**LINES TO TAKE – WINTER FLU AND COVID-19 VACCINATION 2023**

* Decision-making on Scotland’s vaccination programme is guided by the independent, expert advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).
* On 8 August 2023 the JCVI published its advice on a COVID-19 vaccination programme for this winter: [JCVI advises on eligible groups for 2023 autumn booster - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/jcvi-advises-on-eligible-groups-for-2023-autumn-booster)
* This follows a very successful COVID-19 spring booster programme which ran between 1 April – 30 June and saw 78% of the eligible population taking up the offer of vaccination.
* Public Health Scotland welcomes the advice from the JCVI that, to maximise protection in those most vulnerable to serious illness, COVID-19 vaccines should be offered to certain priority groups this winter. Prioritising those most at risk has been the focus from the outset.
* Following the identification of the newly identified COVID-19 variant of interest, BA.2.86, in Scotland, Scottish Government (SG) concluded that as a precautionary measure the safest approach is to bring forward those most vulnerable as soon as possible, with a focus on care homes, who were originally being vaccinated from mid-October.
* Public Health Scotland (PHS) and Scottish Government are now working closely with Health Boards on bringing forward winter vaccinations, where possible, for those at highest risk of becoming seriously ill from flu and COVID-19. This includes care home residents, those aged 75+ and those aged 12+ with weakened immune systems.

**FLU ONLY VACCINATION ADMINISTRATION FOR ADULTS**

* The groups below are eligible for their flu vaccines this winter, with appointments starting from 4 September:
  + aged 50 years and over
  + aged 18-49 with an eligible flu health condition
  + frontline health and social care workers
  + carers (including unpaid and young carers)
  + Teachers and support staff
  + Prison population and prison staff
* Vaccination is required every year because flu viruses are constantly changing. The vaccines offered this year will give you the best possible protection against the viruses likely to be circulating this winter.
* JCVI advice – [JCVI statement on influenza vaccines 2023-24](https://app.box.com/s/t5ockz9bb6xw6t2mrrzb144njplimfo0/file/1079253178131)
* JCVI recommend vaccinating those aged 65 and above. Scotland operates an extended flu programme also offering vaccination to those 50-64 considered at lower risk of flu as there is still a clear health benefit for vaccinating them as per JCVI advice.
* Scotland is the only nation offering a free flu vaccine to all those aged 50-64 this winter.

**FLU ONLY VACCINATION ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN**

* Children 6 months to under 2 years (at risk), 2-5 years old (not in school) and school age pupils are eligible for a flu vaccine this winter.
* Last winter flu virus activity reached extraordinary levels and with the uncertainty of when flu activity will begin this winter, those aged 2-5 years should be offered vaccination from the outset of the programme to ensure they receive the earliest protection to help stop the virus spreading. Early completion of vaccination amongst this group is essential.
* JCVI recommended that expanding flu vaccination to secondary school pupils would be cost effective and provide further resilience to the NHS and social care services during the winter months. Primary school aged children have been offered the flu vaccine since 2013 and from 2021/22, the programme was expanded to include all secondary school pupils.

**COVID-19 AND FLU VACCINATION CO-ADMINSTRATION**

* The groups below are eligible for their flu and COVID-19 vaccines this winter
  + Frontline health and social care workers (appointments begin 4 Sept for this group)
  + Residents and staff in care homes for older adults
  + Those aged 65 and over
  + Those aged 6 months to 64 years of age who are at higher clinical risk from COVID-19
  + Pregnant women
  + Carers aged 16-64
  + Household contacts of those with a weakened immune system aged 12-64
* Getting vaccinated is the safest and most effective way to protect yourself against viruses circulating this winter.
* To optimise an individual’s protection over the winter months and alleviate pressures on the NHS, the winter programme will aim to complete most vaccinations by early December, but the programme will run until 31 March 2024.
* Protection from the COVID-19 vaccines does not stop after 3 months, but slowly starts to fade.
* During the height of the pandemic, invitations were sent by 1st Class blue envelopes. As we move to pandemic recovery, the vaccination programme is returning to the use of 2nd Class white envelopes this year, clearly marked from NHS Scotland.
* NHS Scotland encourages people (aged 12 and over) to opt to receive information about their flu and COVID-19 vaccines by email or text in future. This allows us to send you helpful reminders and updates about your appointment and ensures NHS funds are directed to where they’re needed most; and it’s better for the environment too. You can update your communications preferences on the online booking portal (log in details will be provided on letters)
* Scotland’s vaccination programme has always offered vaccinations in the safest and most effective way possible. Evidence shows that administration of both vaccines together is a safe and efficient way to deliver maximum protection over winter months. Last winter, over 89% of COVID-19 and flu vaccines were co-administered.
* Children aged 6 months-4 years who are at higher clinical risk of COVID-19 are eligible for a vaccine this winter. Your baby must turn 6 months before 01 September 2023 to be eligible.
* Children aged 5-15 years old who are at higher clinical risk of COVID-19, or household contacts (12+) of someone at risk are eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine this winter. Your child must turn 5 before 01 September 2023 to be eligible.
* For those eligible, please look out for a letter in a white NHS Scotland branded envelope, text or email with details about your appointment or how to arrange one. Please attend your vaccination appointment to help NHS Scotland offer vaccines to everyone eligible in a timely way.

**THOSE ELIGIBLE FOR A WINTER 2023 VACCINATION**

* More information is available on [Winter vaccines | NHS inform](https://www.nhsinform.scot/winter-vaccines/) including a self-help guide that helps citizens to find out about the vaccines you may be eligible for, and how you’ll be offered them.
* You will receive an invite or a prompt to book your winter vaccines (COVID-19 and flu) shortly. Please wait to be contacted.
* People should wait for NHS Scotland to contact them with details of their appointment, or prompt to book. Depending on their selected communication preferences, this will be by email, text, or by post in a white, NHS Scotland branded envelope, which replaces the blue envelopes used previously.
* You can [rearrange your appointment](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nhsinform.scot%2Fcovid-19-vaccine%2Frearrange-or-opt-out-of-your-vaccination-appointment%2F&data=05%7C01%7CLeigh.Taylor%40phs.scot%7Ce48cbf4c28c14141332208dbaeb19a2d%7C10efe0bda0304bca809cb5e6745e499a%7C0%7C0%7C638295851476213748%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=bt1tnTftkmUxt2vwudZevPZUZFUSAAcmLo%2FVas7EPP0%3D&reserved=0) if the time or day you’ve been given doesn't suit you.  There are evening and weekend vaccination clinics available too. If it’s more convenient, you can book or reschedule your appointment to a vaccination clinic closer to where you work or somewhere you visit regularly.
* If you're trying to rearrange your appointment online and there are no vaccination appointments available, please check again later. The national vaccination helpline will be unable to offer alternative appointments as they use the same online booking system.

**HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE WORKERS**

Frontline HSCWs are eligible for both flu and COVID-19 vaccinations this winter. In line with the JCVI advice and the Green Book definitions, we continue to offer vaccination to frontline HSCWs workers to protect health services from staff absences due to COVID-19 during the winter months. Information regarding definitions of frontline HSCWs can be found on page 21 of the Green Book. Further detail about who is eligible for vaccination as part of this group has been sent to Health Boards

**RE-PHASING OF THE PROGRAMME AND NEW VARIANT BA.2.86**

**VACCINE LINES - GENERAL**

* NHS Scotland will only use a vaccine if it meets the required standards of safety and effectiveness. All medicines, including vaccines, are tested for safety and effectiveness before they’re allowed to be used.
* The JCVI advise that all available vaccines provide strong protection against severe illness from COVID-19.
* The current JCVI advice is that the current available vaccines be used until other vaccines become authorised and available for use.

**VACCINE LINES - XBB.1.5**

* Although the JCVI notes in its recent statement that the optimum protection from the COVID-19 vaccines is during the first 3 months after vaccination, vaccines continue to offer protection after this point.
* Protection from the COVID-19 vaccines does not stop after 3 months, but slowly starts to fade.
* We will begin our programme from 4 September with the vaccines currently available, BA.4-5, which continue to provide excellent protection against circulating strains.
* We will begin to use the XBB.1.5 vaccines when they are authorised by the MHRA and are available for use across the 4 nations.
* Evidence shows that BA vaccines continue to be effective at preventing hospitalisation, severe disease, and death due to COVID-19.
* BA vaccines are still incredibly effective against the circulating strains of COVID-19 and provide excellent protection.
* Pfizer XBB.1.5 vaccines were only authorised by the MHRA on 4 September and we will deploy them in Scotland as soon as they are available to us.
* As BA.2.86 has only just emerged, at this time there is no data available to us on the efficacy of any of the vaccines in use for the winter programme against BA.2.86.

**VACCINATING ADDITIONAL GROUPS OR REVACCINATING**

* There are currently no plans to increase or expand the groups eligible for COVID-19 vaccination.
* Any decision on expanding eligibility or re-vaccination of certain groups would be a decision for the JCVI and we would of course stand ready to assess any further recommendations from them.

**THE END OF THE ROLLING PRIMARY OFFER**

* If you’re aged 5 to 64 and had your first dose between 1 April and 30 June 2023 and you are not eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine this winter.
* After 25 August you’ll no longer be eligible for a COVID-19s vaccine, unless you later enter an eligible group in future programmes, as recommended by the JCVI.

**THOSE NO LONGER ELIGIBLE**

* The JCVI statement of 26 May 2023 noted that primary course COVID-19 vaccination should consist of a single dose of COVID-19 vaccine and that eligibility for primary vaccination will be the same as for winter 2023 vaccination.
* From 25 August, the rolling offer of primary vaccination is now closed and individuals aged 5 – 64 who aren’t considered at higher risk are no longer eligible for any COVID-19 vaccinations.
* The JCVI no longer advises vaccination of those under the age of 65 who do not have any underlying health conditions.
* The main aim of the COVID-19 programme is the prevention of severe illness, hospitalisations and deaths from COVID-19.
* In the current phase of the pandemic, those most at risk are in older age groups, those in care homes and those with particular clinical conditions that make them more vulnerable to COVID-19-related illness.
* The current phase of the pandemic is less severe than earlier phases, with much lower levels of severe illness, hospitalisation and deaths, especially in younger ages groups and in those without any underlying health conditions.
* In those who aren’t vaccinated, many people have a level of protection against COVID-19 from previous infection.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**  
‘How to’ videos have been developed to help with the booking portal:

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