

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



HSS(MD) 02/2024

BY EMAIL

Chief Executives, Public Health Agency/SPPG/HSC Trusts/
NIAS
GP Medical Advisers, All General Practitioners and GP Locums
(for onward distribution to practice staff)
OOHs Medical Managers *(for onward distribution to staff)*
RQIA (for onward circulation to independent sector
health and social care providers)

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Our Ref: HSS(MD) 02/2024

Date: 17 January 2024

PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION LIST

Dear Colleague

**SEASONAL INFLUENZA VACCINATION OFFER TO ALL 50-64 YEAR OLDS
AND ALL HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE WORKERS**

ACTION REQUIRED

Chief Executives must ensure this information is drawn to the attention of all staff involved in the seasonal influenza vaccination programme as well as ensuring **all** staff are actively encouraged to receive the 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.

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) must ensure this information is cascaded to all Independent Sector Care Homes for onward distribution to all staff and continue to actively encourage all Care Home staff to receive the flu vaccine.

Introduction

1. Having offered the Influenza vaccination to the cohorts recommended by the Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations (JCVI), Northern Ireland's health service has sufficient stocks to now extend a vaccination offer to the 50-64 age range and all health and social care workers.
2. For the remaining part of the 2023/24 seasonal Influenza vaccination programme, the vaccination programme will now be opened to:
 - **everyone aged 50-64 years by 31 March 2024;** and
 - **all health and social care workers**
3. In line with JCVI recommendations, the 2023/24 flu vaccination programme aimed 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.
4. All high priority eligible groups in Northern Ireland have now had the opportunity to be vaccinated in line with JCVI advice which reaffirmed an earlier recommendation - that overall priority within this vaccination programme should be to extend the childhood programme in secondary schools, as this would be more cost effective and likely to have a greater impact on morbidity and mortality, compared with vaccinating lower risk 50-64-year-olds, which was only advised if the budget and vaccine supply allowed.
5. As there are sufficient vaccine supplies still available, for the remaining 2023/24 programme influenza vaccination should now be made available, via trust vaccination clinics and community pharmacies to the groups mentioned at paragraph 1 above. Vaccination will now also be available through general practice, and individual GP practices will decide if they wish to make vaccination available to their patients aged 50-64 years of age.
6. Vaccination remains the best form of defence against severe illness, hospitalisation and death as a result of Influenza. 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. A high uptake rate will help to reduce GP consultations, unplanned hospital admissions, pressure on Emergency Departments as well as staff absences due to sickness.
7. I would therefore encourage all healthcare professionals to take up the offer of vaccination, and would ask all staff to promote vaccination at every opportunity. The benefits of Influenza vaccination among all previously advised eligible groups should continue to be encouraged. I would like to thank all those involved in the delivery of the Influenza vaccination

programme thus far in the current season, your commitment and hard work every year directly impacts the success of the programme.

Yours sincerely



PROFESSOR SIR MICHAEL McBRIDE
Chief Medical Officer

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