

Dear Colleagues,

## **SPRING COVID-19 PROGRAMME 2023**

We are writing to provide you with further information on the spring COVID-19 vaccination programme 2023.

We would like to begin by thanking you for your hard work in delivering the winter flu and COVID-19 vaccination programme. We understand the challenges faced by health and social care colleagues across Scotland in delivering this. Uptake has once again been exceptionally high, protecting those most vulnerable in the Scottish population.

Given the ongoing presence of COVID-19, it is imperative that we continue to reduce the impact of COVID-19, on those most at risk, through vaccination. As we enter spring, it is important that we build on the success of our previous vaccination programmes. These efforts will help us to prevent ill health in the population and minimise further impact on the NHS and social care services.

### **Key Objectives for the Spring 2023 Programme**

1. To protect those in society who continue to be most at risk of COVID-19 and prevent severe illness, hospitalisation and death.
2. To encourage individuals to come forward for any outstanding primary doses before changes to the rolling offer begin from 30 June 2023.

**From Chief Medical Officer for  
Scotland**

**Chief Nursing Officer**  
**Chief Pharmaceutical Officer**  
Professor Sir Gregor Smith  
Professor Alex McMahon  
Professor Alison Strath

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14 March 2023

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#### **For action**

Chief Executives, NHS Boards  
Medical Directors, NHS Boards  
Nurse Directors, NHS Boards  
Primary Care Leads, NHS Boards  
Directors of Nursing & Midwifery,  
NHS Boards  
Chief Officers of Integration  
Authorities  
Chief Executives, Local Authorities  
Directors of Pharmacy  
Directors of Public Health  
General Practitioners  
Practice Nurses  
School Nurses  
Immunisation Co-ordinators  
CPHMs  
Scottish Ambulance Service

#### **For information**

Chairs, NHS Boards  
Infectious Disease Consultants  
Consultant Physicians  
Public Health Scotland  
Chief Executive, Public Health  
Scotland, NHS 24

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#### **Further Enquiries**

Policy Issues  
Covid Policy Team:  
[vaccineoperationaloversight@gov.scot](mailto:vaccineoperationaloversight@gov.scot)

Medical Issues  
Dr Lorna Willocks  
Senior Medical Officer  
St Andrew's House  
[Lorna.Willocks@gov.scot](mailto:Lorna.Willocks@gov.scot)

PGD/Pharmaceutical  
William Malcolm  
Public Health Scotland  
[William.Malcolm@nhs.scot](mailto:William.Malcolm@nhs.scot)

Vaccine Supply Issues  
[nss.vaccineenquiries@nhs.scot](mailto:nss.vaccineenquiries@nhs.scot)

## Spring 2023 booster offer to those at highest risk - Eligibility

3. On the 7 March 2023 the Joint Committee on Vaccination & Immunisation (JCVI) advised that for [spring 2023](#) the following groups should be offered COVID-19 vaccination:

- Residents in care homes for older adults
- All adults aged 75 years and over
- Persons aged 5 to 74 years with a weakened immune system, as set out in the [Green Book, chapter 14a, tables 3 and 4](#)

Further information for the public can be found on [Spring vaccines | NHS inform](#)

## Spring 2023 Booster Programme Age Limits

4. The age cut off for the spring programme is 30 June 2023. If an individual meets the age criteria before the 30 June 2023, they will be eligible for vaccination. The only exception is for children aged 5-11 years with a weakened immune system where the age cut off is 1 April 2023.

## The COVID-19 Primary Rolling Offer

5. The [JCVI interim statement](#) of 25 January signalled a move towards a more targeted offer, during vaccination campaigns, to protect those persons at higher risk of severe COVID-19. Up until the 30 June 2023, anyone who has not received their full primary course (i.e. their first 2 doses, with a possible 3<sup>rd</sup> dose for certain individuals with a weakened immune system) can come forward to receive these. After this date, only those in the following categories may come forward for their primary course during specified programme periods:

- Staff and residents in care homes for older adults
- frontline health and social care workers
- all adults aged 50 years and over
- persons aged 5 to 49 years in a clinical risk group, as set out in the [Green Book](#)
- persons aged 12 to 49 years who are household contacts of people with immunosuppression
- persons aged 16 to 49 years who are carers, as set out in the [Green Book](#)

After 30 June 2023 5-49 year olds, who do not have any underlying health conditions that make them vulnerable to COVID-19, will no longer be eligible for any COVID-19 vaccination. The only exception to this is if proof of vaccination status is required for international travel or visas. Health Boards are expected to have local mechanisms in place to offer people vaccination under these circumstances.

**Please note** that in order to come forward for the rolling primary offer until 30 June 2023, children who do not have any underlying health conditions that make them vulnerable to COVID-19 must have turned 5 before the 31 August 2022. Those without health conditions who turned 5 after this date are not and have never been eligible for COVID-19 vaccination.

As per previous arrangements, individuals from England, Wales and Northern Ireland undertaking short term stays in Scotland should be offered the spring and primary rolling offer as per the criteria for the Scottish population.

The [JCVI statement of 25 January](#) advised that the initial booster offer for 16 to 49 year olds who are not at higher risk of severe coronavirus, should end in line with the end of the winter 2022 programme. In Scotland the winter programme ends on 31 March 2023. However, if individuals mistakenly come forward believing they are coming forward as part of the end of the rolling primary offer between now and 30 June 2023, but a vaccinator identifies that the person has in fact completed their full primary course, but are missing their 2021 Omicron booster dose or winter 2022 dose, they should be vaccinated with that dose in good faith, which is allowed under the national protocols and national PGDs.

6. Health Boards and onsite prison healthcare services will be delivering vaccination in prisons to those in the spring eligible groups (75 years and over, prisoners with a weakened immune system) and at the same time are expected to identify any prisoners who have not completed their primary course and offer vaccination.
7. The national clinical advisory team (clinical informatics, NSS and PHS) will identify all those newly at risk aged 5-49 years, who have entered this group since the last data refresh of winter 2022. Boards will then be expected to extract all those who have not completed their full primary course (i.e. their 2 first doses) and invite those individuals forward to complete their primary course. Any 5-11 year old identified as newly at risk would be sent a timed appointment. Those newly at risk aged 12-49 years would be sent a prompt to book.
8. The FVCV Operational Team will work with Boards and Maternity Services to identify and encourage forward all those pregnant women who have not yet completed their full primary course and either invite or encourage them forward to complete their primary course.

### **Clinical Referral Route**

9. If an individual knows that they are eligible for vaccination this spring as part of the weakened immune system group, or by virtue of being aged 75 years or older, but they have not been sent an appointment or prompt, they can book via the portal or by calling the helpline.
10. If a person thinks they may be eligible as part of the weakened immune system group, but is unsure, they can call the helpline who will refer them to their local Health Board to ascertain eligibility and bring them forward for vaccination if required. The individual could also contact their GP practice or secondary care clinician who can refer their case through local referral pathways. If GP practices or clinicians are unsure of their local referral pathway, they should contact their local Immunisation Co-ordinator for more information.
11. Clinicians should encourage their patients who have recently entered a clinical risk group and who have not completed their primary course of immunisation, that they are eligible to come forward for vaccination in spring.

12. If a clinician deems one of their patients to be extremely clinically vulnerable and at risk of severe illness outside of the seasonal programmes, they can refer their patient via local referral pathways. This is particularly important for those who receive stem cell transplants, as the immunity of this group is removed through treatment. If a patient believes they are extremely clinically vulnerable and at risk of severe illness outside of the seasonal spring and winter programmes, they should consult their clinician.

### Planning and Delivery

13. The spring programme begins on the 27 March 2023, starting with residents of care homes for older adults and the housebound. Community appointments for those aged 75 years and over will begin on 11 April. The next group to be called will be those with a weakened immune system, whose appointments will begin on 24 April. The newly clinically at risk aged 5-49 years, who have not completed their primary course, will be sent letters, emails or texts, prompting them to book an appointment later in programme.

14. Anyone looking to access the rolling primary offer can come forward at any time, up until 30 June 2023.

15. Health Boards will arrange vaccinations at care homes for older adults and the housebound, at a local level.

16. The table below indicates how we will call forward the different groups during spring. They will be sent their appointment via letter, email or text message, depending on their communication preference:

Age Group	Timed or Prompt	Reschedule / Cancel Option
75 years and over	Timed Appointment	Portal or National Vaccination Helpline
5-11 year olds with a weakened immune system	Timed Appointment	National Vaccination Helpline
12-74 year olds with a weakened immune system who attended their last timed appointment	Timed Appointment	Portal or National Vaccination Helpline
12-74 year olds with a weakened immune system who did not attend their last timed appointment	Prompt to self-book via portal or National Vaccination Helpline	Portal or National Vaccination Helpline
5-11 year olds identified as being newly at risk, who haven't completed their primary course	Timed Appointment	National Vaccination Helpline
12-49 year olds identified as being newly at risk, who haven't completed their primary course	Prompt to self-book via portal or National Vaccination Helpline	Portal or National Vaccination Helpline

17. The spring programme and rolling primary offer will end on 30 June 2023.

## Data & Digital

18. The online booking portal is open to all those aged 12 years of age and over. Individuals need their username to enter the portal, which can be found on previous COVID-19 vaccination letters, emails or texts and will be included in the appointment / prompt letter / email / text. For those who aren't sent a letter, email or text, these individuals will be able to recover their username via the portal or the National Vaccination Helpline.
19. Those aged 5-11 years of age can only reschedule or cancel appointments via the National Vaccination Helpline. Individuals aged 12 years and over can reschedule or cancel appointments via the online portal or the National Vaccination Helpline. This will be reiterated in the appointment / prompt letter, email and text.
20. The National Vaccination Helpline will continue to operate throughout the spring programme, with the following opening hours: Monday–Friday 9am–6pm and Saturday 9am–1pm.
21. As part of our strategy to tackle health inequalities and our duty under the Equality Act 2010, 'ethnicity' is a compulsory field in VMT. This has facilitated more accurate data collection, which has supported targeted interventions to improve vaccination equality within Scotland. We provide guidance for vaccinators completing this field, which can be found on [TURAS](#). Health Boards should ensure that their vaccinators are asking this question every time they are prompted to by VMT.

## Vaccines for Spring 2023

22. JCVI advice on use of vaccines for the spring 2023 programme can be found in their [published statement](#).
23. A full list of vaccines being deployed in Scotland for spring 2023 and the delivery mechanisms can be found in **Annex A**. In summary, we will deploy the following vaccines:
  - Pfizer-BioNTech mRNA (Comirnaty) BA.4-5 bivalent (15/15 micrograms) vaccine: Booster dose for those aged 12 and over.
  - Moderna mRNA (Spikevax) BA.4-5 bivalent (25/25 micrograms) vaccine: Booster dose for those aged 18 years of age and over.
  - Pfizer-BioNTech mRNA (Comirnaty) monovalent vaccine paediatric formulation. Dose: 10 micrograms: Primary and booster dose for those aged 5-11 years of age.
  - Novavax Matrix-M adjuvanted monovalent wild-type vaccine (Nuvaxovid), dose 5 micrograms (spike protein), may be used as a primary dose for persons aged 12 years and over and a booster dose for persons aged 18 years and over, when alternative products are considered not clinically suitable (see the [Green Book](#)).
24. Moderna mRNA (Spikevax) BA.4-5 bivalent vaccine will only be deployed in the following three Health Boards: Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Lothian and Grampian.

25. **Off label use:** the following vaccines will be deployed off-label in line with JCVI advice, as set out in Chapter 14a of the Green Book and in line with local Health Board governance arrangements:
- Pfizer-BioNTech mRNA (Comirnaty) BA.4-5 bivalent (15/15 micrograms) vaccine: off label primary dose for those aged 12 years and over.
  - Moderna mRNA (Spikevax) BA.4-5 bivalent (25/25 micrograms) vaccine: off label primary dose for those aged 18 years and over.
  - Novavax Matrix-M adjuvanted monovalent wild-type vaccine (Nuvaxovid), dose 5 micrograms (spike protein): off label booster dose for those aged 12-17.
26. Please note that all stocks of Novavax in the UK will expire on 31 May 2023. After this date, there will be no Novavax available in the spring programme. Health Boards will work to identify and prioritise those who are eligible for spring vaccination who require Novavax, due to mRNA vaccines not being clinically suitable for them, and bring them forward prior to the stock expiring.
27. **Observation Periods:** According to the Summaries of Product Characteristics, it is recommended that all recipients of the Pfizer BioNTech, Moderna and Novavax vaccines are kept for observation and monitored for a minimum of 15 minutes. In recognition of the need to accelerate delivery of the programme in response to the emergence of the Omicron variant, the UK Chief Medical Officers recommended suspension of this requirement for the two mRNA vaccines (Pfizer BioNTech and Moderna) in both children and adults. The suspension of the observation period in individuals without a history of allergy has since been agreed by the Commission on Human Medicines. The advice to suspend the routine 15 minute observation period therefore applies to all currently available COVID-19 vaccines, including the bivalent mRNA products and the Novavax vaccine.
28. Please note that as per the Green Book Chapter and PGDs, children aged 5-11 years who have commenced immunisation with a paediatric dose of Pfizer BioNTech, who then turn 12 years of age, should complete their primary schedule of vaccination with the paediatric dose (*although the adult/adolescent dose is an acceptable alternative if this is the only supply available*). Boards will need to have processes in place to identify these 12 year olds requiring a paediatric dose from the scheduling files and appoint them to clinics where that vaccine is available.

### **Resources and Communication materials**

29. Communications assets and messaging have been provided to Health Board communications leads and shared with partners. We encourage you to share these through your channels and networks. This includes the 'Ready Reckoner' that will be sent to Boards prior to programme launch. All these materials will be updated as required, reflecting any developments or issues.
30. Invitation letters and leaflets (email/text if digital preference) have been sent to people who are eligible. This includes tailored information for people with a weakened immune system and more information about the COVID-19 vaccine spring booster.

31. The public should be signposted to NHS Inform for up to date information on the vaccination programme: [Spring vaccines | NHS inform](#)

### **Workforce Education**

32. NHS Education for Scotland (NES) and Public Health Scotland (PHS) have worked closely with stakeholders to develop a range of workforce education resources/opportunities for COVID-19 vaccination. These are available on the NHS Education for Scotland TURAS Learn website: [COVID-19 vaccination programme | Turas | Learn \(nhs.scot\)](#)

33. NES / PHS facilitated a webinar on the spring 2023 programme on the 15 March, covering key features including CMO / JCVI guidance and new COVID-19 vaccines. The webinar was recorded and will be placed on the TURASLearn site.

34. In addition, COVID-19 Spring programme vaccine specific resources have been developed and will also be available shortly on the [COVID-19 vaccination programme | Turas | Learn \(nhs.scot\)](#)

We would like to recognise and express our sincere gratitude for your professionalism and continuing support in planning and delivering this important vaccination programme.

Thank you for all your hard work over the winter period and we wish you all the best for the spring 2023 programme.

Yours sincerely,

*Gregor Smith*  
**Chief Medical Officer  
Scotland**

*Alex McMahon*  
**Chief Nursing Officer**

*Alison Strath*  
**Chief Pharmaceutical  
Officer**

## Annex A: Covid Vaccines being deployed for Spring 2023

Programme & Green Book	Supply Team Abbreviation	Licensed Use*	JCVI / Green Book Recommended Use	Spring 2023 Mechanism
Moderna bivalent (Spikevax®) bivalent Original/Omicron BA.4-5 vaccine	Spikevax Bivalent BA.4-5	12+ Booster	18+ Booster 18+ Primary course  Primary course off-label	18+ booster: National Protocol  18+ off label primary course: National PGD
Pfizer BioNTech (Comirnaty) bivalent Original/Omicron BA.4-5	Comirnaty Bivalent BA.4-5	12+ Booster	12+ Booster 12+ Primary course  Primary course off-label	12+ booster: National Protocol  12+ off label primary course: National PGD
Pfizer BioNTech COVID-19 BNT162b2 vaccine (Comirnaty®) 10 micrograms	Comirnaty 10 Concentrate	5-11 Primary dose + booster	5-11 Booster 5-11 Primary course	5-11 booster and primary dose: National PGD
Novavax COVID-19 vaccine (Nuvaxovid®)	Nuvaxovid	12+ Primary course 18+ booster	12+ Booster 12+ Primary dose  (Booster use in 12–17 year olds off-label)	12+ primary dose: National PGD  18+ booster dose: National PGD  12-17 booster dose off label: National PGD

\* More information is available in the individual Summary of Product Characteristics (<https://products.mhra.gov.uk/>)