

Scottish Vaccination and Immunisation Programme

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Lines to take – Winter Flu and COVID-19 Vaccination 2025

- Decision-making on Scotland's vaccination programme is guided by the independent, expert advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).
- The JCVI published its [advice to UK governments on the forthcoming COVID-19 vaccination programme](#) in November 2024 and Scottish Government accepted this advice and issued a [CMO letter](#) detailing eligible cohorts.
- The JCVI's advice is to offer the vaccines to those at high risk of serious illness from flu or COVID-19 and who are therefore most likely to benefit from vaccination.

COVID-19 vaccination

- This winter, the COVID vaccine is offered between 29 September and 31 January.
- Eligibility for the COVID-19 vaccination programme is based on the advice and recommendations of the JCVI.
- This is informed by robust evidence of which groups are at risk of severe disease, hospitalisation and death from COVID-19.
- Vaccination will be offered to those at high risk of serious illness from COVID-19. These groups include:
 - adults aged 75 years and over
 - residents in a care home for older adults
 - individuals aged 6 months and over who are immunosuppressed (as defined in the 'immunosuppression' sections of tables 3 or 4 in the [COVID-19 chapter of the Green Book](#))
- The JCVI recommendations are reviewed **regularly** and are based on a combination of factors including consideration of the risk of disease and benefit of vaccination for different groups of individuals.
- This winter, we will be using Pfizer mRNA vaccines for all eligible groups. There are **no other vaccines types available**.
- COVID-19 vaccines offer strong protection, especially against severe illness, but this protection gradually declines over time. That's why vaccines are offered in spring and

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winter to those at higher risk. This helps maintain immunity during periods when the virus is more likely to circulate.

- COVID-19 vaccines significantly reduce the risk of severe illness, hospitalisation and death, especially in older adults and those with underlying health conditions.

Flu vaccination

- This winter, the flu vaccine is offered between 15 September and 29 March.
- Full details on those eligible for their flu vaccines this winter is available on [NHS Inform](#).
- The following groups are eligible for seasonal flu vaccine this winter:
 - **Adult programme**
 - Those living in long-stay residential care homes or other long-stay care facilities
 - All those aged 65 and over
 - All those aged 18 to under 65 years in defined risk groups. This includes:
 - those in clinical at-risk groups set out in [Green Book Chapter 19](#)
 - those experiencing homelessness
 - those experiencing substance misuse
 - asylum seekers living in Home Office hotel or B&B accommodation
 - all prisoners within the Scottish prison estate
 - pregnant women
 - Frontline health and social care workers
 - Non-frontline NHS workers
 - Poultry workers & bird keepers (See CMO letter Annex A for further detail on eligibility criteria, [NHS Scotland - Publications](#))
 - Unpaid carers and young carers
 - Household contacts of those with immunosuppression
 - **Childhood programme**
 - Children aged from 6 months to 18 years in clinical risk groups (if not eligible in accordance with bullets below)
 - All children aged 2-5 years not yet at school (age as of 01/09/2025)
 - All primary school children (primary one to primary seven)

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- All secondary school pupils (years one to six)
- Eligible children who are home educated, or not currently in mainstream education for a variety of reasons, or clinically at risk who may not be attending school at the time are offered vaccination through local arrangements.
- Vaccination is required every year because flu viruses are constantly changing, and immunity may wane. The vaccines offered this year will give those eligible the best possible protection against the viruses likely to be circulating this winter.
- Flu vaccine eligibility remains the same as Winter 2024. Those aged 50-64 are no longer included as an eligible group as we have moved beyond the pandemic period.
- Flu vaccines are available to purchase privately for those who are not eligible under the national programme, and many employers offer vaccination.

Health and social care workers (HSCWs)

- Frontline HSCWs are eligible for flu vaccination this winter in line with the JCVI advice.
- All NHS staff, including non-frontline staff, are eligible for a flu vaccine.
- Social care staff of all ages who have direct hands-on duties are eligible to receive the flu vaccine this year.
- This winter the JCVI has **not** advised COVID-19 vaccination for frontline HSCWs [workers](#).

Further lines regarding eligibility for the COVID-19 vaccine

- Over the last five years, population immunity to COVID-19 has been increasing due to a combination of naturally acquired immunity following recovery from infection and vaccine-derived immunity (this combination is known as 'hybrid immunity').
- COVID-19 is now a relatively mild disease for most people. It can still be unpleasant, although rates of hospitalisation and death from COVID-19 have reduced significantly since COVID-19 first emerged.

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- Age has always been strongly associated with the risk of hospitalisation and mortality from COVID-19, with the oldest in the population being the most vulnerable.
- As COVID-19 becomes an endemic disease (regularly occurring within the community), and with a move towards longer term plans, the focus of the programme is shifting towards targeted vaccination of those over 75 years of age, residents in a care home for older adults and individuals who are immunosuppressed. These are the groups who continue to be at higher risk of COVID-19 related serious disease, including mortality.
- There are currently no plans to increase or expand the groups eligible for COVID-19 vaccination.
- The primary aim of the COVID-19 programme has always been the prevention of severe illness, hospitalisations and death in those most at risk and this remains unchanged for 2025.
- Any decision on expanding COVID-19 eligibility or further 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.
- In those who aren't eligible for vaccination this year, many people have a level of protection against COVID-19 from previous vaccination or infection.
- We know that carers may wish to seek the COVID-19 vaccination to protect those they care for. The most important consideration is to make sure that the person being cared for receives their COVID-19 vaccine, if they are eligible. This will give them optimum protection against the COVID-19 virus.
- We understand that unpaid carers and those living with people who are immunosuppressed may want to seek vaccination to protect loved ones from COVID-19, but the current vaccines provide limited protection against spreading the virus from one person to the other (transmission).
- We understand that unpaid carers and those living with people who are immunosuppressed may wish to seek COVID-19 vaccination to prevent themselves

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from becoming ill and being unable to care for those they look after, but the current vaccines do not necessarily prevent a person from catching COVID-19. What they do is prevent severe illness, hospitalisation and death. People who are not considered higher risk of COVID-19 related serious disease by the JCVI, due to their age or clinical condition, should experience much less severe symptoms than during the early stages of the pandemic.

Private COVID-19 vaccination

- Pharmacy companies, private clinics and private GP services in the UK offer private sales of COVID-19 vaccine.
- Private sales of COVID-19 vaccines are not controlled or managed by NHS Scotland or Scottish Government.
- NHS Scotland does not have any responsibility over which pharmacies or private clinics offer private COVID-19 vaccines, which vaccine types they stock or what they charge.
- Private sales are managed by arrangements between individual private providers, pharmacy companies and vaccine manufacturers.
- NHS Scotland continues to offer the COVID-19 vaccine to those eligible this winter, free of charge, as recommended by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

Non-mRNA vaccines

- Last winter (2024/2025), NHS Scotland procured non-mRNA vaccines for those who cannot receive mRNA vaccines due to severe allergic reactions.
- For these individuals, the Novavax Nuvaxovid XBB.1.5 vaccine was the only product available in the UK market to protect against COVID-19.
- Novavax, the manufacturer of the previously available non-mRNA vaccine has confirmed there is currently no way for NHS Scotland to purchase non-mRNA stock at this time. It has therefore not been available from Spring 2025 onwards

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- The lack of non-mRNA stock applies not only to the NHS in Scotland, but the rest of the NHS and private pharmacies across the UK. The decision not to make stock available at this time sits with the manufacturer.