

Media Release

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Surgeons urge Māori patients to get vaccinated ASAP

Māori patients are being urged by surgeons to get their first vaccination as soon as possible especially now that the highly contagious Delta variant is spreading in the Aotearoa New Zealand community.

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons' (RACS) Māori Health Advisory Group supports the call by Te Rōpu Kaupapa Urutā, endorsed by Te Ora, for the government vaccination program to prioritise the first dose of vaccine for Māori and Pasifika.

Dr Maxine Ronald (Nga Puhi, Ngati Wai), a general surgeon working in Whangarei and Chair of RACS' Indigenous Health Committee, says it is vital that Māori get vaccinated to avoid becoming seriously unwell and to protect their whānau.

“We know that Māori have a higher rate of underlying health conditions such as cardiovascular disease or diabetes so getting infected with COVID-19 means the risks of getting seriously ill or dying are much higher. It is vital that whānau get vaccinated to protect each other especially our kaumatua, tamariki and vulnerable whānau.”

Dr Ronald cares for many patients who have cancer who may be concerned about their ongoing care and investigations. She wants to reassure Māori patients that scheduled cancer-related treatments and operations are still going ahead during lockdown. “So I urge patients who have scheduled treatments to keep to your appointments unless you have been told otherwise by the hospital.”

Dr John Mutu-Grigg (Ngati Kahu, Te Rarawa), an orthopaedic surgeon who works in Auckland and is Chair of RACS' Māori Health Advisory Group, says it is important for patients to know that if surgery has been delayed, it will be because it is considered safe to delay it. “For example, many orthopaedic surgeries can be delayed during lockdown, because it is safer to wait than to proceed. The sooner we all get through lockdown, get vaccinated and follow basic hygiene precautions – the sooner elective operating will be able to get back to normal.”

Dr Mutu-Grigg wanted to reassure Māori patients in particular that hospitals were the safest place to be if people were very unwell. “I know there is a lot of concern and fear among people about going to hospitals that may have Covid patients. Hospitals have the necessary equipment and systems in place to make sure that all patients – those with Covid and those without - are safe and in the best possible care. If you are seriously unwell, then hospital is the safest place to be.”

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About the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS)

RACS is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Australia and New Zealand. The College is a not-for-profit organisation that represents more than 7000 surgeons and 1300 surgical trainees and International Medical Graduates. RACS also supports healthcare and surgical education in the Asia-Pacific region and is a substantial funder of surgical research. There are nine surgical specialties in Australasia being: Cardiothoracic surgery, General surgery, Neurosurgery, Orthopaedic surgery, Otolaryngology Head-and-Neck surgery, Paediatric surgery, Plastic and Reconstructive surgery, Urology and Vascular surgery. www.surgeons.org