

A COVID-19 Situational Report:  
Beyond Aotearoa  
New Zealand's Fortress

Discussion Paper 2021/03  
1 September 2021

**MCGUINNESS INSTITUTE**  
TE HONONGA WAKA

## Discussion Points

A SlideShare of key points from  
Discussion Paper 2021/03 –  
A COVID-19 Situational Report  
Beyond Aotearoa New Zealand's  
Fortress (1 September 2021)

# Discussion points

**Insight:** What we know (and do not know) about COVID-19

**Hindsight:** What we did (or did not) do well

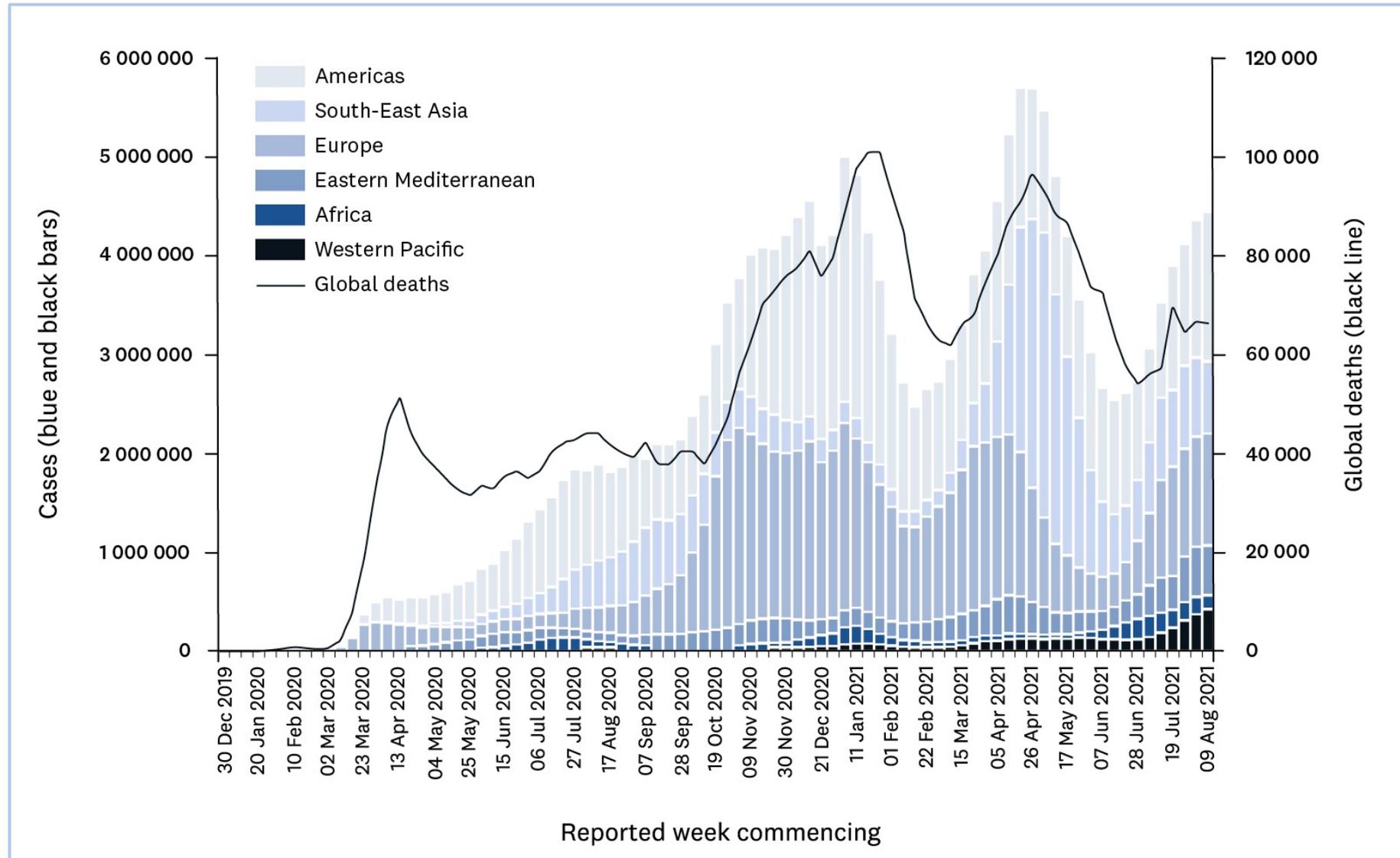
**Foresight:** What the future might look like

The challenges we face – a noisy world

Constitutional stress

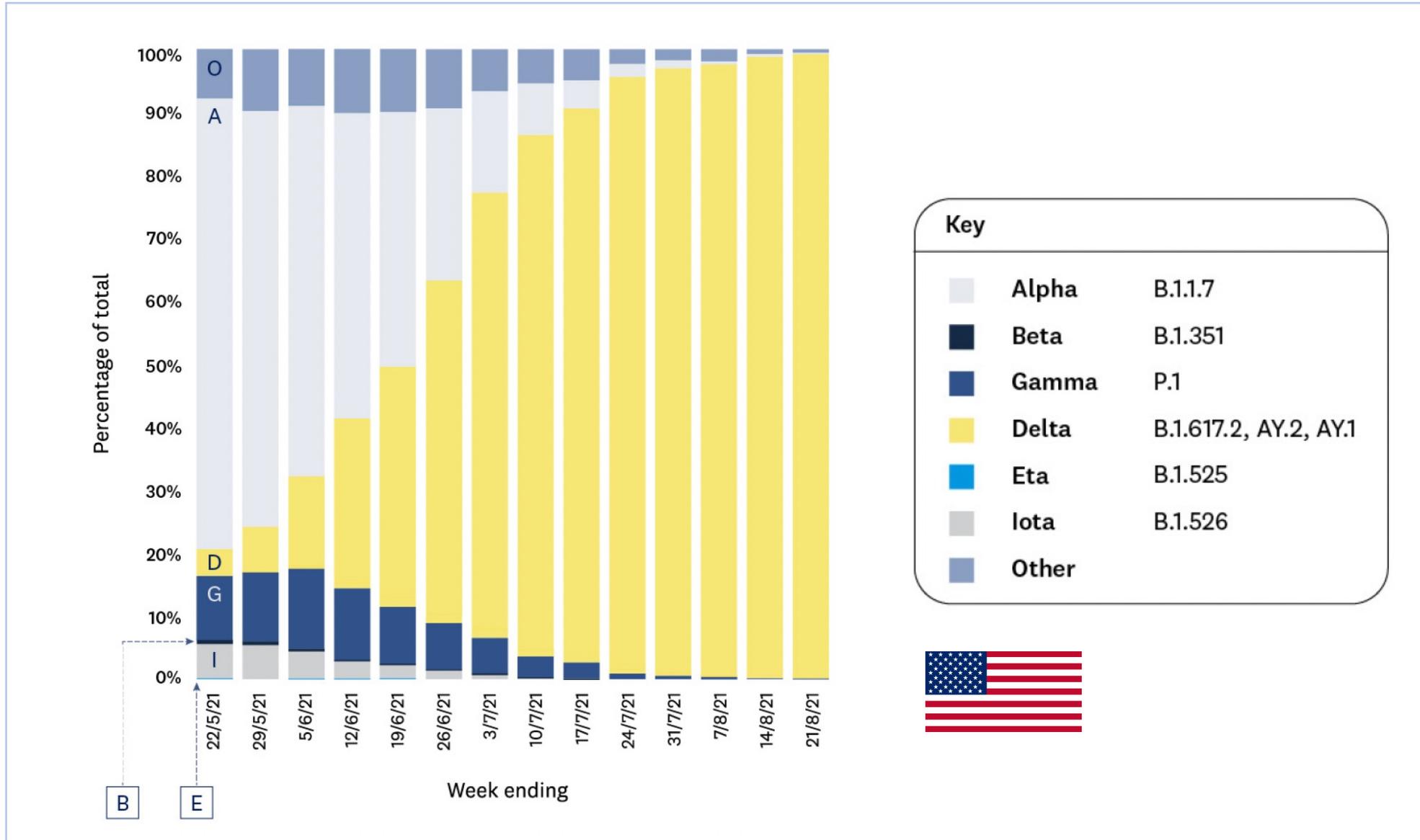
Time to build governance systems that deal with the fat tails problem

# Global cases and deaths: COVID-19 is not under control



DISCUSSION PAPER 2021/03 – Figure 1: Global cases and deaths, reported weekly by WHO

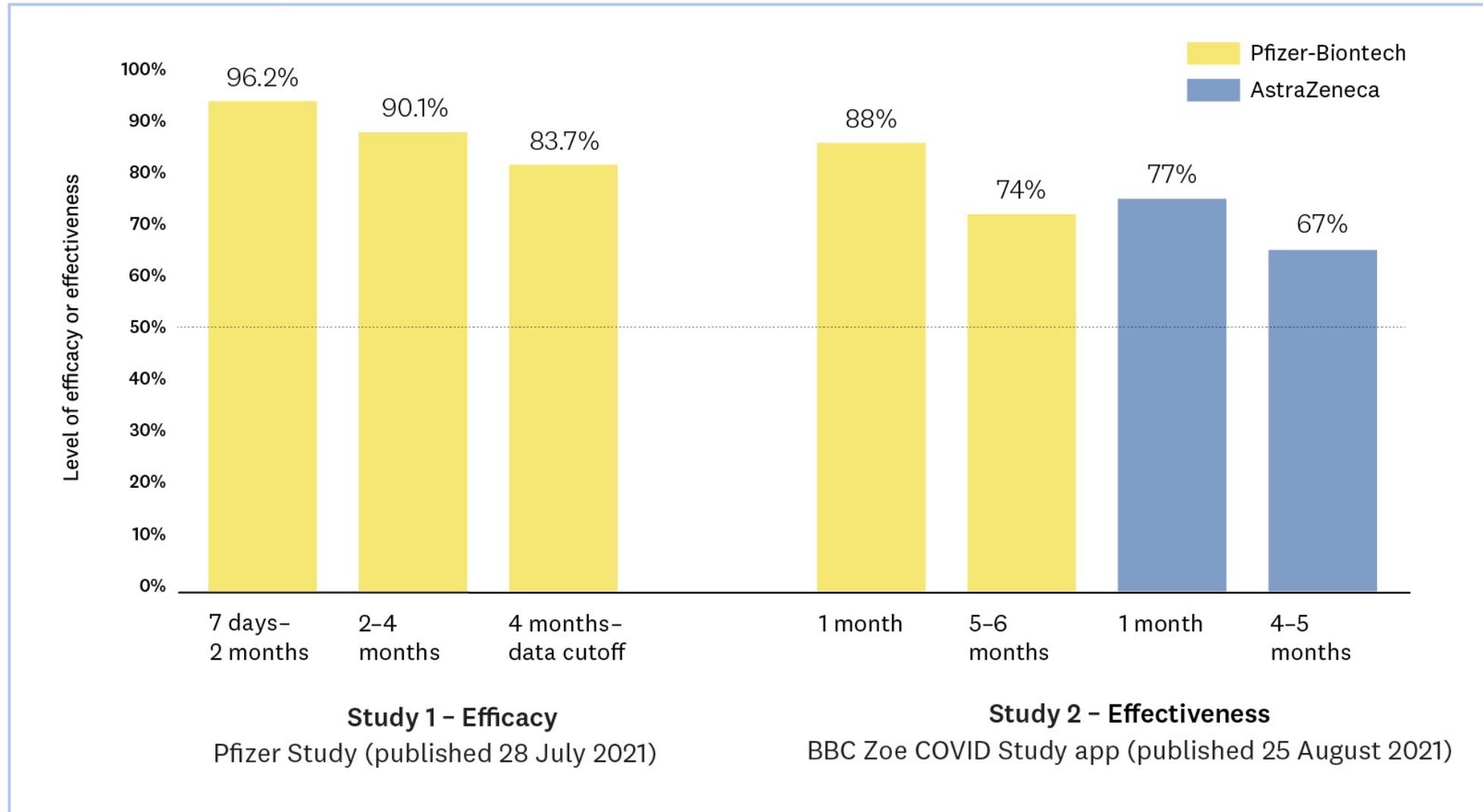
# Variants can emerge and become dominant very quickly



DISCUSSION PAPER 2021/03 – Figure 2: US variant proportions by week



# Vaccine effectiveness is waning; boosters may be necessary



The UK Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) noted in July 2021 that there was a risk that the current environment in the UK and overseas creates a petri dish where Delta is rampant at the same time as a wide range of vaccinated and unvaccinated people socialise. This could lead to a new variant, immune to the current vaccines, emerging and spreading quickly through the community before being identified (due to testing and genome sequencing being overwhelmed).... These new variants risk severely slowing down the development of new vaccines, and more importantly, risks creating the perfect environment for new variants to emerge.

- The origin of the ancestral strain
- Evidence supporting boosters
- Why Delta is more transmissible
- How Delta might further evolve
- Extent the vaccinated can transmit Delta
- Whether new treatments and interventions (e.g. NPIs) are on the horizon
- Whether a life-long vaccine is possible
- Extent new variants might emerge or existing ones become more problematic
- Ability to manage, treat and cure long COVID-19
- Long-term impact of Delta and vaccines
- Extent other viruses might emerge or be already circulating

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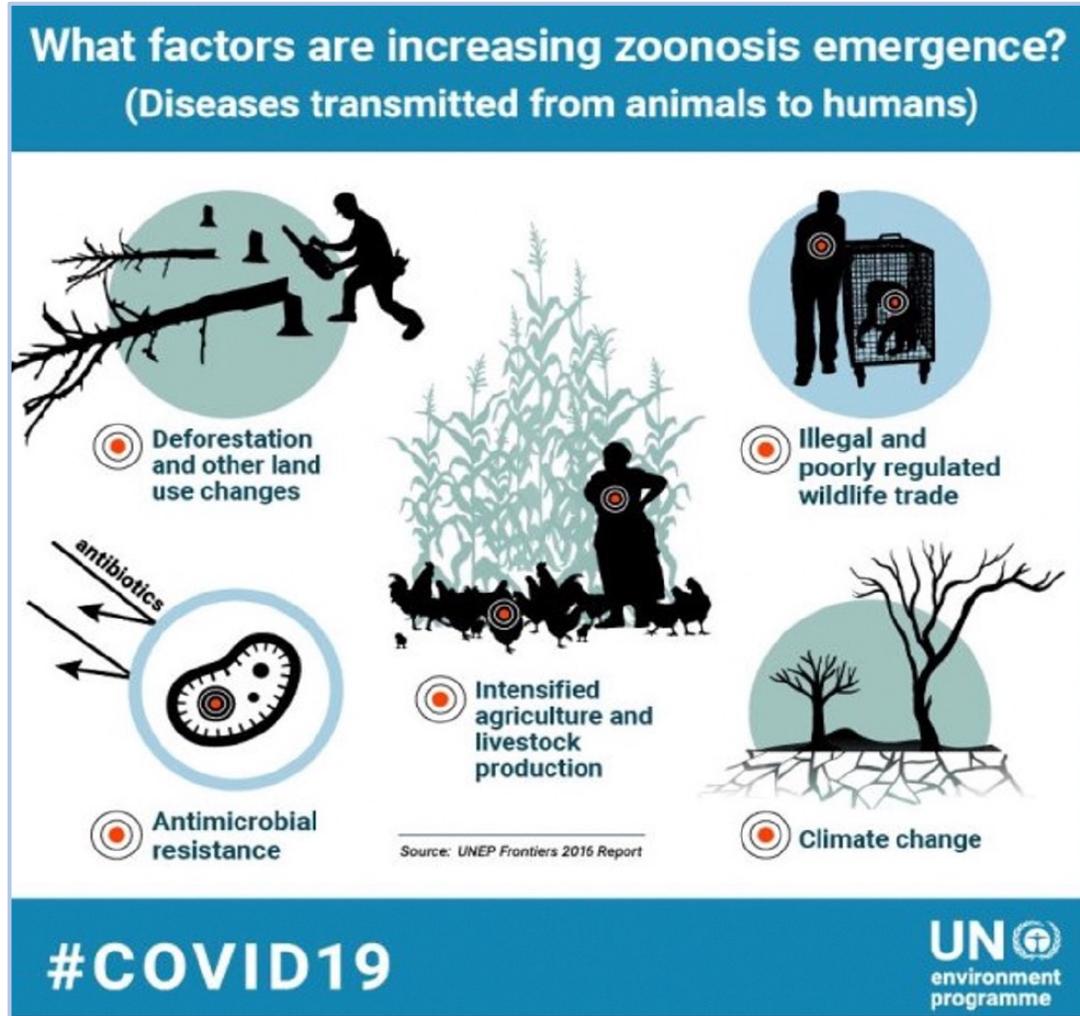
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# Globally: Management of emerging zoonosis, pandemic preparation and vaccination rollout



Not called a pandemic until 11 March 2020

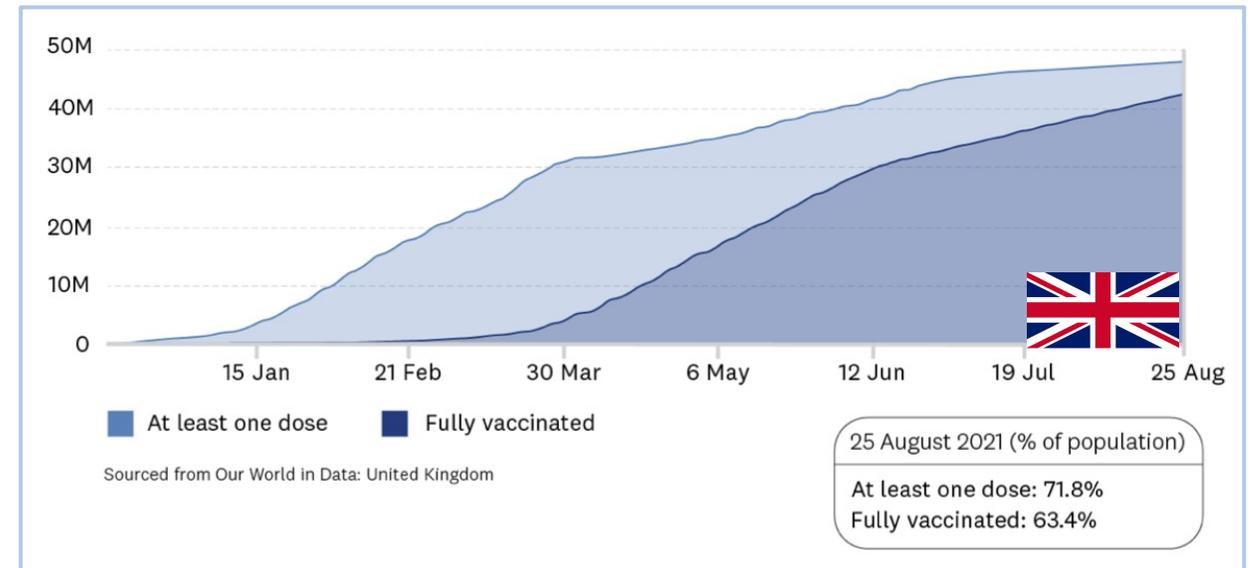
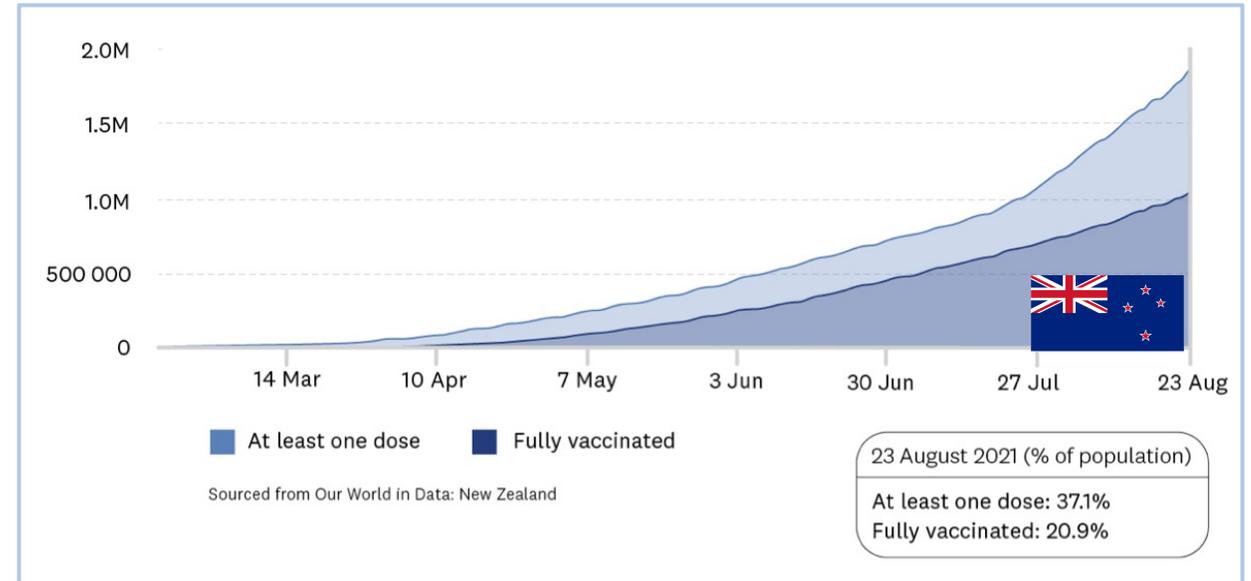
Public masks not part of the advice until April 2020 (CDC) and June 2020 (WHO)

Inequitable vaccine rollout

Lack of a global research strategy

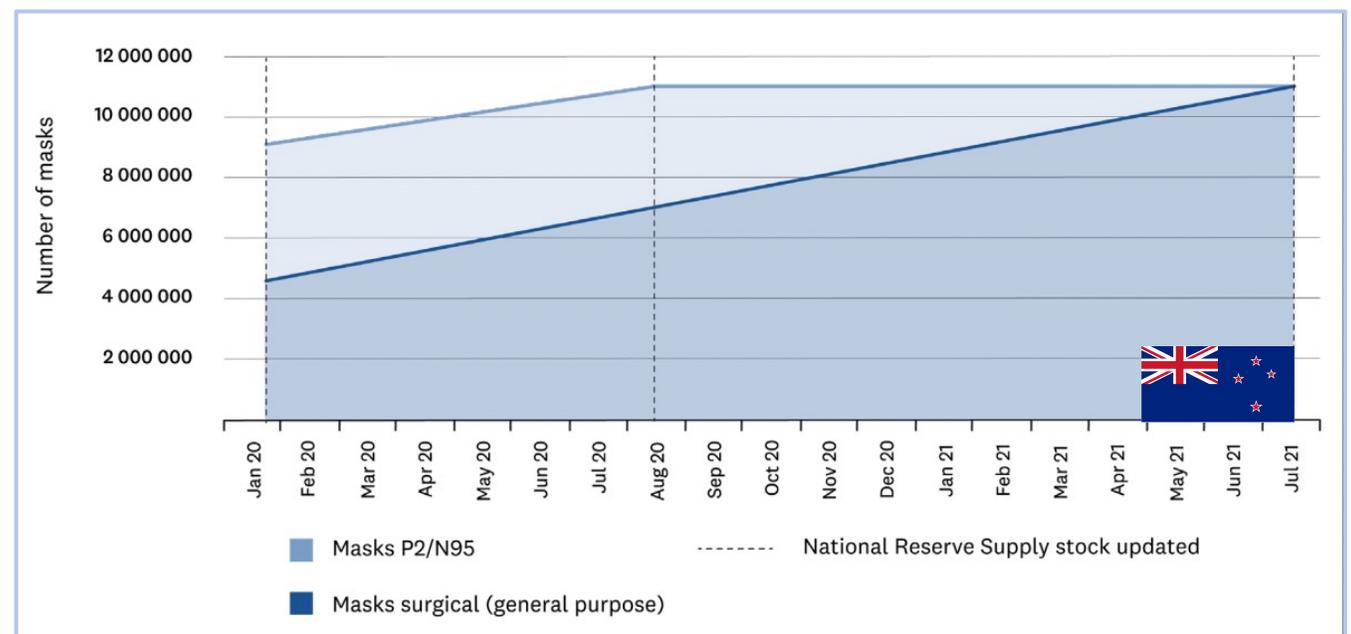
# New Zealand's vaccination rollout has been slow and gaps between doses too close

New Zealand continued to focus on a gap between doses of three weeks, long after the UK found that eight weeks gave more immunity for the individual and also enabled more jabs in arms, creating better overall immunity in the community.



# New Zealand's National Reserve Supply is essential; we have not focused on stock levels and logistics

- Set minimum levels
- Update the public composition of the National Reserve Supply monthly
- Audit stock monthly during a pandemic
- Support New Zealand manufacturing of masks (security of supply)



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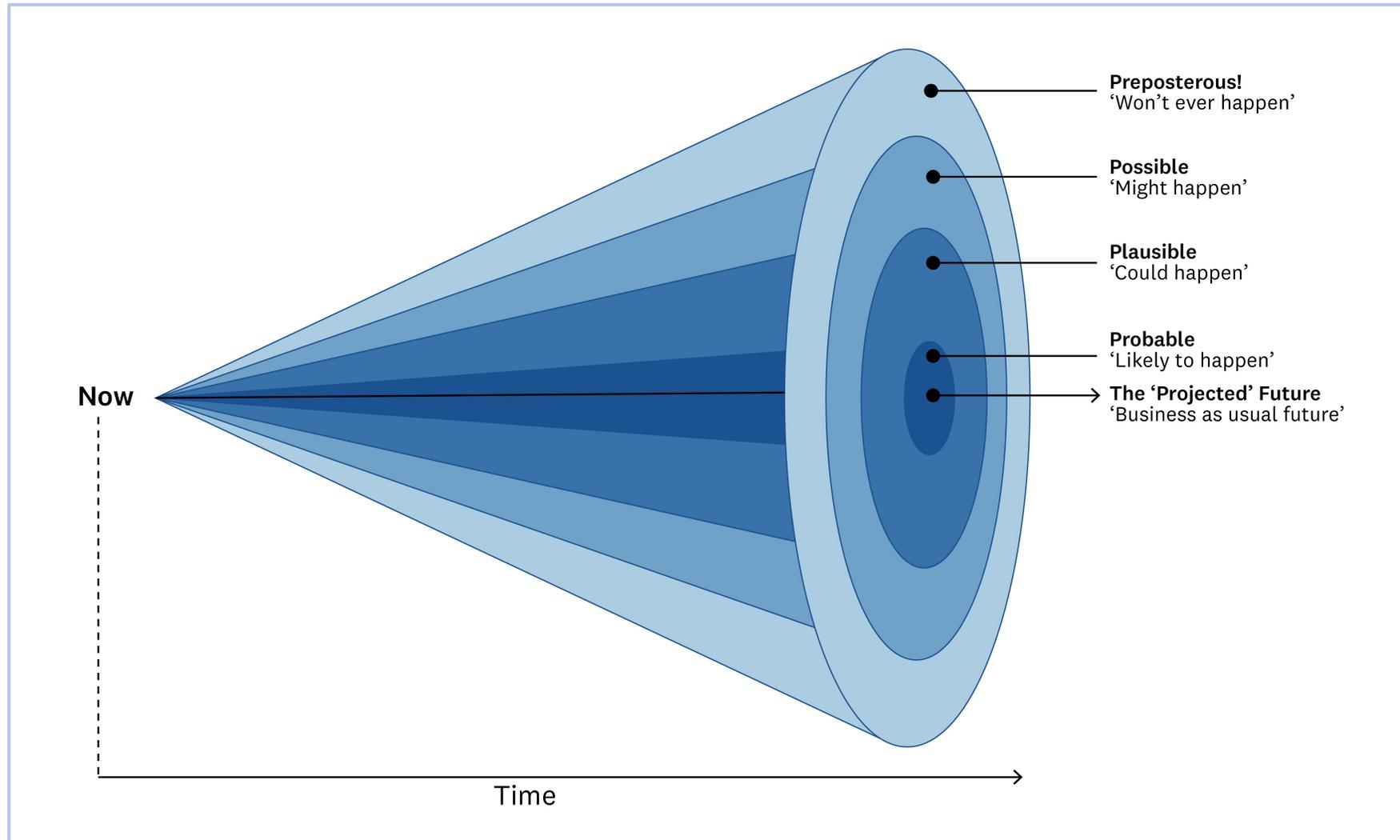
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Foresight tends to focus on dystopian futures, because that is where lessons are easier to decipher



## Check List for Policy Analysts

**Institutional governance and management** – What have we learnt and do our current institutional settings (government and public sector) need to change to deal with pandemic-like events?

**Institutional infrastructure** – Do we have the short- and long-term capability and capacity to deal with disruptive events and, if we do not, what will be required to address this?

**Institutional policy settings** – Do our settings promote long-term thinking or short-term reactive approaches? Do we have a set of principles to shape and drive decision making?

**Interdisciplinary collaboration** – Do our settings promote collaboration and knowledge and evidence sharing to glean insights that can inform and shape approaches to different threats and challenges?

**Information** – How do we ensure that the public is best educated on evidence-based strategies and approaches as part of an elimination or suppression strategy?

**Equity of outcomes** – How do our policy settings ensure that the most vulnerable are prioritised? How do we ensure that we do not increase marginalisation and reinforce bias? How do red zone countries integrate back into the mainstream?



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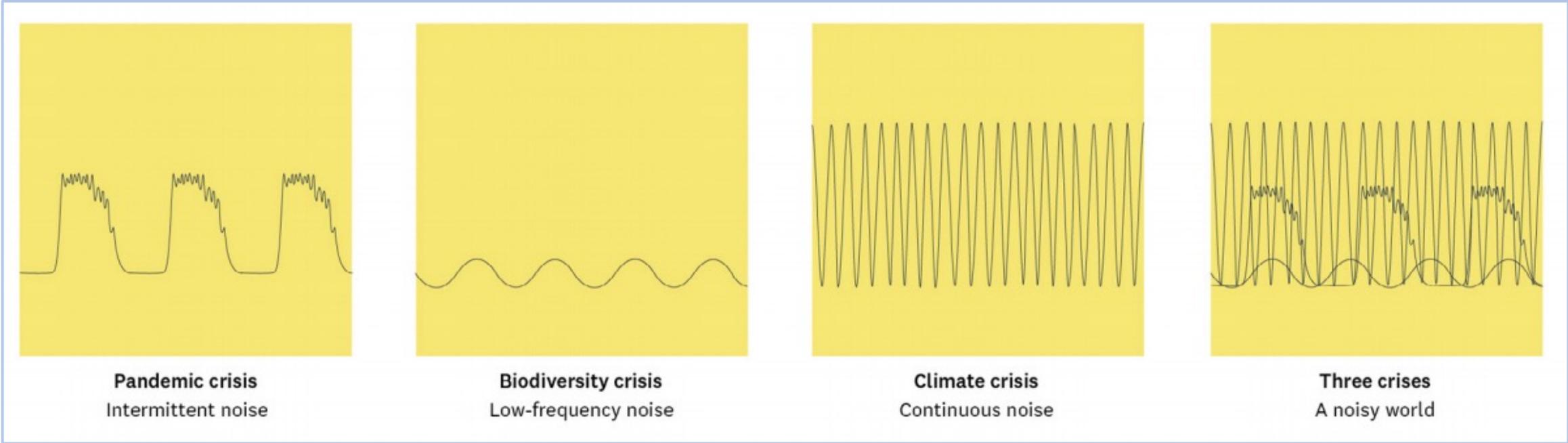
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# Should we redesign our governance system for the emerging future – the noisy world?



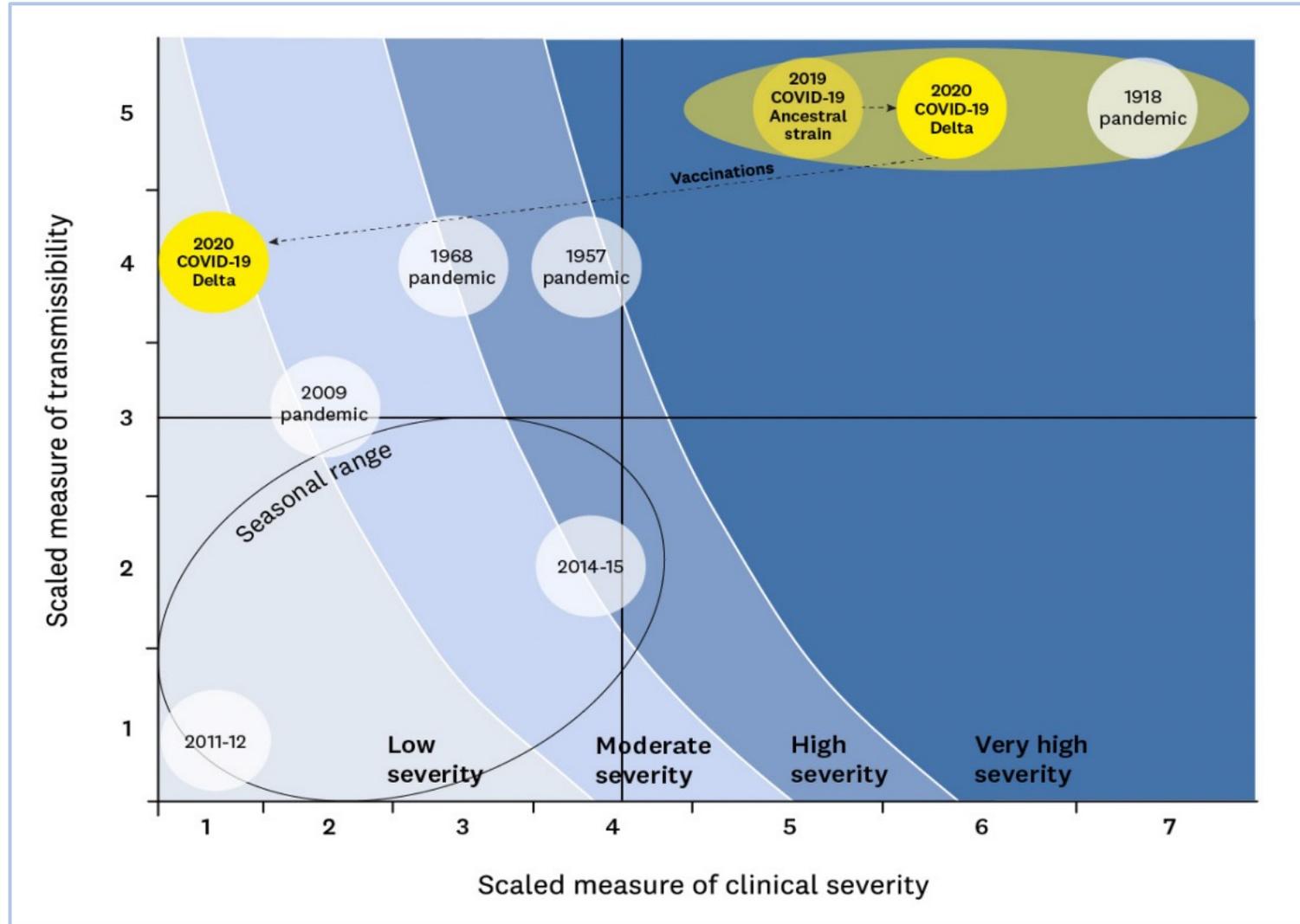
Reviewing our overall response to date is a great way of preparing the country for pandemics in the future. These 1919 terms of reference could have been written today.

A [1919] Commission to inquire into and report as to the following matters, namely :—

1. The causes of the introduction and extension of the recent epidemic of influenza in New Zealand.
2. The best methods of preventing or dealing with such occurrences in future.
3. All matters connected with the arrival in New Zealand waters of the s.s. Niagara and the s.s. Makura in respect to their bearing on the introduction or extension of the epidemic.
4. The administration of the Public Health Department and of local authorities with regard to their responsibilities in relation to the epidemic, and generally in regard to public health.
5. The proper relation of local authorities to the Public Health Department in respect of the prevention or suppression of infectious diseases, and generally in regard to public health.
6. The efficiency of the quarantine arrangements in New Zealand.



# How can we stay ahead of the emerging COVID-19 variants?



DISCUSSION PAPER 2021/03 – Figure 11: The 2017 CDC Pandemic Severity Assessment Framework (PSAF) (updated)

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‘The COVID-19 crisis will be looked back on in the future as a key moment in our history. Whether it will be seen as a disaster or the beginning of a better age will depend on the honesty, courage, and unity we, as a nation, can show over the next couple of years. It is time to move beyond self-congratulation on what we did during the crisis. It is time to reckon with the much harder task of fulfilling the promise inherent in that time for our children and grandchildren.’

– Sir Michael Cullen

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# We need to answer the question: Given the risk of a pandemic has been on the horizon for years, why were we not better prepared?

**Managing the risk of a 'bird flu' pandemic – a Chartered Accountant's perspective**  
By Wendy McGuinness

**The current landscape**  
A senior lecturer at Te Pūkaki in Wellington on 7 February by the New Zealand Society for Risk Management Inc. entitled Avian Influenza (bird flu) – the next pandemic? (sponsored by HAKAHI, Solid Energy – Coal of New Zealand, URS New Zealand, Air New Zealand and ACC) drew the big picture. Table 1 outlines senior lay observations from the seminar.

The scale of risk due to an influenza pandemic is significant, shown in Figure 1 where the risk levels (after taking into account current controls) of five events are mapped and compared the influenza pandemic. One (1) is a nuclear powered ship suffering a radiation leak in the Bay of Plenty (NZ 2), a major earthquake in Wellington (NZ 3) and a B737 crash (NZ 4) are also shown. The current level of control for an influenza pandemic (B1)

Risk	Control Consequence	Control Likelihood	Control Risk
1 Avian influenza – national impacts	Major	Almost certain	Extreme
2 Radiation from nuclear powered ship	Negligible	Almost incredible	Low
3 Earthquake on the Wellington fault	Moderate	Rare	Medium
4 B 737 crash – domestic flight	Minor	Almost incredible	Low

‘[A] potential full border closure until a vaccine is developed. The period of time between the first outbreak and the development of the appropriate vaccine will be a critical factor in managing the risk. This is currently expected to be in the range of six weeks to six months. Consequently, the longer New Zealand can keep the virus out (i.e. reduce the gap), or ideally, completely prevent the virus entering New Zealand (resulting in the second phase not occurring), the fewer negative effects on human health and the economy.’

	Risk	Control Consequence	Control Likelihood	Control Risk
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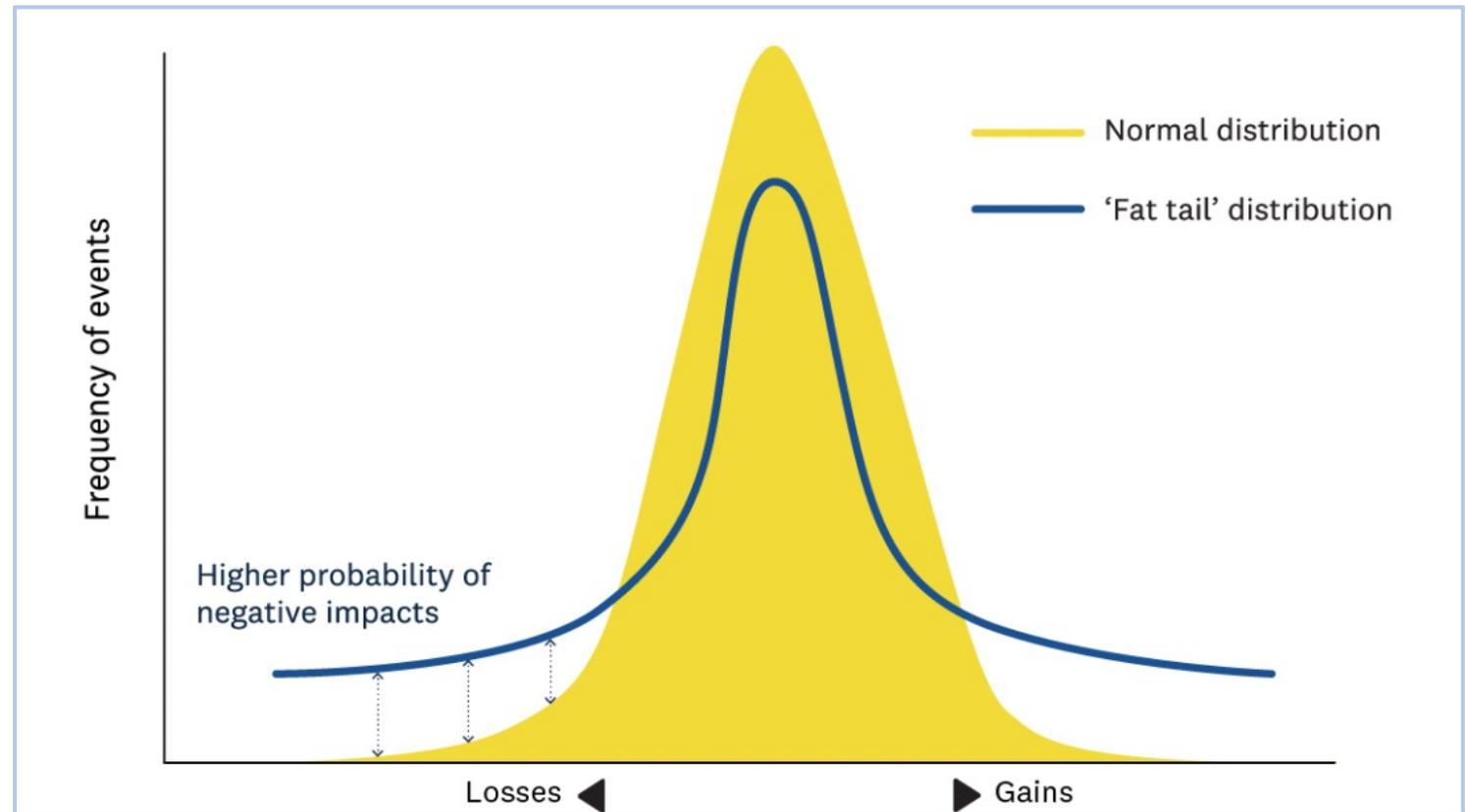


## Uncertainty over the future is increasing

This uncertainty over the future is illustrated by the COVID-19 tail getting 'fatter'. This means we need to work harder to understand the tail on the left and be prepared for a range of eventualities.

Four ways to eliminate fat tail risks:

1. Cut the tail by eliminating specific tail risks
2. Take a cautious approach by applying the precautionary principle
3. Put contingencies in place
4. Act immediately, at blitz-like speed, and at scale, when the tail rears



- Although vaccinations will help, they are not the silver bullet. New Zealand must use all the tools in the toolbox to not only prevent and manage COVID-19 outbreaks but build capability in the healthcare system. We have a lot more work to do.
- COVID-19 is not the complete story. We are facing three crises: pandemics, biodiversity and climate.
- We need to separate ‘COVID-19 operational planning’ from ‘New Zealand’s strategic thinking’. This means creating a team to think broadly about all three crises and reflect, think, integrate, consult, recalibrate and pivot. While MOH aims to improve the existing COVID-19 response, the second team would focus on redesigning New Zealand so that it is ‘fit for the future’ – two different work streams with two different information requirements and skill sets.

Constitutional stress is on the increase. This means redesigning our constitutional framework is now urgent. Our current government system has been in a reactive mode for ten years, since the Christchurch earthquakes and the terrorist attacks, and we urgently need to reestablish a proactive mode.

New Zealand needs a new independent organisation; one able to embed foresight in the public service and wider society more generally. This means analysing, consulting, seeking out expertise, undertaking risk assessments, building on Long-term Insight Briefings, creating reference climate scenarios and considering integrated approaches to all three crises (where possible, aligning the emissions transition with the COVID-19 suppression transition). Such an organisation would benefit from nonpartisan support; new institutions require ongoing care, guidance and reliable funding streams.

None of the three crises will wait for New Zealand to get our House in order. Instead, we need to move with lightning speed to better embed foresight, think strategically and get prepared.

## Tasks an independent foresight body might undertake include:

1. Supporting departmental CEs in the preparation, promotion (in particular, the public consultation) and central publishing of all resulting Long-term Insights Briefings
2. Supporting the long-term aspects of the existing resource management reform
3. Facilitating and/or creating reference climate change scenarios for Aotearoa New Zealand
4. Facilitating and/or creating COVID-19 scenarios for Aotearoa New Zealand (we are in a unique situation globally and we need to understand more about our options)
5. Preparing a risk register and assessment for Aotearoa New Zealand (say every year)
6. Preparing a regular generational plan (say every three years)
7. Reviewing the ability for the country to deal with constitutional stress, in particular our constitutional response to fat tail events when low probability/high magnitude events occur.

# Thank you Ngā mihi

Read ‘Discussion Paper 2021/03: A COVID-19 Situational Report: Beyond Aotearoa New Zealand’s Fortress as at 1 September 2021’ [here](#).

Learn more about our *PandemicNZ* Project and COVID-19 timeline [here](#).

We welcome your feedback: [enquiries@mcguinnessinstitute.org](mailto:enquiries@mcguinnessinstitute.org)

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