

To: GP Practices
 Community Pharmacies
 HSC Trusts

Tel: 0300 555 0114
 Website:
www.publichealth.hscni.net

23rd September 2024

Dear Colleagues,

Operational detail: Autumn Influenza & COVID-19 vaccination programme 2024/25

We are writing to you regarding the Autumn Influenza (flu) and COVID-19 vaccination programme 2024/25 with further operational details to help you with your planning.

1. Eligible cohorts

Following the recently issued Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) autumn/winter flu and Covid-19 statements, DoH have confirmed the policy positions for both vaccine programmes [Influenza](#) and [Covid-19](#).

The eligible cohorts for each vaccine programme are now confirmed as follows:

Flu	Covid-19
✓ All those aged 65 yrs. and over	✓ All those aged 65 yrs. and over
✓ Care home residents (long stay residential)	✓ Care home residents (for older adults)
✓ Those in clinical risk groups aged 6mths – 64 yrs.	✓ Those in clinical risk groups aged 6mths – 64 yrs.
✓ Pregnant women	✓ Pregnant women
✓ Frontline HSC workers	✓ Frontline HSC workers
✓ All pre-school children 2 – 4 yrs.	
✓ All primary school children	
✓ Secondary school children in yrs. 8-12	
✓ Carers	
✓ Close contacts of those immunosuppressed	

2. Timing and Delivery Model

This year, for the majority of eligible cohorts, the Flu and Covid-19 vaccination programmes will commence from **Monday 7th October 2024**. The reason for this is this is to ensure a higher degree of protection for vulnerable cohorts during the winter months where infection is likely to be at its peak.

The school Flu programme, and vaccines for pregnant women, are an exception to the October start date, with vaccinations starting as soon as the vaccine becomes available.

Information on the delivery model and the eligible groups each service provider will vaccinate has been outlined in **Appendix 1**.

3. Vaccine Type

The COVID-19 vaccines procured by UKHSA are allocated as follows:

Vaccine Provider	Vaccine Type
GP Practices	Spikevax® JN.1 (Moderna)
Community Pharmacies	Comirnaty® JN.1 (Pfizer)
Trusts	Comirnaty® JN.1 (Pfizer) Comirnaty® JN.1 (Pfizer) Infant & Paediatric formulas

Adult influenza vaccines procured by PHA as per JCVI advice, are as follows:

Cohort	Vaccine Type
Aged 65 years and over	aQIV: Flud Tetra® (Seqirus) ¹
Aged 18 to 64 yrs. in eligible groups	QIVc: Flucelvax® Tetra (Seqirus)

Children's influenza vaccines procured by UKHSA are as follows:

Cohort	Vaccine Type
Aged 6 months to less than 2 yrs. in clinical risk groups	QIVc: Flucelvax® Tetra (Seqirus) *Off label use*
Aged 2 yrs. to less than 18 yrs. in eligible groups (including clinical risk groups)	1. LAIV: Fluenz® (trivalent) vaccine nasal suspension (AstraZeneca UK) 2. QIVc ² Flucelvax® Tetra (Seqirus)

¹ SPC accessed via [EMC Northern Ireland \(emcmedicines.com\)](https://emcmedicines.com) states that Flud Tetra is licensed for 50+ years. However, this product has been procured for the explicit use of those aged 65+. Please adhere to this policy.

² Where LAIV is contraindicated or otherwise unsuitable (e.g. patients object to LAIV on the grounds of its porcine gelatine content).

4. Ordering and Delivery Dates

Order opening dates:

Service providers can begin to place orders with Movianto from the following dates:

- Flu vaccine orders are **now open** (from Friday 13th September).
- Covid-19 vaccines are expected to arrive into Northern Ireland w/c 16th September. A phased ordering system will be in operation, as follows:
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 - GPs and Community pharmacies who are paired with care homes can begin to place orders for Covid-19 vaccines from **Monday 23rd September**.
 - Remaining community pharmacies and Trusts will then be able to place orders for Covid-19 vaccines from **Monday 30th September**.

***The Vaccination Programme is operating under a Patient Group Direction (PGD) which will be issued by PHA/SPPG. The Vaccination Programme will officially begin on 7 October 2024, however, those administering the vaccine can choose to begin offering the vaccine earlier if they have received their first delivery of vaccine, provided a valid PGD or National Protocol is in place, prioritising groups as specified in this letter.

Alternatively, prescribers may choose to use a Patient Specific Direction (PSD) to administer the vaccine in the absence of a PGD or National Protocol.***

We encourage GPs who are holding clinics later in the programme to order vaccines closer to the date of their clinics and no more than 2 weeks before clinics are due to take place.

Spikevax (Moderna) expiry date

Providers who are using Spikevax (Moderna) vaccine should note that this vaccine should be used within the post thaw expiry date (marked on the packaging by Movianto) of 30 days.

Delivery Timeframes:

Orders placed by 12pm on any working day will be delivered within 2 working days. However, in the initial stages it may take up to 5 working days to receive delivery.

***Please allow enough time for vaccine ordering and delivery to ensure you have vaccine in stock for clinic. Approval for emergency orders for vaccine will be granted in exceptional circumstances only and can only be facilitated for flu vaccines (Covid-19 vaccines cannot be defrosted and dispatched same day) ***

Quotas:

In order to manage the stock appropriately and in line with incoming deliveries to NI, quotas will be placed upon orders according to the provider's previous uptake. The majority of each providers quota will be available to order in the first instance, with the reserve held for mop up clinics. This is to reduce over-ordering and holding large amounts of vaccines in practice. If your practice is planning a large mass vaccination clinic, or mop-up clinic, requests for additional vaccine will be considered once all vaccine has been administered or there have been patients **confirmed** to attend clinic. Requests for an uplift to vaccine quota can be made to pha.immunisation@hscni.net.

*****Over-ordering leads to vaccine waste and increased costs to the programme each year.*****

For split practices, quotas have been divided equally between each practice. If your practice requires a different split of the quota, please contact PHA pha.immunisation@hscni.net to make amendments.

5. Management of the Cold Chain

Each year there is significant wastage and clinic disruption due to cold chain failures. There are significant costs relating to vaccine purchase, therefore we need to ensure vaccine wastage is minimal. While often talked about as fridge failures, in fact most are human error including leaving vaccines sitting out of the fridge or turning off the power supply. Please take time to check your cold chain processes are in line with [PHA advice](#).

All significant cold chain breach incidents, such as vaccines stored outside of the recommended temperature ranges, should be reported to the local Health and Social Care Trust Pharmacy Medicines Information (Appendix 2) and the PHA Health Protection Duty Room in the first instance. **Do not dispose of any vaccine until advice has been sought.**

6. Recording Vaccinations

VMS will continue to be used to record vaccinations. Please ensure you record the correct eligibility cohort and vaccine for each patient. We ask that you update your records as soon as possible after clinics to reflect the vaccinations administered. This not only helps to inform uptake and subsequent public health action, but assists in the planning of vaccine deployment.

VMS releases are planned to support the new vaccines: flu LAIV trivalent (release 10th September) and COVID JN.1 (release 24th September). GP clinical systems need their reference data updated before writebacks can commence.

For COVID JN.1 these updates are in:

- *EMIS MKB 214 expected to roll out in late September 2024*
- *Vision August 2024 Gemsript, rollout expected by 20th September 2024*

For LAIV trivalent:

- *EMIS MKB 215 estimated for late October 2024*
- *Vision October 2024 Gemscript, rollout expected in NI late October 2024*

Writeback of all new vaccine products from VMS is validated using test data at nominated practices for both EMIS and Vision. This process can take a few days to complete, so we expect JN.1 writeback to all practices to commence in early October and LAIV trivalent in late October.

7. Housebound patients

All eligible housebound patients should be referred by GPs to Trusts as soon as possible and no later than **30th September**. Please note this includes housebound immunosuppressed patients and not only those aged 65 and over.

8. Training and supporting materials

Training and supporting materials will be available from the PHA prior to the start of the programme. Training slides will be available on the PHA website

- COVID-19 - [Professional information | HSC Public Health Agency \(hscni.net\)](#)
- Influenza - [Information for health professionals | HSC Public Health Agency \(hscni.net\)](#)

Patient information leaflets have been developed and are available on the PHA website at [Publications | HSC Public Health Agency \(hscni.net\)](#) when available. Hard copies will also be delivered to each provider.

Should you have any further questions please contact pha.immunisation@hscni.net

Sincerely,

PHA Immunisation Team

Appendix 1: Delivery Model - Flu and Covid-19 Vaccines

Group / cohort	Vaccinated by:	Flu	Covid-19
65yrs +	GP / Community pharmacy	GP issues invite to pt. Self-identify to Community Pharmacy	GP issues invite to pt. Self-identify to Community Pharmacy
Clinical risk groups (16 – 64yrs)	GP / Community Pharmacy	GP issues invite to pt. Self-identify to Community Pharmacy	GP issues invite to pt. Self-identify to Community Pharmacy
Pregnant women	GP / Trust Vaccine Teams / Community Pharmacy	GP issues invite to pt. if pregnancy known. Trust antenatal staff to also offer vaccination at clinic. Self-identify to Community Pharmacy	GP issues invite to pt. if pregnancy known. Trust antenatal staff to also offer vaccination at clinic. Self-identify to Community Pharmacy
All pre-school children 2-4yrs	GP	GP issues invite to parent	n/a
Clinical risk groups (6mths – < 2yrs)	GP / Trust	GP issues invite to parent	Trust identifies and vaccinates pt.
Clinical risk groups (2 – 15yrs)	GP / School Nursing Teams / Trust Vaccine Teams	If school age, vaccine offered in school. Severely at risk who would benefit from earlier vaccination should be offered by GP	Trust identifies and vaccinates pts. up to 4yrs. GP identifies and refers pts. 5-15yrs to Trust
Front line HSC workers	Trust Vaccine Teams / Community Pharmacy	Trusts will promote to staff Self-identify to Community Pharmacy	Trusts will promote to staff Self-identify to Community Pharmacy
Housebound patients	Trust Vaccine Teams	GP identifies & refers pt. to Trust	GP identifies & refers pt. to Trust
Inpatients (eligible cohorts)	Trust Vaccine Teams	Trusts identify eligible inpatients	Trusts identify eligible inpatients
Care home residents	Community Pharmacy	Care Homes	Care Homes
Care home staff	Community Pharmacy	Care Homes	Care Homes
All primary school children	School Nursing Teams	Schools	n/a
All secondary school children	School Nursing Teams	Schools	n/a
Carers	GPs / Community Pharmacy / Trust Vaccine Teams	Self-identify	n/a
Close contacts immunosuppressed	GPs / Trust Vaccine Teams	Self-identify	n/a

Appendix 2: Contacts (for cold chain incidents)

Northern Ireland Medicines Information Services (NIMIS) Monday to Friday
9.00am - 5.00pm

Trust	Email Address	Phone Number
Regional Service and Local Service for Belfast Trust	medicineinfo@belfasttrust.hscni.net	028 9504 0558
South Eastern Trust Local Service	medicines.information@setrust.hscni.net	028 9056 1445 028 9048 4511 ext. 10220
Western Trust Local Service	altnagelvin.medinfo@westerntrust.hscni.net	028 7161 1462 028 7134 5171 ext. 213756
Northern Trust Local Service	<p>1st Contact</p> <p><i>Specialist Vaccine Services Pharmacy Technician, Pharmacy Department, Mid-Ulster Hospital, Magherafelt</i></p> <p>Alternative contact medicines.info@northerntrust.hscni.net</p>	028 7936 6755 028 9442 4556 ext. 4763
Southern Trust Local Service	medicinesinfo.cah@southerntrust.hscni.net	028 3756 3893 028 375 63890

Public Health Agency:

Duty Room	0300 555 0119
Immunisation Team (general queries)	pha.immunisation@hscni.net

Appendix 3: Guidance on Ordering

GP Practice - Guidance on Ordering Vaccines

➤ **Quotas**

Quotas have been based on previous uptake (recorded on VMS). Due to vaccine availability, vaccines will not be available for all eligible individuals in your practice/clinics as this does not reflect uptake. Please **do not** request vaccines for all patients invited as these will not be approved. A small percentage of each providers quota will be held back to facilitate mop up clinics. Please contact PHA to release these vaccines.

➤ **Ordering timeframes & planning clinics**

Only order vaccines 2 weeks ahead of the date of arranged clinics. A large amount of vaccines should not be stored in fridges as this increases the risk of vaccine wastage and can create vaccine shortages if large quantities are ordered and not used. Currently there is no mechanism in N.I. to transfer stock between or to other providers. Please also note the Moderna Covid-19 vaccine for the Autumn programme has a shelf life of 30 days.

- Please plan clinics appropriately. Arrange clinics based on amount of vaccines available to your practice and only order quantities that were reflective of previous years uptake. Extra clinics can be arranged after all vaccine has been used and you can place an additional order via PHA. Please do not plan any clinic until a vaccine order has been placed and a delivery date confirmed.

➤ **Additional orders**

If you use all vaccines you can contact PHA to request further supplies. These requests will be reviewed on an individual basis, and additional orders will only be approved when all vaccines ordered have been used and recorded on VMS.

➤ **Emergency orders**

Emergency orders should only be placed in extenuating situations and not due to poor planning. Please note there is a high cost involved with emergency orders which then impacts on the finances/budget of the vaccination programme. Please note that Movianto can only facilitate emergency orders for flu vaccines, as neither Pfizer nor Moderna Covid-19 vaccines can be defrosted and despatched on same day.

➤ **Cold chain failures**

There have been a large number of cold chain failures over the past number of vaccination programmes. We must try to minimise these moving forward. Please also see the [Guidance on vaccine handling and storage in GP practices](#) for information.

➤ **Recording vaccinations**

Please ensure all vaccines administered are recorded on VMS promptly. VMS is used to monitor uptake and also how we calculate quotas. It is also important that all records are up to date to ensure the completeness of the patient vaccination record and reduces the risk of double vaccination.

Appendix 4: Fluad Tetra box

Note the picture of the Fluad Tetra vaccine box contains reference for use by 50 years and older. As previously highlighted, SPC accessed via [EMC Northern Ireland \(emcmedicines.com\)](http://EMC Northern Ireland (emcmedicines.com)) states that Fluad Tetra is licensed for 50+ years. However, this product has been procured for the explicit use of those aged 65+. Please adhere to this policy.

