



Dear Colleagues

WINTER PROGRAMME 2025 – SEASONAL FLU AND COVID-19 VACCINATION

We are writing to provide you with further information about the winter seasonal flu and COVID-19 vaccination programme 2025/26.

We would like to begin by thanking you for all your hard work in delivering the spring 2025 COVID-19 vaccination programme.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation's (JCVI) published advice on flu vaccination in winter 2025/26 is available online [via this link](#).

The JCVI's published advice on COVID-19 vaccination in winter 2025/26 is available online [via this link](#).

Key objectives for the winter 2025/26 programme

1. To protect those in society who remain at higher risk of severe flu and COVID-19, in order to prevent severe illness, hospitalisation and death.
2. To minimise additional pressure on the NHS and social care services, during the winter period, as a result of flu and COVID-19 infection.
3. To increase uptake across the entirety of the programme, but with a particular focus on improving uptake in the clinical at risk flu groups, and flu vaccination for health and social care workers, where we saw significant reductions in uptake in winter 2024/25.

**From Chief Medical Officer
Chief Pharmaceutical
Officer
Acting Deputy Chief
Nursing Officer**

Professor Sir Gregor Smith
Professor Alison Strath
Mark Richards

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SGHD CMO (2025) 15

Addresses

For action

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

For information

Chairs, NHS Boards
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Further Enquiries

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Child Flu Eligibility

4. Eligibility for child flu vaccination remains identical to winter 2024/25 with vaccination in winter 2025/26 being offered to the following groups in Scotland:
- All 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)
 - All secondary school pupils (years one to six)

Adult Flu Eligibility

5. Eligibility for adult flu vaccination remains identical to winter 2024/25 with vaccination in winter 2025/26 being offered to the following groups in Scotland:
- All those living in long-stay residential care homes or other long-stay care facilities
 - All those aged 65 years and over
 - All those aged 18 years to under 65 years in defined risk groups. This includes:
 - those in clinical at-risk groups set out in [Influenza: the green book, chapter 19 - GOV.UK](#)
 - 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 handlers (see **Annex A** for eligibility criteria)
 - Unpaid carers and young carers
 - Household contacts of those with immunosuppression

COVID-19 Eligibility

6. Eligibility for COVID-19 vaccination has changed for winter 2025/26 compared to winter 2024/25. The following groups are being offered a COVID-19 vaccination in winter 2025/26. These individuals will also be eligible for flu vaccination:
- Residents in care homes for older adults
 - All adults aged 75 years and over
 - Individuals aged 6 months and over who are immunosuppressed (as defined in tables 3 and 4 in the [COVID-19 chapter of the Green Book](#)).
7. The following groups are no longer eligible for COVID-19 vaccination from winter 2025/26 (unless they fall into any of the three eligible groups listed in point 6 above):
- Those aged 65-74
 - Those in a clinical risk group (as defined in tables 3 and 4 in the [COVID-19 chapter of the Green Book](#)), including pregnant women
 - Frontline health and social care workers

8. It is important to note that although these groups are no longer eligible for COVID-19 vaccination, they will be called forward for, and should take up a seasonal flu vaccine this winter.
9. The reduction in the size of the COVID-19 programme is the result of a change of advice from the JCVI that was issued in [November 2024](#). In this statement, the JCVI advised that the COVID-19 vaccination programme should now move to JCVI's standard cost effectiveness assessment, as per other routine vaccination programmes. Furthermore, over the last four years, population immunity to SARS-CoV-2 has been increasing due to a combination of naturally acquired immunity following recovery from infection and vaccine-derived immunity. COVID-19 is now a relatively mild disease for most people, though it can still be unpleasant, with rates of hospitalisation and death from COVID-19 having reduced significantly since SARS-CoV-2 first emerged. This has led to a more refined approach to the targeting of the COVID-19 vaccination programme, with a focus on individuals where there is good evidence of a high risk of hospitalisation and/or mortality. Available data continues to demonstrate that older people are more likely to experience hospitalisation and mortality if infected with COVID-19 and data on hospital admissions in the UK is now consistent with the clinical risk being highest in those aged 80 years and older. Individuals who are immunosuppressed are also at higher risk of hospitalisation and/or mortality following COVID-19 infection.

Health and social care workers (HSCWs)

10. It is imperative that timely flu immunisation of all health and social care workers (HSCWs) 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 remain eligible for the seasonal flu vaccine in 2025/26. Health Board senior leaders should demonstrate active support and encouragement for all staff to receive their flu vaccine this year. Health Boards are asked to make vaccines as easily accessible as possible for staff, including offering HSCW drop-in clinics and workplace vaccination. HSCWs may also book their vaccination using the online portal or national vaccination helpline. It is also possible for HSCWs to book an appointment at any venue across Scotland, for example somewhere close to where they work or visit regularly.

Programme age limits

11. The date for calculation of age cut off for the winter 2025 programme is 31 March 2026. If an individual meets the age criteria on or before 31 March 2026, they will be eligible for vaccination. The only exception is for the infant programme, where the baby must have turned 6 months before the programme starts on 1 September 2025. This also applies to those pre-school children eligible for flu aged 2. If a child is diagnosed with a new risk condition during the programme, their clinician, parent or carer can refer them for vaccination via the clinical referral route detailed in **Annex B**.
12. There will be a data refresh in late October to identify those who have become newly eligible since the start of the programme, so that they too can be offered flu vaccination before flu viruses start circulating more widely in the population.

Programme timings

13. Below are the dates for the winter FVCV programme:

- **Early September:** Start of child flu programme and flu offer to pregnant women (*vaccine supply dependant*)
- **15 September:** Adult flu programme begins
- **29 September:** Beginning of co-administration to those groups eligible for both flu and COVID-19 vaccination
- **Saturday 31 January 2026:** COVID-19 programme ends
- **Sunday 29 March 2026:** Flu programme ends

The National Vaccination Helpline

14. At this time, the National Vaccination Helpline (**0800 030 8013**) provides support to the flu and COVID-19 vaccination programmes. The helpline is unable to assist with or make bookings for any other vaccination programme.

Action

15. Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs), GP practices, community pharmacies and others who are participating in the programme are asked to note and implement the arrangements outlined in this letter, noting that more detailed operational guidance will be made available from Public Health Scotland (PHS) to delivery teams closer to programme start.
16. We have procured sufficient vaccine to support uptake in eligible cohorts for the coming season, however ongoing effective management at a local level is essential to avoid unnecessary wastage.
17. The benefits of vaccination should be clearly communicated and vaccination appointments made as easily accessible as possible, especially for those in historically less well served groups.
18. In keeping with JCVI flu advice, the timely delivery of vaccination is important to ensure the eligible population is protected before flu activity starts to increase in the winter months. We therefore expect the vast majority of the flu and COVID-19 adult programme to be completed by early December 2025. Boards should endeavour to meet the World Health Organisation (WHO) flu target of 75% coverage in the 65+ age group by that point. Those in the other eligible groups should also have the opportunity to come forward and receive flu and/or COVID-19 vaccination by that point.

Further information can be found in the annexes:

- **Annex A:** Poultry worker and bird handler eligibility criteria
- **Annex B:** Information on clinical referral routes
- **Annex C:** Vaccine products for Scotland's winter programme 2025
- **Annex D:** Programme resources and communication materials

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

Yours sincerely,

Gregor Smith

Professor Sir Gregor Smith
Chief Medical Officer

Alison Strath

Professor Alison Strath
**Chief Pharmaceutical
Officer**

Mark Richards

Mark Richards
**Acting Deputy Chief Nursing
Officer**

Annex A: Eligibility information on flu vaccination offer to poultry workers and bird handlers

Background

Due to the high levels of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 activity in both wild and domestic birds in the UK in summer 2023, the JCVI advised that seasonal influenza vaccination should be considered for those at higher risk of infection with avian influenza related to their work or similar exposures. People at highest risk are likely to be those undertaking culling or cleaning at confirmed avian influenza outbreak premises, or handling live unwell birds. Workers employed at, or regularly visiting, statutorily-registered poultry units and poultry processing units, may also be at risk if they have direct exposure to bird faeces / litter such as through initial egg sorting or cleaning of premises. People involved in collection of wild bird carcasses where avian influenza is suspected should also be considered for vaccination. Further information can be found at [Influenza: the green book, chapter 19 - GOV.UK](#).

Scotland's eligibility for winter 2025/26

- Workers employed at, or regularly visiting, poultry units and poultry processing units, including inspection teams.
- Those who would be undertaking culling and / or cleaning at confirmed avian influenza outbreak premises.
- Those who would be handling live unwell birds where avian influenza is suspected.
- People involved in the collection of wild or domestic bird carcasses where avian influenza is suspected, including sea birds.

Accessing vaccination

- **Self-booking appointment:** Eligible individuals can self-book into their local clinic via the online booking portal [Winter vaccines | NHS inform](#) or via the National Vaccination Helpline on 0800 030 8013.

Communications

- All individuals and companies registered on the Scottish Kept Bird Register will be sent details on eligibility and how to book their flu vaccination.
- Local Health Board and Health Protection Teams will engage with local companies and producers to encourage their workforce to come forward for vaccination.
- The PHS poultry worker and bird handler toolkit can be accessed [here](#). This includes resources for employers.
- The informed consent leaflet is available [here](#).

Annex B: Clinical referral routes

If an individual thinks they may be eligible due to age, or an underlying clinical condition, but has not been sent an appointment or prompt, they can call the helpline on 0800 030 8013, who will refer them to their local Health Board to ascertain eligibility and bring them forward for vaccination if required.

- For COVID-19 this would be if they are aged 75 and over, or are part of the immunosuppressed group.
- For flu this would be if they are aged 65 and over, or are in one of the clinical at risk groups (which also includes immunosuppression).

An individual could also consult their GP practice or secondary care clinician who can then assess the individual and complete a referral form to refer their case through local referral pathways for vaccination. If GP practices or clinicians are unsure of their local referral pathway, they should contact their local Immunisation team or co-ordinator for more information.

- Guidance on the clinical definition of immunosuppression can be found in the [COVID-19 chapter of the Green Book](#)
- Guidance on the clinical definitions for clinical at risk groups can be found in [Influenza: the green book, chapter 19 - GOV.UK](#)

Annex C: Vaccine products for Scotland's winter programme 2025

PHS will provide Health Boards with template Patient Group Directions and National Vaccine Protocols for both flu and COVID-19 prior to programme start.

We have procured sufficient flu and COVID-19 vaccines to support uptake in eligible cohorts for the 2025 programme, however, ongoing and effective management at a local level is essential to the efficiency of the programme. Health Boards should fully consider the needs of their eligible cohorts and plan appropriately and timeously in order to successfully deliver the programme.

Seasonal flu

Further information on flu vaccines types can be found in the [2025 Adult & Child Flu CMO letter](#)

COVID-19

For the winter 2025 COVID-19 programme, the following COVID-19 vaccines are advised:

For all individuals aged 12 years and over:

- Pfizer BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine (Comirnaty® KP.2). Dose: 30 micrograms

For children aged 5 to 11 years:

- Pfizer BioNTech paediatric COVID-19 vaccine (Comirnaty® 10 LP.8.1). Dose: 10 micrograms

For children aged 6 months to 4 years:

- Pfizer BioNTech infant COVID-19 vaccine (Comirnaty® 3 LP.8.1). Dose: 3 micrograms

Non-mRNA COVID-19 vaccines for winter 2025

Whilst it remains the Scottish Government policy position that Health Boards must make non-mRNA COVID-19 vaccines available to those individuals who are contraindicated to, or allergic to, mRNA vaccines, at the point of publication of this letter there are no non-mRNA products authorised for use in the UK by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) available for purchase. Health Boards should contact individuals affected to explain the situation. The Scottish Vaccination and Immunisation Programme (SVIP) will keep this under review, to see if supply becomes available at a later date.

COVID-19 vaccine dosage interval

The COVID-19 vaccine should usually be offered no earlier than around 6 months after the last vaccine dose, although operational flexibility around the timing of vaccination in relation to the last vaccine dose is considered appropriate (with a minimum interval of 3 months between doses). More information on operational flexibility will be provided in the [COVID-19 chapter of the Green Book](#).

Annex D: Programme resources and communication materials

Communication materials

PHS will provide a range of communications materials, messaging and assets to Health Boards and partners to help promote the vaccination offer to the general public, with a focus on groups where uptake is historically low. PHS will also develop toolkits to encourage the promotion of the winter vaccinations that will support NHS and social care colleagues.

The public should be signposted to NHS Inform for up to date information on the vaccination programme:

[Flu vaccine | NHS inform](#)
[Winter vaccines | NHS inform](#)

Workforce education

NHS Education for Scotland (NES) and PHS have developed a range of vaccine specific workforce education resources/opportunities for both COVID-19 and seasonal flu. These are or will be available on the NES TURAS Learn website:

Flu: [Seasonal flu programme | Turas | Learn \(nhs.scot\)](#)

COVID-19: [COVID-19 vaccination programme | Turas | Learn \(nhs.scot\)](#)

In addition, a new page on Turas Learn is designed to help support healthcare practitioners to have vaccination conversations with the public and will be of interest to all healthcare practitioners. [Vaccination conversations | Turas | Learn](#)