

**From the Chief Medical Officer
Professor Sir Michael McBride**



HSS(MD) 01/2025

FOR ACTION

Chief Executives, Public Health Agency/HSC Trusts/NIAS
Chief Operating Officer, SPPG
GP Medical Advisers, SPPG
All General Practitioners and GP Locums (for onward
distribution to practice staff) OOHs Medical Managers (for
onward distribution to staff)

PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION LIST

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Our Ref: HSS(MD) 01/2025
Date: 10 January 2025

Dear Colleague

**EXTENSION OF SEASONAL INFLUENZA VACCINATION OFFER TO ALL 50-64
YEAR OLDS**

ACTION REQUIRED

Chief Executives must ensure this information is drawn to the attention of all staff involved in the seasonal influenza vaccination programme.

Chief Executives should also ensure all Health and Social Care staff are actively encouraged to take up the offer of an influenza vaccine.

The Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) must ensure this information is cascaded to all General Practitioners, practice managers and community pharmacies for onward distribution to all staff involved in the seasonal influenza vaccination programme.

Introduction

1. Having offered the influenza vaccination to the cohorts recommended by the Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations (JCVI), the Public Health Agency has advised that there are sufficient stocks to extend the offer of influenza vaccination to everyone in the 50-64 age group, from 15 January 2025.

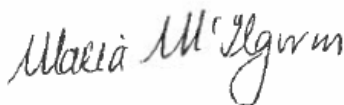
2. Therefore, from 15 January 2025 and for the remainder of the 2024/25 seasonal influenza vaccination programme, the programme will be extended to include:
 - **anyone aged 50-64 years of age by 31 March 2025**
3. In line with JCVI recommendations, the 2024/25 flu vaccination programme continues to provide protection to those who are at higher risk of influenza-associated morbidity and mortality i.e. those aged 65 and over and those in clinical risk groups, and to reduce transmission to all age groups through the vaccination of children. **Protection of these groups remains the priority for the programme and all efforts should be taken to increase vaccine uptake in these groups.**
4. Starting from the 15 January 2025, influenza vaccination will also be made available via community pharmacies and HSC Trust vaccination clinics to anyone aged 50 to 64 years of age. Vaccination will also be available through general practice, and individual GP practices will decide if they have capacity to make vaccination available to their eligible patients.
5. Extending the programme to all those aged 50 to 64 years of age will make use of any available purchased influenza vaccine stock that would otherwise not be used and written off as waste, however available quantities of vaccine remain limited. The quantities of influenza vaccine procured for the programme were informed by the advice from JCVI which determined the eligible cohort populations at the start of the programme. Therefore, we remind service providers to adhere to the ordering advice given to make best use of what vaccine stock remains and ensure that the most vulnerable patients continue to be able to avail of a vaccine. Further details on stock ordering, quotas and VMS will be detailed in an upcoming operational letter in due course.
6. Vaccination remains the best form of defence against severe illness, hospitalisation and death as a result of influenza.
7. The seasonal influenza vaccination programme is a critical element in helping to protect the health of our population to reduce the pressures on our health and care services during the winter months. The HSC is currently witnessing the impact of a more severe influenza season and achieving a high uptake rate amongst all eligible groups, including health and social care staff, will help to reduce GP consultations, unplanned hospital admissions, pressure on Emergency Departments as well as staff absences due to sickness.
8. Healthcare professionals are urged to encourage anyone eligible to receive an influenza vaccine to take up the offer of vaccination as quickly as possible.

9. Thank you to all those involved in the delivery of the annual influenza vaccination programme thus far, your commitment and hard work every year directly impacts the success of the programme.

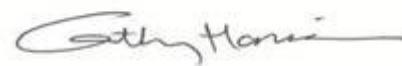
Yours sincerely



Professor Sir Michael McBride
Chief Medical Officer



Ms Maria McIlgorm
Chief Nursing Officer



Professor Cathy Harrison
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer

Circulation List

Director of Public Health/Medical Director, Public Health Agency (*for onward distribution to all relevant health protection staff*)

Assistant Director Public Health (Health Protection), Public Health Agency

Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency

Assistant Director of Pharmacy and Medicines Management, SPPG (*for onward distribution to Community Pharmacies*)

Directors of Pharmacy HSC Trusts

Director of Social Care and Children, SPPG

Family Practitioner Service Leads, SPPG (*for cascade to GP Out of Hours services*)

Medical Directors, HSC Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Consultants, Occupational Health Physicians and School Medical Leads*)

Nursing Directors, HSC Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Community Nurses, and Midwives*)

Directors of Children's Services, HSC Trusts

RQIA (*for onward transmission to all independent providers including independent hospitals*)

Joe Brogan, Assistant Director, Head of Pharmacy and Medicines Management, Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) (*for onward distribution to SPPG Pharmacy and Medicines Management Team and community pharmacists*)

Regional Medicines Information Service, Belfast HSC Trust

Regional Pharmaceutical Procurement Service, Northern HSC Trust

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Michael Donaldson, Head of Dental Services, SPPG (*for distribution to all General Dental Practitioners*)

Raymond Curran, Head of Ophthalmic Services, SPPG (*for distribution to Community Optometrists*)

Trade Union Side

Clinical Advisory Team
Louise McMahon, Director of Integrated Care, SPPG
Dr Camille Harron, NIMDTA
Prof Pascal McKeown, QUB
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Prof Louise Dubras, Ulster University

This letter is available on the Department of Health website at
<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/professional-medical-and-environmental-health-advice/hssmd-letters-and-urgent-communications>