



**MINISTRY OF HEALTH
PRESS RELEASE
3 MAY 2023**

Ministry of Health emphasizes safety of childhood vaccines and its Expanded Programme on Immunization while investigating death of infant

The Ministry of Health is currently investigating the death of a 4 month-old baby that occurred on Saturday 29 April 2023. We extend our heartfelt and deepest condolences to the family at this time.

The Ministry has a system in place to monitor, investigate, clarify, and report on whether an unfortunate event such as this is due to vaccination or not, given that the baby was also vaccinated earlier during the day. This system includes an internal process and an external formal investigation by the World Health Organization and UNICEF, which is being planned. However, we would like to share the following information based on the preliminary investigation conducted by Senior Ministry of Health Officials:

- 1) The baby received vaccination due at 14 weeks old, as per the immunization schedule, at our Motootua Site. Six (6) hours later the baby was brought to the emergency department at the hospital in a critical condition.). Despite swift action by the medical team, including resuscitation, the baby unfortunately passed away.
- 2) Other infants who were vaccinated from the same batch of vaccines, including the deceased baby's twin, have not had any adverse reactions or been brought to the hospital for treatment or for any other medical concerns. The Ministry of Health continues to follow-up closely with those families out of an abundance of care and caution and to provide needed support.
- 3) It has been confirmed that the nurses who administered the vaccines had followed all the standard procedures accordingly in the care, storage and administration of the vaccines.





We understand that the public may be concerned as to the cause of the unfortunate loss of life this infant. We wish to reassure the public that the Ministry is investigating this matter and continues to ensure the proper care, storage and administration of vaccines through intensive training, monitoring and evaluation to ensure the safety of our people and to prevent incidents like the unfortunate deaths of the two infants in 2018.

The Ministry wishes to reiterate that nearly 350,000 vaccinations for COVID-19 have been safely administered and more than 500,000 childhood vaccinations have also been safely administered since 2019 in Samoa. We reaffirm the safety and effectiveness of these WHO approved vaccines used in the Ministry's immunization programme which have been used for many decades world-wide. WHO approved vaccines go through robust clinical trials and are only approved for use in the wider population after their safety and efficacy have been rigorously tested.

The Ministry will continue its vaccination programme and strongly urges the public to bring all children for vaccination as per the vaccination schedule outlined in the Child Health Book. This is especially important given the threat of the outbreak in American Samoa.

The Ministry will be supporting and cooperating with the investigating teams from the World Health Organization and UNICEF, who will determine whether this unfortunate event is related to the vaccine or coincidental in nature. The public will be updated regularly as the investigation continues. The case has also been referred to the coroner.

Members of the public may contact Tagaloa Dr. Robert Thomsen or Teuila Pati at 66600 or 66693 for any urgent questions. For psychosocial support if needed, please do not hesitate to call the MOH Call Center on 800-6440

Aiono Dr. Alec Ekeroma ONZM

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