



(MOH, 2021)

## Canterbury kicks off COVID-19 vaccinations

### Media release

24 February 2021

About 40 border workers from Christchurch Airport have been vaccinated today at a nearby community based testing centre as the COVID-19 immunisation programme starts rolling out in the South Island.

They included a range of people, such as aviation security workers, cleaners, police, customs workers and health protection officers who screen passengers arriving on international flights.

Yesterday (23 February), 35 of the Canterbury-based vaccination team gave and received the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine to prepare for today's rollout.

About 20 per cent of New Zealand's approximately 12,000 border and Managed Isolation & Quarantine (MIQ) workers are based in Canterbury and it's fantastic that the first group have taken up the opportunity to get their first dose of the vaccine as we roll this programme out to all the region's border and MIQ workers over the next few weeks.

'These people play a critical role at the frontline of our continued efforts to keep the virus out of our communities and we're very grateful for their commitment and hard work. They're the most at risk of exposure to COVID-19 and it is important that we prioritise their protection,' COVID-19 Vaccine Immunisation Programme Clinical Lead Dr Joe Bourne said.

Canterbury DHB clinician Dr Alan Pithie, Consultant Physician in Infectious Diseases and General Medicine, said the rollout of the immunisation programme in Canterbury was an important milestone in the fight against COVID-19.

'Our staff are putting in a huge amount of work to provide those at the border in Canterbury with the best protection against COVID-19.

'This is just the start of the vaccination rollout and we are confident that the system we have created is robust and efficient. We are really proud of our team, this is obviously a new situation for everyone, but it is incredibly important that we complete this first phase as quickly as possible,' Dr Pithie said.

The vaccines have been transported in special containers to the South Island after being transported there from the ultra-low temperature (ULT) storage facility in Auckland.

Health Protection Officer Debbie Smith said she was relieved to get vaccinated today against COVID-19.

'It's another level of armour and I feel like a superhero on the inside now. Working on the frontline, you tend to live your life differently. There have been events I've thought twice about going to because of the potential risk I pose and that's where the vaccination is going to let me live my life a little bit more normally, I hope.'

Her colleague and fellow Health Protection Officer, Jimmy Wong, said getting vaccinated was a huge relief because it meant greater protection for his family.

'I've got a three-month-old baby at the moment and it's very important to me to do what I can to protect myself and to protect my family.'

Both have worked at Christchurch International Airport since 26 January last year and one of their key roles is health screening people returning to New Zealand on international flights, which puts them in close contact with people potentially with COVID-19.

Airport cleaner Cherry\* said she was very keen to get vaccinated and pleased to get that opportunity today as one of the first in Christchurch.

'I'm happy so I can protect myself and my family. I have felt a little nervous working at the airport and this is a real relief.'

She works full-time for OCS Ltd at the airport and her role includes sanitising touch points, clearing rubbish and ensuring surfaces remain clean and safe.

\* This person has asked to be referred to only by her first name.