

Introduction to Vaccination in New Zealand

Sourced from information compiled for the website New Zealand Historical Data in 2000.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20060129101121/http://homepages.paradise.net.nz/~dchamber/nzdoc96.html>

"Under the 1863 Vaccination Act, every child born in New Zealand was required to be vaccinated within six months of their birth. The local Registrars of Births, Deaths and Marriages acted as Vaccination Inspectors, recording vaccination details for children born in their district."

From: Gavel & Quill: A Guide to Court Records at National Archives

Smallpox vaccination around the country by Dr Derek GOW

Reference: New Zealand Doctor 4 Sep 1996 p51

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...smallpox vaccination in NZ began around the time of the first immigrant ships in 1840...

... the arrival of European settlers in NZ prompted the local CMS missionaries to begin vaccinating Maori. This activity was headed by William Williams, who had completed a surgical apprenticeship before joining the mission. In April 1845 Williams recorded fears of smallpox among the Patutahi Maori. It was a false alarm, but he seized the opportunity to vaccinate the 'whole population in this quarter'.

The arrival of increasing numbers of medical men accelerated this process. In 1848 John Fitzgerald, Wellington Hospital's first medical superintendent, circularised local Maori on the importance of vaccination. His attempt to educate and protect was not entirely successful.

In 1849 New Plymouth's colonial surgeon, Peter Wilson, complained that the indiscreet publication in Maori of a booklet on smallpox had occasioned near panic among Taranaki Maori, and that local doctors were swamped with demands for vaccination. Some Maori even resorted to direct arm to arm inoculation, a practice so fraught with danger it had recently been banned in England.

Vaccination of North Island Maori seems to have been fairly common in the late 1840s. Following reports of smallpox in the East Cape in 1851, William Colenso, another CMS worker, asked crown land purchase agent Donald McLean for assistance in obtaining vaccine.

"I have at different times vaccinated a large number," Colenso wrote, "but there are still hundreds who have not been done."

In December 1854 the colonial government formalised such initiatives by establishing a Central Board of Vaccination for the Aborigines of New Zealand. In line with past endeavours, this consisted of clergymen and gentlemen. Of its eight original members, only two were doctors - Arthur Thomson of the 58th Regiment and John Davies Colonial Surgeon, medical officer to Auckland Hospital and local coroner.

The board seems to have been an almost exclusively Auckland organisation. It was active for about a decade, though little is known of its work. One of its few recorded actions was to recommend that "a short treatise on Small Pox and Vaccination should be printed in the Maori tongue and circulated amongst them as widely as possible."

Some contemporary observers believed the board had made a major contribution to Maori health. Arthur Thomson claimed in his 1859 Story of New Zealand that two-thirds of the "natives" had been vaccinated by that date. His boast is impossible to verify or refute.

The level of enthusiasm for vaccination among European settlers is equally difficult to quantify. Support appears to have been lukewarm from the outset, as immigrants realised that smallpox posed little threat to this most distant of Britain's colonies.

William Purdie, an early arrival in the new settlement of Otago, was a vigorous advocate of the procedure. As noted in last month's column, he was supported by the Rev Thomas Burns, nephew of the famed poet.

The lengthy sea voyage from Britain meant that supplies of vaccine were erratic in these early years. In November 1851 the Otago Witness reported the arrival of fresh matter. Noting that Purdie had already used this to good effect on several children, an important assurance at a time when impure vaccine caused numerous problems, the Witness urged parents to take advantage of his offer of free vaccination.

Three weeks later the paper warned that the remarkable absence of disease in Otago had led many to believe they would be entirely relieved from the "scourge of sickness". The editorial stated that failure to vaccinate local children was an act of folly, verging on insanity, which would ultimately be punished. Few heeded the warning.

Within two decades, fear of smallpox had been largely excised from the minds of New Zealanders.

Attempts to boost immunisation rates generally faltered on a sea of indifference or actual hostility.

In February 1869 the Illustrated New Zealand Herald compared the threat of smallpox to an invasion by some great naval power, with smallpox cast as a more terrible and insidious foe than any battleship.

Predicting that thousands would be slain if the disease reached New Zealand, the editorial deplored the reactions of the colony's citizens. New Zealanders were waiting, it lamented, with "a stoical fatalism that would do credit to Mahometans".

The exasperation and despair of this editorial has been echoed many times by advocates of immunisation over the past 150 years.

Vaccination Chronology

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| 1845 | William Williams recorded fears of smallpox among the Patutahi Maori. It was a false alarm, but he seized the opportunity to vaccinate the 'whole population in this quarter'. (14) |
| 1848 | John Fitzgerald, Wellington Hospital's first medical superintendent, circularized Maori on the importance of vaccination. (14) |
| 1848 Sep 14 | Announcement on smallpox vaccination plans for Maori written by A. S. Thompson. (1) |
| 1849 | Peter Wislon, New Plymouth's colonial surgeon, complained that the indiscreet publication in Maori of a booklet on smallpox had occasioned near panic among Taranaki Maori, and that local doctors were swamped with demands for vaccination. (14) |
| 1851 | There were reports of smallpox at East Cape. William Colenso, a CMS worker, asked crown land purchase agent Donald McLean for assistance in obtaining vaccine. (14) |
| 1851 Nov | William Purdie reported the arrival of fresh vaccine and the Otago Witness urged parents to take advantage of his offer of free vaccination. (14) |
| 1854 | Vaccination Report. (3) |
| 1854 Dec | The Colonial Government established a Central Board of Vaccination for the Aborigines of New Zealand. This consisted of clergymen and gentlemen. Only two of the original eight members were doctors - Arthur Thomson of the 58th Regiment and John Davies, Colonial Surgeon, local coroner and medical officer to Auckland Hospital. (14) |

- 1855 Te korero o te Runanga o Waenganui o te motu Nei, mo te mahi okaoka, mo te koroputaputa ki, nga iwi Maori, o Niu Tirenī: A short treatise on the Board's policy on smallpox vaccination prepared and published by the Central Board of Vaccination. It was also published in "The Maori messenger" v1 n3 (1 Mar 1855) along with an English version entitled: Address from the Central Board of Vaccination to the aboriginal natives of New Zealand. (2)
- 1856 Report: Vaccination of Natives. (5)
- 1859 Arthur Thomson claimed in his "Story of New Zealand" that two-thirds of the 'natives' had been vaccinated by that date. (14)
- 1863 Dec 14 The Vaccination Act, 1863: An Act to extend and make compulsory the practice of Vaccination. Children to be vaccinated within six months of birth. Certificate of successful vaccination to be given. Registrar of births to register vaccination. Provincial Governments determine vaccination districts.(4)
- 1867 Jun 15 "As there is reason to believe that many of the poorer classes neglect to have their children vaccinated, through inability to pay the usual fee, the Superintendent informs the public, that Dr Day, of Vincent street, the appointed Public Vaccinator for Auckland, will be in attendance every Wednesday, at ten o'clock, at the Dispensary (Mr Wellsman's) Queen Street, to vaccinate the children of the poor, without any fee or charge." (20)
- 1869 Feb The Illustrated New Zealand Herald compared the threat of smallpox to an invasion by some great naval power, with smallpox cast as a more terrible and insidious foe than any battleship. (14)
- 1869 Jun 15 Tue. House of Representatives: Vaccination Act Amendment Bill. Introduction to the House.
- 1869 Jul 07 Wed. House of Representatives: Vaccination Act Amendment Bill. Discussion prior to second reading. (16)
- 1869 Jul 14 Wed. House of Representatives: Vaccination Act Amendment Bill. This Bill was considered in Committee, progress was made and reported, and leave obtained to sit again on Tuesday. (16)
- 1869 Jul 20 Tue. House of Representatives: Vaccination Act Amendment Bill. This Bill was further considered in Committee, progress was reported, and leave obtained to sit again on Thursday. (15)
- 1869 Jul 22 Thu. House of Representatives: Vaccination Act Amendment Bill. This Bill was further considered in Committee, progress was reported, and leave obtained to sit again on Wednesday next. (15)
- 1869 Jul 30 Fri. House of Representatives: Vaccination Act Amendment Bill. This Bill was further considered in Committee, progress was made and reported, and leave given to sit again on Wednesday. (15)
- 1869 Aug 31 Tue. House of Representatives: The Vaccination Bill is discharged. (15)
- 1870 Report of Public Petitions Committee on the Vaccination Bill - AJHR 1870 F8
- 1870 Jun 17 Fri. Legislative Council: Vaccination. Discussion about the reading of Dr Stratford's paper on vaccination by members of the Council. (17)
- 1870 Jun 17 Fri. House of Representatives: Vaccination Bill Mr Fox moved for leave to bring in a Bill to amend the laws relating to vaccination. Leave was granted. The Bill was brought in, read a first time, ordered to be printed, and the second reading fixed for Tuesday. (17)

- 1870 Jun 21 Tue. House of Representatives: Vaccination Bill Second Reading (17)
- 1870 Jun 23 Thu. House of Representatives: Vaccination Bill. On the motion of Mr Fox, it was ordered that the Select Committee to which the Bill to amend the laws relating to vaccination stands referred, shall consist of Mr Gillies, Mr R. G. Wood, Mr Kelly, Sir D. Monro, Mr Collins, Mr Richmond, Mr Rolleston and Mr Webster. (17)
- 1871 Jan 11 Question put to the Auckland Provincial Council Vaccine Lymph - Dr Stratford, pursuant to notice, asked the Provincial Secretary, What steps have been taken by the Executive to procure a supply of genuine vaccine lymph for the use of the Provincial Vaccinator of the Province of Auckland, and if they have directed him to use animal or human vaccine lymph at the choice of the people operated upon? Mr Lusk answered, The Government have taken no steps with regard to this question. (21)
- 1871 Nov 14 The Vaccination Act 1871: An Act to repeal "The Vaccination Act, 1863" and to make other provision in lieu thereof. The Registrar of Births in every district shall keep a book in which he shall register the certificates received and a list of unvaccinated children will be sent to the Public Vaccinator on the 1st Jan and 1st July.(4)
- 1871 Dec 21 Vaccination - On motion of Dr Nicholson Resolved that a respectful Address be presented to His Honour the Superintendent, requesting him to make provision for Vaccination within the Province, until such time as the Colonial Government shall have made due provision for the same; and this Council will appropriate such sum as His Honor may recommend as being required for this purpose, provided it do not exceed 200 pound. Address No. 67 (22)
- 1872 Mar 01 Places where lymph can be procured; Provincial hospitals of Wellington, Wanganui, Napier, New Plymouth, Auckland, Nelson, Picton, Christchurch, Dunedin, Invercargill and the County hospital of Hokitika. Also that all persons qualified as Medical Practitioners in NZ are appointed as Public Vaccinators under "The Vaccination Act 1871". (8)
- 1872 Oct 21 The Public Health Act 1872: An Act to amend the Law relating to Public Health.
- 1873 May 08 Vaccination Districts Constituted. The boundaries for each district are stipulated. The appointed Vaccination Inspectors are the same people who are the Registrars of Births. (8)
- 1873 Dec 11 Districts for which Public Vaccinators are appointed and the places where vaccinations are to be performed. Under the Public Health Act 1872 (8)
- 1876 Public Health Act 1876
- 1877 Oct 26 The voyage of the ship 'Zealandia' ends in Wellington with two weeks quarantine on Somes Island after a smallpox outbreak. (24)
- 1877-1880 Return of Births, Deaths and Vaccination of Children from 1877-1880 (13)

	1877	1878	1879	1880
[1]	16,856	17,770	18,070	19,341
[2]	1,103	1,086	1,407	1,299
[3]	10,746	11,495	12,384	13,628

[1] Number of Births Registered

[2] Number of Deaths of Children under Six Months of Age

[3] Number of Cases of Successful Vaccination Registered (children under fourteen years of age)

- 1884 Jul 29 Possible introduction of Smallpox from Australia (26)
- 1884 Aug 04 Napier: "A case of confluent small-pox was landed from the steamer Waihora on Saturday, and sent to the hospital. The nature of the disease, suspected yesterday, was confirmed today, and the man is not expected to live. He had not been vaccinated. The Mayor has wired to the Colonial Secretary for instructions, and also to the Mayors of Auckland and Gisborne to warn them of the Waihora, and make arrangements to quarantine. It has been decided to remove the case to the quarantine station. (27)
- 1884 Aug 05 Auckland: "On the arrival of the Waihora, Captain Eddie was greatly astonished to learn that the lamp trimmer of the vessel had been sent ashore at Napier suffering from small-pox, as the man was treated at Wellington by the chemist for inflammation of the bowels. Nothing was thought of Mouatt's illness on board until on the passage between Wellington and Napier, he was reported as worse, and was sent ashore without the captain or passengers suspecting smallpox. On the arrival here of the Waihora the postmaster instructed the captain to send the mails to the hulk for fumigation, and for the vessel to anchor there. Dr Philson, the health officer, proceeded to the vessel, and after making inquiries, forwarded results to Wellington, from where replies were awaited. He instructed Captain Eddie to destroy the bedding and bed clothing of Mouatt, and to thoroughly fumigate the vessel. Dr Philson's opinion is that the vessel will have to go into quarantine for the full time. The passengers are in excellent health, and are greatly annoyed at the turn of events. (28)
- Napier: It is considered that no possible danger of infection can arise from the case of small-pox landed at Napier from the Waihora, as from the first the case was considered a very suspicious one and was rigorously isolated. Stringent quarantine precautions have been taken; and the patient, with the doctor, attendants, and all necessary medicine and other supplies, have been sent to the quarantine station, and a cordon of sentries placed round to prevent communication with the rest of the district. The Health Board met and, under the advice of their medical officers, made all necessary arrangements for preventing the spread of the infection. The patient first felt symptoms of indisposition shortly before reaching Wellington. (28)
- 1884 Aug 06 Dunedin: "It is stated that Mouatt, who has the small-pox at Napier, has a wife and family at Port Chalmers, and that he spent the night with them when the Waihora was in port. It is suggested that the Port Chalmers Corporation should take the necessary precautions. (29)
- 1884 Aug 11 Another case in Invercargill (30)
- 1904 Smallpox outbreak in Christchurch.(12)
- 1911 Jan 01 The Smallpox Case: Landed on Quail Island (18)
- 1911 Jan 17 Quail Island: Strong complaints (19)
- 1913 Smallpox epidemic. (13)
- 1913 Smallpox epidemic at Bay of Islands (25)

(1) Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL): MS-Papers-1187-082 Smallpox vaccination plans written by A. S. Thompson

(2) ATL: EMI 0418 NIW33 (copy 1) Central board of Vaccination (Auckland) 1855

(3) Government Report: Committee Session 1 p461

(4) New Zealand Statutes

(5) Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives (AJHR) 1856 Section A10

(8) New Zealand Gazette

(12) Te Karanga Aug 1990 v6 n2 p10-11 The Smallpox outbreak in Christchurch by Mary Dryden: Looks at the press coverage of a smallpox outbreak.

(13) New Zealand Doctor p42 18 Mar 1998 "Student doctors' smallpox effort" by Dr Charles Hercus and Dr Wilfrid Wallis: Reveals the role of medical students in the public vaccination campaign during the smallpox epidemic of 1913.

(14) New Zealand Doctor p51; 4 Sep 1996 "Smallpox vaccination around the country" by Derek Dow. Examines smallpox vaccination in NZ from 1845 to 1869.

(15) Parliamentary Debates Volume 6 1869

(16) Parliamentary Debates Volume 5 1869

(17) Parliamentary Debates Volume 7 1870

(18) Hawera and Normanby Star Tuesday 3 Jan 1911: "The Smallpox Case"

(19) Hawera and Normanby Star Wednesday 18 Jan 1911: "Quail Island: Strong complaints"

(20) Auckland Provincial Government Gazette 1867 p270

(21) Journal of the Auckland Provincial Council 1871 Session XXVI p108

(22) Journal of the Auckland Provincial Council 1871 Session XXVII p72

(23) AJHR 1881 Section H20 Return of Births, Deaths and Vaccination of Children from 1877-1880 (total numbers only)

(24) Alexander Turnbull Library MS-Papers-0089-03 Diary of Laura Cotton Barraud who records her journey to New Zealand on the ship 'Zealandia' in 1877.

(25) Alexander Turnbull Library MS-Group-0246) Florence Marie Harsant (1891-1994): My everyday life as travelling organiser for Maori women on behalf of the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

(26) Hawera and Normanby Star Tuesday 29 Jul 1884

(27) Hawera and Normanby Star Monday 4 Aug 1884

(28) Hawera and Normanby Star Tuesday 5 Aug 1884

(29) Hawera and Normanby Star Wednesday 6 Aug 1884

(30) Hawera and Normanby Star Monday 11 Aug 1884

Smallpox deaths – sources: (1) New Zealand Official Yearbook; (2) Statistics of New Zealand

1872	Four deaths (2)	
	3 were registered in Auckland Province	
	1 occurred in Wellington Province but was not registered	
1873	nil (2)	
1874	Four deaths (2)	
	One male aged 1 to 3 months; Auckland Province	
	One female aged under 1 month; Auckland Province	
	One female aged 6-12 months; Canterbury Province	
	One female aged 30-35 years; Canterbury Province	
1875-1878	nil (2)	
1879	smallpox is not listed under "Miasmatic Diseases" (2)	
1880	nil (2)	
1881	One death (2)	One male aged 1-2 years; Otago Provincial District
1882	One death (2)	One male aged 25-30 years; Auckland Provincial District
1883-1892	nil (2)	
1893	nil (1,2)	
1894	nil (1)	
1895-1897	nil (1,2)	
1898-1902	nil (2)	
1903	One death (2)	One male aged 20-25 years; Canterbury Provincial District
1904-1907	nil (2)	
1908	Unable to find a reference to smallpox - change in reporting format (2)	

Known surviving Vaccination archives

Vaccination correspondence

1901-1905 mostly Eltham and Hawera districts (6)

Vaccination Registers

These "are arranged by the number of the entry in the Register of Births, and include the names of children and parents, the child's date of birth, date of vaccination and name of medical practitioner. The registers include entries for all children born in the district, whether they were vaccinated or not. In some cases vaccination details were recorded in the Register of Births, rather than in a separate vaccination register." (1)

			Archives Reference
Balclutha	(5)	1892-1921	AG 237 R.1132
Coromandel	(3)	1874-1888	BACL A208/25
Eltham	(6)	1899-1917	
Huntly	(3)	1894-1913	BAHB A560/39
Mount Cook/Fairlie	(4)	1874-1917	CAHY CH648
Napier	(2)	1877-1921	AAOW W3244/252-255
Norsewood	(2)	1876-1913	ABPQ W4287/100-101
Owhango	(3)	1912-1917	BAHH A577/70
Timaru	(4)	1890-1918	CAHY CH24
Waihi	(3)	1895-1904	BAFV A1050/33
Waihi	(3)	1904-1907	BAFV A540/271
Waihi	(3)	1910-1915	BAFV A540/273
Waihi	(3)	1913	BAFV A1050/34
Waimangaroa	(4)	1894-1916	CAIS CH620
Wainui	(2)	1887-1914	ABPQ W4287/102
Weber	(2)	1897-1903	ABPQ W4287/103

Publications held in the Alexander Turnbull from the ATL NZ & P Subject Catalogue

- 1859 Extracts from papers relating to... vaccination
1900 Cox (E) The protest of an anti-vaccinist
1904 Cox (E) The Vaccination Coup de tat in New Zealand
- 1914 Burroughs Wellcome & Co. London.
The History of inoculation and vaccination for the prevention and treatment of disease. Lecture memoranda Australasian Medical Congress Auckland, NZ
- 1914 The History of Smallpox in Australia, 1788-1908. Compiled by... J. H. L. Cumpston, Melbourne.
1915 Smallpox epidemic in New South Wales, 1913 by D. G. Robertson, Melbourne.
- 1946 New Zealand External Affairs Department Publication No.17 ... International sanitary convention for aerial navigation, 1944. Wellington.
- 1962 Dixon, Cyril William 1912-; Smallpox. London; J. & A. Churchill.
- (1) Gavel & Quill: A guide to court records at National Archives
(2) National Archives Wellington - references from Gavel & Quill
(3) National Archives Auckland
(4) National Archives Christchurch - references from Gavel & Quill
(5) National Archives Dunedin - references from Gavel & Quill
- (6) National Register of Archives and Manuscripts: A965 NZ Department of Health; Vaccination papers and registers 1899-1917 held at the New Plymouth City Library.
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Vaccination Legislation

Vaccination Act 1863

Vaccination Act Amendment Bill 1869 (Introduction of)

Vaccination Act Amendment Bill 1869 (Discussion prior to 2nd reading)

Vaccination Act Amendment Bill 1869 (Discharged)

Vaccination Bill 1870 (2nd reading)

Vaccination Act 1871

Public Health Act 1872

Public Health Act Amendment 1875

Public Health 1876

Public Health Act 1876 Amendment 1877

Public Health Act 1876 Amendment, 1880, Local (Christchurch Drainage Board)

Public Health 1876 Amendment 1881

Public Health 1876 Amendment 1882

Public Health 1876 Amendment 1884

Public Health 1876 Amendment 1893

Public Health 1900

Public Health Amendment 1901

Public Health Amendment 1901 (No.2)

Public Health Amendment 1902

Public Health Amendment 1903

Public Health Amendment 1904

Public Health Act Amendment 1906

Public Health Act Amendment 1907

Public Health 1908

Public Health Amendment 1910

Public Health Amendment 1915

Public Health Amendment 1918

Public Health Amendment 1919
