for the last 14 days.

The plateau effect is also the result of a change in the balance of cases from the BA.1 sub-variants of Omicron to the 30% to 50% more transmissible but not more lethal BA.2 sub-variants.

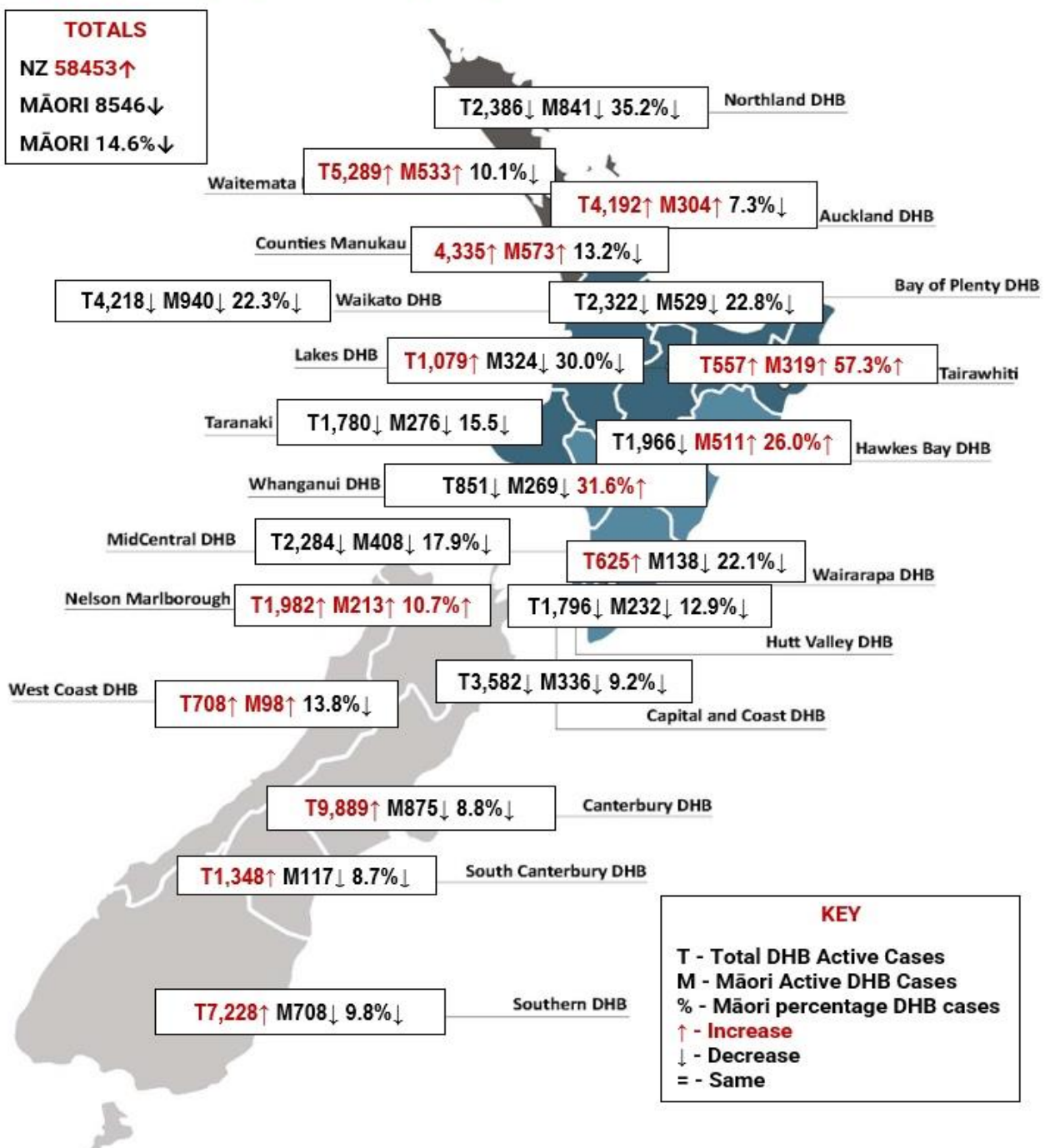
Māori Cases

There were 644 and 714 new Māori cases over the last two days. The lowest figures since 23 February, they end 49 consecutive days with Māori the second-highest cases.

The following map compares the overall total number of active cases, the total number of active Māori cases, and the percentage of active Māori cases in each DHB, between 18 April and 25 April.

Omicron Māori Active Cases by DHB

Comparing Monday 25 April and Monday 18 April 2022



Active Māori cases have fallen as a percentage of total active cases in 16 DHBs, most notably in the Lakes DHB from 37.6% to 30.0% and the Hutt DHB from 16.5% to 12.9%.

Second Wave Risks

Driven by a relaxation in behaviours, waning immunity from vaccination and Omicron recoveries, many modellers are predicting a second wave sometime around July. Others suggest the current plateau might precipitate a second wave sooner.

Opinion varies on waning immunity. The science is clear that those with boosters and recovery from Omicron will have strong protection from reinfection and/or severe disease for some months.

The World Health Organisation believes booster vaccinations will remain protective for up to six months. The US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention maintains that while stronger than two Pfizer vaccine doses, the third booster also begins to wane after four months.

The United States and Australia are recommending a 4th booster for those aged over 50yrs. There is no such move in New Zealand.

Border and New Variant Risks

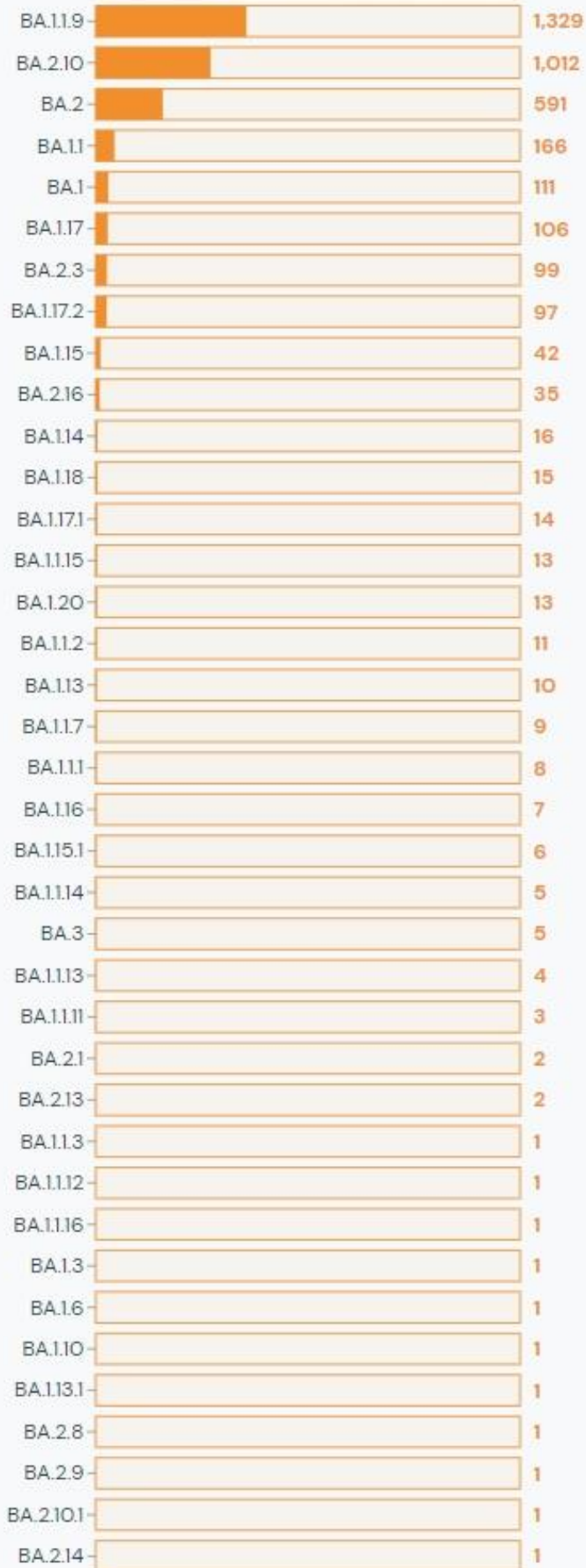
The risk of a second wave has other contexts. With changes at our borders including self-recognition testing and home isolation for entering vaccinated and unvaccinated New Zealanders, vaccinated Australians and shortly visa waiver countries our borders are more porous than at any other time during Covid-19.

The 19 April detection of the recombinant XE (BA.1 and BA.2) subvariant, which experts estimate to be 10% more transmissible than the BA.2 subvariant is a warning.

Omicron has mutated into more than 70 sub-variants. None is yet thought to cause more fatalities. However, if a new variant or subvariant emerges that impacts young people like the second wave of the Spanish Flu in 1918, then Māori would be dangerously exposed. By 3 April, testing had detected 38 Omicron subvariants in New Zealand.

Lineage breakdown of Omicron in New Zealand

There are **75** Pango lineages currently associated with the Omicron variant:



all Omicron lineages 

Vaccinations by Ethnicity

Friday 23 April 2022

| Ethnic Group | 12yrs+ (#1st #2nd) | | 18+ Booster (#3rd) | | 5-11yrs (#1st) | | 5-11yrs (#2nd) | |
|--------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|
| Māori | 520,867 | 84.5% | 232,737 | 59.2% | 40,692 | 33.4% | 11,985 | 9.8% |
| Pacific | 281,768 | 91.5% | 138,757 | 68.2% | 23,411 | 46.8% | 5,821 | 11.6% |
| Asian | 640,451 | 99.9% | 420,279 | 87.9% | 58,595 | 77.1% | 26,098 | 34.3% |
| Pākehā&Other | 2,613,103 | 93.7% | 1,818,683 | 80.0% | 135,498 | 57.4% | 61,582 | 26.1% |
| Total | 4,056,189 | 93.1% | 2,610,456 | 78.0% | 258,196 | 53.4% | 105,486 | 21.8% |

1. There is an undercount of the vaccine eligible Māori population between the Ministry of Health HSU Index (2020) and the NZ Statistics Estimate of Resident Population (2021) of 45,000 in the 12yrs+ age group and 6,210 in the 5-11yrs age group. 2. This table aggregates the #1st & #2nd Pfizer doses because both wane at about the same rate and quicker than the 3rd booster.

Table: Dr Rawiri Taonui • Source: Ministry of Health • Created with Datawrapper

Since 1 April, the nationwide uptake of first or second vaccinations in the 12yrs+ Māori group has dropped to an average of just 20 vaccinations per day nationwide. Notwithstanding, a 15% or thereabouts vaccine resistance, the numbers show a considerable refocus of previous energy and effort to close vaccination gaps to supporting whānau isolating at home over the last two months.

Uptake of a third booster shot is higher at an average of 177 per day since 1 April. Nevertheless, the large 18.8% gap between the Māori and the national figure indicates the vulnerability of Māori should a more severe Covid variant enter Aotearoa's permeable border.

If a new variant targets young people, the risk increases. There is a constant 20% gap between tamariki Māori and the national figure for 5-11yrs first vaccinations. While a modest 161 per day uptake of the second vaccination demonstrates the vigilance of motivated whānau and parents, uptake of the first tamariki vaccination has slowed to 20 per day.

The risk is starker when breaking down age groups above 12yrs of age. While just 12.6% of double vaccinated over-65yrs Māori have not received a booster, 50% of 35-49yrs Māori and an exceptionally large 67.9% of 18-34yrs Māori have not received boosters, our most valuable defence against Omicron and any new variants.

Māori Vaccination by Age

Friday 18 April 2022

| Age | Vax #1 #2 | | Booster #3 | | Gap to Booster | |
|--------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|
| 65yrs+ | 50,129 | 94.3% | 43,803 | 82.4% | 6,326 | 12.6% |
| 50-64yrs | 101,967 | 89.9% | 74,462 | 65.6% | 27,505 | 27.0% |
| 35-49yrs | 110,272 | 82.3% | 56,573 | 42.2% | 53,699 | 48.7% |
| 18-34yrs | 179,265 | 81.6% | 57,529 | 26.2% | 121,736 | 67.9% |
| 12-17yrs* | 79,160 | 82.6% | 377 | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| 5-11yrs* | 40,658 | 33.4% | 0 | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Total | 561,451 | 76.1% | 232,744 | | 328,707 | |

1. *Boosters are available to 16&17yrs but not under-15yrs. Percentage numbers are therefore not applicable. 2. Data updated each Sunday but not released until each Thursday.

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A similar pattern occurs in DHBs. The higher the double or boosted vaccination rate, the lower the percentage of active Māori cases. The lower the double and boosted vaccination rate, the higher the percentage of Māori active cases in each DHB.

Comparing Māori Vaccinations & Active Cases by DHB

Vaccinations 23 April & Active Cases 25 April 2022

| | 1st & 2nd Vaxx | | 3rd Vaxx Booster | | Māori % of Active Cases |
|----------------|----------------|-------|------------------|-------|-------------------------|
| Auckland | 26,583 | 91.3% | 13,550 | 61.5% | 7.3% |
| Canterbury | 35,534 | 90.8% | 17,405 | 61.6% | 8.8% |
| Capital Coast | 25,839 | 88.3% | 14,215 | 66.5% | 9.2% |
| Waitematā | 37,941 | 87.7% | 17,543 | 58.0% | 10.1% |
| Southern | 22,377 | 87.7% | 10,912 | 64.2% | 9.8% |
| West Coast | 2,502 | 86.6% | 1,191 | 60.3% | 13.8% |
| Manukau | 57,313 | 86.3% | 23,414 | 52.4% | 13.2% |
| SthCanterbury | 3,178 | 85.9% | 1,405 | 58.0% | 8.7% |
| Nelson | 10,261 | 85.5% | 4,652 | 58.3% | 10.7% |
| MidCentral | 23,007 | 85.7% | 10,321 | 57.6% | 17.9% |
| Waikato | 63,694 | 85.3% | 26,060 | 52.4% | 22.3% |
| Taranaki | 14,527 | 85.0% | 5,862 | 52.6% | 15.5% |
| Hutt | 18,018 | 84.2% | 8,750 | 60.7% | 12.9% |
| Hawke's Bay | 31,027 | 82.5% | 13,197 | 55.4% | 26.0% |
| Wairārapa | 5,946 | 82.6% | 2,600 | 56.0% | 22.1% |
| Bay of Plenty | 42,008 | 82.4% | 18,266 | 56.2% | 22.8% |
| Lakes | 27,145 | 82.0% | 11,558 | 54.9% | 30.0% |
| Te Tai Rāwhiti | 18,021 | 81.1% | 8,281 | 58.7% | 57.3% |
| Whanganui | 11,842 | 80.1% | 5,420 | 58.2% | 31.6% |
| Northland | 43,783 | 80.1% | 19,013 | 55.9% | 35.2% |

Note booster numbers are a percentage of those who are eligible for boosters.

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Summary

Omicron has been in steady decline. If we avert a second wave now numbers will decrease further over the next month. New variants and sub-variants have ready access through our more open borders. Declining Māori vaccination uptake makes our communities vulnerable especially if a new variant targets younger people. While the current focus on economic recovery is important, it should proceed together with a focus on lifting Māori vaccination rates.

Kia noho haumarū, stay safe and self-sovereign.

Dr Rawiri Taonui