

Dear Colleagues

SEASONAL FLU IMMUNISATION CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL PROGRAMME 2023/24 – COHORT CONFIRMATION

1. We are writing to provide you with information about the childhood and schools' based seasonal flu immunisation programme for the 2023/24 season (this includes both Local Authority and Independent school settings).
2. We would like to begin by thanking all those involved in the programme for your hard work, as despite the challenges of delivering an extended flu immunisation programme to over 2.5 million eligible individuals during the 2022/23 flu season, we know that it has been a challenging time for all staff across the health and social care sector.
3. Delivery of the flu immunisation programme will again provide protection for those at risk of infection with seasonal flu viruses, and it is therefore essential that we build on the success of last year's programme to prevent ill health, reducing transmission and minimise further impact on the NHS and social care services.
4. A recommendation to extend influenza vaccination to school-aged children was made in 2012 by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), to provide both individual protection to the children themselves and reduce transmission across all age groups. Implementation in a school setting began in 2013, with pre-school and primary school children being offered vaccination.

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
Chief Officers of Integration
Authorities
Chief Executives, Local Authorities
for Directors of Education
Directors of Pharmacy
Directors of Public Health
School Nurses
Immunisation Co-ordinators
CPHMs

For information

Chairs, NHS Boards
Infectious Disease Consultants
Consultant Paediatricians
Public Health Scotland
Chief Executive, Public Health
Scotland
NHS 24
General Practitioners
Practice Nurses

Further Enquiries to:

Policy Issues

Vaccination Policy Team
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Medical Issues

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Supply Issues

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5. Following consideration, the JCVI recommended that expanding flu vaccination to secondary school pupils would be cost effective, and provide further resilience to the NHS and social care services during the winter months. This was implemented in Primary Schools and from 2021/22, the programme was expanded in Scotland to include all secondary school pupils, and are included again this year.
6. The programme remains a key intervention during the winter, and agreement has been reached to include secondary school children in Scotland until 2025/26. This is a school based programme and only school pupils are eligible (see information below regarding home educated children). Information on vaccination for teachers and pupil facing support staff can be found in the adult seasonal flu programme letter: [Seasonal flu immunisation programme 2023/24](#).
7. Health Boards should make arrangements so that pupils who miss out on vaccination during the school session, are recalled and offered subsequent opportunities to get the vaccine. Likewise, Health Boards should offer the opportunity for those few children under 9 years of age who are in a clinical risk group and receiving flu vaccination for the first time and who require a second dose. Children who are in eligible age groups and are home educated should also be offered vaccination through local arrangements.

Eligibility

8. Those eligible for the childhood and school flu vaccination programme include:
 - All children aged from 6 months to 2 years in clinical risk groups (children must be aged 6 months or above on 1 September 2023);
 - All children aged 2-5 years, not yet at school (children must be aged 2 years or above on 1 September 2023); and
 - All primary school children (primary one to primary seven) at school.
 - All secondary school pupils (S1 up to and including S6) at school.

Further guidance on the list of eligible groups can be found in the most recent influenza chapter (chapter 19) of the Green Book available [here](#). Any Green Book updates will be reflected in the link.

Priority for those aged 2-5 years

9. Last winter Flu virus activity reached extraordinary levels and with the uncertainty of when flu activity will begin this winter, **those aged 2-5 years should be offered vaccination from the outset of the programme** to ensure they receive the earliest protection to help stem virus transmission. Early completion of vaccination amongst this group is essential.
10. Most Health Boards and Health & Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs) have completed the transfer of flu vaccine delivery to pre-school children from GP

Practices. However, some Boards may still have arrangements in place to use GP practices to meet their own delivery requirements. Health Boards and HSCPs should be working closely with these GP practices to ensure that all eligible children are offered the vaccine timeously to protect them against this infection.

Vaccine

11. Fluenz Tetra[®], a live attenuated nasal influenza vaccine (LAIV), the recommended vaccine for children and adolescents aged under 18 years. Please note that, as a live, attenuated vaccine, Fluenz Tetra[®] is contraindicated in a very small number of children.
12. LAIV is the vaccine of choice as it is generally more effective than the injected vaccines. It is also easier to administer and considered better at reducing the spread of flu to others, who may be vulnerable to the complications of flu. LAIV should be offered unless it is medically contraindicated or otherwise unsuitable
13. A very small number of pupils may be aged 18 years at the time they receive the vaccine, and they should also be offered the LAIV off-label. This will be included in the national Patient Group Direction (PGD) template.
14. Children who have a contraindication to LAIV should be considered for a suitable quadrivalent, inactivated flu vaccine, as appropriate for their age. Cell based quadrivalent influenza vaccine (Seqirus Vaccines) (QIVc), which is now licensed for all children aged two years and above, will be available to order for children in at risk groups who are contraindicated to receive LAIV.
15. Children in clinical risk groups aged 6 months to less than 2 years should also be offered Cell-based Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (QIVc). This is an off-label recommendation.

Alternative Vaccine – philosophical beliefs

16. For those who do not wish to receive LAIV due to the presence of porcine gelatine, the injectable vaccine QIVc is an alternative that can be given for religious reasons. Parents can request by ticking the appropriate box on the consent form.
17. An alternative vaccine should also be offered to those individuals aged 18 and under, who request it for other reasons such as vegetarianism or veganism. A discussion must take place between the individual and a clinician to ensure that the benefits of the JCVI recommended vaccine (LAIV) are explained. If the individual still wants to have an injectable alternative this should be offered. The inactivated Influenza vaccine national specimen patient group direction produced by Public Health Scotland and the Scottish Government National Protocol and the childhood flu consent form have been updated to reflect this change and provides NHS Boards with a national approach for Scotland. There are adequate flu vaccine supplies for this arrangement. The

number of requests during the 2023-24 programme will be monitored and evaluated

Resources

18. Health Boards are asked to ensure that immunisation teams, including vaccine holding centres and Child Health, are properly resourced to develop and deliver this year's extended programme. Provision of NES/PHS education resources together with application of the common staffing method will support Health Boards to assure that at all times sufficient numbers of suitably qualified and competent practitioners, from a range of professional disciplines, are available to meet the health, wellbeing and safety of patients, enabling the provision of safe and high-quality health care and the wellbeing of staff. Further information on funding arrangements will be circulated in due course.

Support

19. Any issues or queries should be escalated to the Immunisation Co-ordinator within the Health Board. If you require contact details for your NHS Board Immunisation Coordinator please email seasonalfluprogramme@gov.scot

ACTIONS

20. Health Boards, including their primary care teams, and participating GP practices are asked to note and plan appropriately to implement the arrangements outlined in this letter for the 2023/24 childhood and school seasonal flu immunisation programme. It is imperative that every effort is made to ensure high uptake as the flu vaccine is a key intervention to reduce viral transmission and will lessen the pressure on health and social care services.

21. Health Boards and Primary Care teams should fully consider the needs of their eligible cohorts, planning appropriately and timeously in order to successfully deliver the programme. Sufficient vaccines have been procured to support higher vaccination uptake however, ongoing and effective management at a local level will also be required.

22. Action should be taken to ensure as many children and young people as possible are vaccinated early in the season, and before flu viruses begin to circulate. The benefits of flu vaccination should be communicated and vaccination made as easily accessible as possible.

23. Health Boards should engage early with education colleagues, including Head Teachers, to ensure that models of vaccine delivery are discussed and agreed, with the most effective model being implemented.

24. We would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude for your professionalism and continuing support in planning and delivering the flu immunisation programme, and thank you for all your hard work.

Yours sincerely,

Gregor Smith

Professor Sir Gregor Smith
**Chief Medical Officer
for Scotland**

Alex McMahon

Professor Alex McMahon
**Chief Nursing Officer
Officer**

Alison Strath

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Chief Pharmaceutical

RECOMMENDED FLU VACCINES, VACCINE COMPOSITION, ORDERING AND DELIVERY INFORMATION, VACCINATION DATA RECORDING AND RESOURCES

Flu vaccines for 2023/24

1. 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
At risk children aged 6 months - 2 years	Cell-based Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (surface antigen, inactivated), Seqirus Vaccine (QIVc)
Children aged 2 –18 years who cannot receive LAIV	Cell-based Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (surface antigen, inactivated), Seqirus Vaccine (QIVc)
Pre-school children aged 2-5 years	Live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV)
Primary school children	Live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV)
Secondary school pupils	Live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV)

2. The Summary of Product Characteristics (SmPC) for individual products and Patient Group Directions (PGD) should always be referred to when ordering vaccines..

Contraindications

3. The Green Book chapter on influenza contains detailed advice on the flu vaccine and associated contraindications and colleagues should ensure they are familiar with, and refer to this before vaccinating patients

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/influenza-the-green-book-chapter-19>.

Vaccine composition for 2023/24

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

5. 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. Getting vaccinated is the best protection available against an unpredictable virus that can cause severe illness.

6. 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:

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

7. Recommended composition of influenza virus vaccines for use in the 2023/2024 northern hemisphere influenza season – full report (24 February 2023) available at: [WHO recommended-composition](#)

8. 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](#)

Vaccine ordering and delivery arrangements

9. Fluenz Tetra[®] has a shorter shelf life (18 weeks) compared to other flu vaccines. The expiry date on the nasal spray applicator should always be checked before use.

10. The delivery schedule for Fluenz Tetra[®] for 2023/24 has not yet been confirmed, as this is subject to manufacturing and ongoing regulatory processes. As Fluenz Tetra[®] has a shorter shelf life than other vaccines, it will be delivered into the national stockpile in a number of consignments, ensuring that there are in date supplies available throughout the period vaccine can be offered.

11. To support efficient delivery of the programme, it is anticipated that the delivery schedule will result in most of the vaccine becoming available to order in the initial weeks of the programme.

12. Sufficient vaccine has been procured for the 2023/24 flu season to ensure vaccine supply is available and Vaccination teams must secure adequate vaccine supplies before organising vaccination clinics.

13. LAIV and inactivated flu vaccine should be ordered from vaccine holding centres as in previous years.

14. Health Boards and participating GP practices must ensure adequate vaccine supplies before organising vaccination clinics.

Recording Childhood flu vaccinations using Vaccine Management Tool (VMT)

15. Health Boards universal usage of VMT to record childhood vaccination events in 2023/24 is essential to achieve improved data quality for reporting purposes. A flat file upload from National Clinical Data Store (NCDS) to Scottish Immunisations & Recall System (SIRs) and Child Health Systems Programme School (CHSP-School) will be provided. Health Boards who are still delivering any aspect of childhood flu via arrangement with GPs, participating GP practices must use VMT for recording the vaccination event and GPIT systems will be updated via NCDS.

16. Technology required for Health Boards to extend the use of VMT to child flu teams is available from local e-Health Leads and we would encourage the repurposing of existing IT equipment where possible.

Communication materials

17. An invitation letter and leaflet to support informed consent will be issued to parents/carers of all eligible pre-school children aged 6 months to 2 years in clinical risk groups and 2 to 5 years (not yet at school) inviting them for vaccination. A national media campaign (radio, digital and social media) will be timed around parents receiving this communication. Research and insight activity including potentially changing attitudes to vaccination will underpin the campaign.

18. Posters, leaflets and other materials to support the campaign will also be distributed to relevant community settings, such as nurseries and libraries. Health Boards and HSCPs are encouraged to undertake additional local communication activity as appropriate to complement national communications.

19. For school based programmes, consent packs will be distributed to schools to be sent home in school bags. These packs will include a letter and leaflet for parents/carers of primary and secondary school pupils as well as a consent form.

20. To support the programme in schools, PHS will ensure all schools have supporting materials on the flu vaccine for staff, parents and pupils. This will include a briefing for staff to support the delivery of the flu vaccine in schools and to help prepare pupils. These will be available for staff to download prior to the start of the programme at:

www.publichealthscotland.scot/flueducationpack.

21. Flu vaccine information leaflets for children aged two to five years, primary school and secondary school pupils will be available in other languages (including Polish, Chinese, Arabic, Punjabi, Urdu and BSL) and alternative formats (audio, large print and Easy Read) at www.nhsinform.scot/childflu. PHS will consider requests for other languages and formats. These are available by calling 0131 314 5300 or email at phs.otherformats@phs.scot

22. The public should be signposted to [NHS inform](#) for up to date information on the programme at www.nhsinform.scot/childflu. A national helpline is also available for information about the flu vaccine programme, by calling 0800 030 8013.

Workforce education materials

23. NHS Education for Scotland and Public Health Scotland have worked closely with stakeholders to develop/revise workforce education materials. These will be made available shortly on the NES TURASLearn site at [Seasonal flu | Turas | Learn \(nhs.scot\)](#)

These include:

- a) A flu e-learning resource containing the following units: Four interactive learning units that can be completed individually to suit an individual needs:
 - Unit 1: Seasonal flu
 - Unit 2: Legal aspects of vaccination administration
 - Unit 3: The Scottish adult flu immunisation programme
 - Unit 4: The Scottish child and school immunisation programme
- b) Training slide sets for trainers and practitioners

Developed to support trainers, facilitators and experienced practitioners to update knowledge in relation to the seasonal flu vaccination programme in Scotland 23-24.

- c) Intra-Nasal Flu Vaccine Video

This short video demonstrates the correct technique for intra-nasal administration of the Fluenz® Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine

- d) Proficiency documents for registered staff and HCSW
- e) Seasonal Flu 23/24 - Algorithm posters

In addition, a variety of core supporting materials for vaccinators are available on TURASLearn including a top tips resource for staff vaccinating children and young people.