

SEASONAL FLU IMMUNISATION PROGRAMME 2023/24: CONFIRMATION OF ADULT COHORTS



Dear Colleagues

1. We would like to begin by thanking all those involved in the Scottish Flu Immunisation Programme. Despite the challenges, and working to an accelerated deadline of early December across the winter programme, you successfully delivered an extended programme to over 2.5 million eligible individuals during the 2022/23 flu season, achieving this during a period of immense pressure as we experienced a large rise in flu activity for the first time in four seasons. Even with these added pressures, vaccination uptake rates in the 65 years and over cohort remained reassuringly high, reaching 85.5% last season and significantly in excess of the World Health Organization's target ambition of 75% uptake. This key objective was only accomplished because of your immense professionalism, commitment and hard work.
2. The Seasonal Flu Immunisation Programme is essential to protect those who are most vulnerable to severe illness from flu. This year in Scotland 63.7% of the eligible population received a flu vaccine. It is essential we continue to protect the most vulnerable in society and with our learning strive to increase vaccination uptake levels in less well served groups, including those living in economic deprivation.

Key Objectives

3. The key objectives of the Seasonal Flu Immunisation Programme, which are a strategic and Ministerial priority, are;
 - o To protect those most at risk of severe illness from flu and to support the resilience of the health and care system, particularly during the winter months.

**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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Addresses

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
Immunisation Co-ordinators
CPHMs
Scottish Prison Service
Scottish Ambulance Service
Occupational Health Leads

For information

Chairs, NHS Boards
Infectious Disease Consultants
Consultant Physicians
Public Health Scotland
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Further Enquiries

Policy Issues
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Medical Issues

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Vaccine Supply Issues

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- Building on experience to deliver the programme in an agile and patient-centred way, and to deploy vaccines in a timescale that best protects the population.
 - To further increase flu vaccine uptake across all eligible groups; with particular focus on those who are aged 65 years and over, those aged 18-64 years in clinical risk groups, pregnant women (at all stages of pregnancy) and Health and Social Care Workers. Full details of eligibility for flu immunisation for this winter season is set out in [Green Book Chapter 19](#).
 - The Seasonal flu Immunisation Programme 2023/24 remains extended again this year, to include:
 - social care staff who deliver direct personal care;
 - carers, including unpaid carers;
 - independent contractors (GP, dental, optometry and community pharmacy practices, including support staff);
 - teachers and support staff (pupil facing),
 - prison population, prison officers and support staff who deliver direct detention services;
 - secondary school pupils; and
 - all those aged 50-64 years.
 - Some of those aged 50-64 years may also be eligible due to underlying health conditions, employment or being unpaid carers. The extended offer will maintain resilience in the sectors above for the coming winter, and eligibility will be reviewed again next year.
 - We will work with our communications colleagues and our health and social care partners to encourage greater uptake across eligible frontline health and social care workers. A creative, well-timed and accessible approach is required, and is critical to protect staff, whilst also safeguarding those in their care.
4. NHS Boards are encouraged to use their judgement and local knowledge, in line with the Green Book, to vaccinate people experiencing substance misuse and those who are homeless, including all those in temporary accommodation and rough sleepers. It is likely that a significant proportion of these people will have underlying chronic medical conditions and are at high risk of both flu and COVID-19 related complications.
 5. Most NHS Boards and Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs) will be delivering flu vaccine to pregnant women through their local maternity services again this season and should keep local GP practices informed about their plans, including how to refer women to the services as appropriate.
 6. Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland (PHS) will provide further guidance around delivery arrangements and cohort prioritisation in due course. A separate letter will be issued for the childhood element of the Seasonal Flu Immunisation Programme 2023/24 will follow.

7. More information on the procured flu vaccines for the forthcoming season, as well as vaccine composition, is provided in Annex A.

Extension of the programme

8. Scottish Ministers wish to continue to offer an extended Seasonal Flu Immunisation Programme in 2023/24, to provide greater protection, and in response to the earlier and more severe flu season experienced last winter.
9. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all aspects of public health, including vaccine supply at a global level. With that in mind, advice from the Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) for the coming season has informed our decision to again procure sufficient vaccine for the expanded eligibility groups. We will continue to prioritise those most at risk from flu, adapting our approach when required to protect public health, and health and social care services, as far as possible.
10. The Scottish Government will remain in regular dialogue with delivery partners, through the FVCV Programme and SIPG, and update you as appropriate.

Health and Social Care Workers

11. It is imperative that timely immunisation of all health and social care workers in direct contact with patients/clients remains a central element in our objective to protect the most vulnerable in our society. In addition, non-frontline NHS staff may be eligible for the Seasonal Flu Immunisation Programme 2023/24 via their occupational health service. They are encouraged to book their vaccination using the online portal and Health Boards are asked to make vaccines as easily accessible as possible, including offering workplace vaccination.
12. Last year, staff flu vaccination uptake rates dropped slightly from the previous year, with combined uptake amongst health and social care workers reaching 46.9% (Health Care workers at 55.7% and Social Care Workers at 36.4%). Flu vaccination not only protects individual staff members, but reduces the risk of transmission of flu viruses within health and social care settings, contributing to the protection of individuals who may have a suboptimal response to their own immunisations.
13. Senior clinicians, NHS Managers, Directors of Public Health, Local Authorities and Integration Authorities should ensure this work aligns with the prioritisation already being given to our planning response for the health and social care sector this coming winter.
14. [Chapter 12 of the Green Book](#) provides information on which groups can be considered as directly involved in delivering care.

Communication materials

15. The national media campaign across all key channels is being developed, and further details will be provided in due course. The Scottish Government will work closely with Public Health Scotland (PHS) to develop a toolkit for partners.
16. PHS will produce and make available a range of national accessible information materials to support informed consent for all eligible cohorts.
17. The public should be signposted to NHS Inform for up-to-date information on the programme. Further details will be provided in due course.

Workforce Education

18. NHS Education for Scotland (NES) and PHS will work closely with stakeholders to update workforce education materials to support the programme, and thereafter make these available to colleagues prior to the start of the flu season. These will be available on the [NES TURAS Learn website](#).

Action

19. NHS Boards and GP practices which are participating in the programme are asked to note and implement the arrangements outlined in this letter.
20. We have procured sufficient vaccine to support uptake for the coming season, however ongoing effective management at a local level is essential. NHS Boards and social care services should fully consider the needs and preferences of their eligible cohorts, planning appropriately and timeously.
21. As many people as possible should be vaccinated early in the season, and before flu viruses begin to circulate. The benefits of flu vaccination should be communicated and vaccination delivery made as easily accessible as possible, especially for those in historically less well served groups.
22. To continue encouraging uptake of flu vaccination among social care staff, Integration Authority Chief Officers and Local Authorities are asked to work closely to communicate and actively promote the Seasonal Flu Immunisation Programme 2023/24 to social care workers providing direct personal care, and to ensure they are fully supported to access the service. A separate letter will be issued to social care membership organisations and providers to emphasise this.

Yours sincerely,

Gregor Smith

Alex McMahon

Alison Strath

**Professor Sir Gregor Smith
Chief Medical Officer**

**Professor Alex McMahon
Chief Nursing Officer**

**Professor Alison Strath
Chief Pharmaceutical
Officer**

RECOMMENDED FLU VACCINES, VACCINE COMPOSITION AND ORDERING INFORMATION

Flu vaccines for 2023/24

The flu vaccines that have been centrally procured for the forthcoming flu season are in line with the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) and are set out in the table below.

Eligible Groups	Vaccine – JCVI Recommended
Individuals aged 65 years and over	aQIV - Adjuvanted Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (Seqirus).
Individuals aged 18-64 years with “at-risk” conditions	QIVc - Cell-based Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (Seqirus).
Health, Social Care Workers and NHS independent contractors	QIVc - Cell-based Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (Seqirus).
Unpaid/Young carers	QIVc - Cell-based Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (Seqirus).
Individuals aged 50-64 not otherwise eligible through a qualifying health condition or employment.	QIVc - Cell-based Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (Seqirus).
Nursery, Primary and Secondary school Teachers and support staff.	QIVc - Cell-based Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (Seqirus).
Prison population, prison officers and support staff.	QIVc - Cell-based Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (Seqirus).

Vaccine composition for 2023/24

Each year the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends flu vaccine strains based on careful mapping of flu viruses as they circulate around the world.

This monitoring is continuous and allows experts to make predictions on which strains are most likely to cause flu outbreaks in the northern hemisphere in the coming winter.

For the 2023/24 flu season, the WHO recommends that quadrivalent vaccines for use in the 2023/2024 influenza season in the northern hemisphere contain the following:

Egg-based vaccines

- an A/Victoria/4897/2022 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus;
- an A/Darwin/9/2021 (H3N2)-like virus;
- a B/Austria/1359417/2021 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus; and
- a B/Phuket/3073/2013 (B/Yamagata lineage)-like virus.

Cell culture - or recombinant-based vaccines

- an A/Wisconsin/67/2022 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus;
- an A/Darwin/6/2021 (H3N2)-like virus;
- a B/Austria/1359417/2021 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus; and
- a B/Phuket/3073/2013 (B/Yamagata lineage)-like virus.

For more information

Recommended composition of influenza virus vaccines for use in the 2023/2024 northern hemisphere influenza season – full report (February 2023) available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/recommended-composition-of-influenza-virus-vaccines-for-use-in-the-2023-2024-northern-hemisphere-influenza-season>

Questions and Answers - Recommended composition of influenza virus vaccines for use in the Northern hemisphere 2023-2024 influenza season and development of candidate vaccine viruses for pandemic preparedness (February 2023) available at: [Frequently Asked Questions - Recommended composition of influenza virus vaccines](#)

Egg-free vaccine

For individuals with egg allergy the advice in the most recent influenza chapter of the Green Book should be followed: [The Green book of immunisation - chapter 19 influenza \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

JCVI has advised that egg-allergic adults and children over age two years can be given QIVc - Cell-based Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (Seqirus).

Vaccine ordering and delivery arrangements

Information on ordering and delivery arrangements for the flu vaccine will be provided within further correspondence. Details of the supply arrangements for community pharmacies supporting this year's immunisation programme will be shared directly via relevant NHS Boards.

NHS Boards and GP practices participating in the programme should plan appropriately and place the minimum number of orders needed, taking into consideration available fridge capacity. NHS Boards are charged for each delivery made to practices participating in the programme.

NHS Boards and GP practices participating in the programme must ensure adequate vaccine supplies before organising vaccination clinics.

Orders for the flu vaccine should be placed on the Movianto online ordering system - Marketplace: (<https://marketplace.moviato.com>). Log-in details used in previous seasons remain valid and should continue to be used.

If you have any issues with log-in arrangements or if you have new staff who require access to the system please contact Movianto Customer Services on 01234 587 112 for assistance.

When placing orders for the vaccines in Marketplace, practices should search for the type of vaccine required. For example, if vaccines are required for patients aged 18 to 64 these can be found in Marketplace by entering the search term “QIVc” or on the ‘Orders’ screen. If vaccines are required for patients aged 65 or over, these can be found by searching for “aQIV”.

Individuals aged 65 years and over should be offered aQIV; those individuals aged 18-64 should be offered QIVc. Those who are egg-allergic should be offered the QIVc vaccine as detailed above.

Vaccines are available in packs of 10. On the ordering platform, please read the vaccine information carefully and order the number of packs required rather than the total volume of individual vaccines – for example, as the vaccine is available in packs of 10, a site that wants to request a delivery of 500 vaccines should place an order for 50 packs of 10.

Patient information leaflets for vaccines supplied in packs of 10 will be provided separately to the vaccines. These will be automatically added to orders by the manufacturer.

Further information and support

As with last year, a Procurement Officer within NHS National Procurement will act as a link between participating sites and Movianto to ensure any potential allocation or delivery issues can be minimised and swiftly resolved. Contact details for the Procurement Officer are as follows: NSS.vaccineenquiries@nhs.scot

For queries linked to ordering and deliveries, please contact the Movianto Customer Service Team (01234 587 112 or Flu.Scotland@movianto.com) If any delivery service issues cannot be resolved satisfactorily through dialogue, the issue should be escalated to NHS National Procurement (contact details as above) in the first instance and thereafter the Immunisation Co-ordinator within the NHS Board. If you require contact details for your NHS Board Immunisation Coordinator please email: seasonalfluprogramme@gov.scot