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Dear Colleague(s)

## COVID-19 VACCINATION PROGRAMME: GREEN BOOK UPDATED TO ALLOW OPERATIONAL FLEXIBILITY ON DOSE TIMING FOR BOOSTER VACCINATION

This letter provides details on changes to [the Green Book, Chapter 14a page 22](#), on 29 October 2021 to allow operational flexibility in the COVID-19 booster programme by advising that administration may be brought forward to a minimum of five months in certain circumstances.

### Key objectives

1. To update on the 29 October 2021 changes to the Green Book to allow flexibility in administering booster vaccinations. Covid-19 booster vaccination can usually only take place six months after the second dose, although there is now further flexibility to offer vaccination in some operational circumstances after five months and in some clinical situations after four months.

### Background

2. The Green Book was updated on 29 October 2021 to state that for operational reasons, administration may be brought forward to a minimum of five months in certain circumstances including:
  - in a care home setting to enable all residents to be vaccinated in the same session
  - where an otherwise eligible individual attends for another reason (for example to receive influenza vaccine)
3. This change will allow for example, care home residents who may have received their second doses at different times to be vaccinated in the same session, as long as it has been 5 months (22 weeks) since their second dose.
4. The change also offers flexibility where someone is attending for flu and could benefit from co-administration if also eligible for COVID-19 booster and has a 22 week gap from their second dose already.

### From the Chief Medical Officer

Dr Gregor Smith

5 November 2021

SGHD(2021)31

#### 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  
 Directors of Pharmacy  
 Directors of Public Health  
 General Practitioners  
 Practice Nurses  
 Immunisation Co-ordinators  
 Operational Leads

##### For information

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

#### Further Enquiries

Policy Issues  
 COVID Vaccination Policy  
[TeamVaccinationsDelivery@gov.scot](mailto:TeamVaccinationsDelivery@gov.scot)

Medical Issues  
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Pharmaceutical and Vaccine Supply Issues  
 NHS NSS National Procurement:  
[NSS.fluvaccineenquiries@nhs.scot](mailto:NSS.fluvaccineenquiries@nhs.scot)

5. There was also a change for those about to receive immunosuppressive treatment where the booster may be brought forward to a minimum of four months (~120 days) to avoid giving a booster when the immune system is less able to respond. Such individuals will need to be scheduled for additional boosting at a later date, currently expected to be around six months after the last dose.

## **Operational delivery**

6. The Scottish vaccination programme has prioritised vaccinating those at greatest risk as early as possible. Based on the efficiency of direct lettering of appointments in the early stages of the Programme, it was decided to adopt the same approach for the most at risk for the 2021/2022 Autumn/Winter Programme.
7. Our approach is to maximise the co-administration of flu and COVID boosters at the same time. This person centred approach will ensure that people, particularly those who are older or at most risk, do not have to arrange and attend two separate appointments. This is also the most efficient use of staffing.
8. This change to the Green Book guidance offers some degree of flexibility which should increase our potential to co-vaccinate, on an opportunistic basis, more people who attend at 22 or 23 weeks as they would previously have been required to return at a later date to receive their booster.
9. As you are already aware from my letter dated 17 September 2021, in order to allow Health Boards operational flexibility, Boards were advised that a COVID-19 booster vaccine could be given at a minimum interval of 24 weeks between the second dose and the booster dose.
10. Health Boards should continue to schedule as currently planned i.e. via cohort group for those groups that are being invited by letter and not using the self-booking portal. This takes up most of the current level of appointment capacity in our clinics for the majority of November. For people coming to these appointments, if they have a gap of 22 weeks and above they can have co-administration.
11. The programme then moves to a self-booking phase, with the portal opening on 15 November for citizens in the next groups which are those age 50-59 years; those 16+ years who are unpaid carers; and those 16+ years who are household contacts of immunosuppressed individuals.
12. People self-booking will be guided to consider when they book to optimise their co-administration to prevent them needing two appointments. From modelling we can see that the vast majority of people by the start of December are within the 22-24 week gap or beyond. For those attending clinics – if they meet this criterion and are eligible for both vaccinations – these again can be administered.

## **People who are immunosuppressed**

13. The flexibility set out in the Green Book also now provides scope to offer those about to receive immunosuppressive treatment the booster earlier, at a minimum of four months (~120 days), to avoid giving the booster when the immune system is less able to respond.

14. In keeping with other stages in the programme, engagement between secondary care specialists providing treatment to this group and with immunisation coordinators is likely to be the best way to implement this. Secondary care clinicians can identify those who would benefit from this earlier booster offer and it is proposed that immunisation coordinators liaise with relevant clinicians to ensure an agreed route through to vaccination for these individuals.

## **Communications**

15. Full details and messaging will be provided to Health Boards when available, allowing them to deploy via their channels to local communities. A Scottish Government news release will be issued, and social media will also be used to highlight these changes.
16. We will ensure this messaging flows through to NHS Inform and the helpline, so that members of the public are aware of – and have access to – the latest details on how and when they can be vaccinated. Clarity of messaging will be crucial to avoid any confusion.

## **Action**

17. Health Boards should exercise flexibility to co-vaccinate eligible people at 22+ weeks following their second COVID-19 vaccination.
18. Health Boards should continue to schedule and appoint based on the highest to lowest risk eligibility criteria; but where people attend for these appointments and are 22+ weeks they can be vaccinated for both COVID-19 booster and influenza.

We remain very grateful for your continued support and ongoing efforts in relation to the national COVID vaccination programme.

Yours sincerely

*Gregor Smith*

Dr Gregor Smith

**Chief Medical Officer**