



Dear Colleagues

WINTER PROGRAMME 2023 – SEASONAL FLU AND COVID-19 VACCINATION

We are writing to provide you with further information about the winter seasonal flu immunisation and COVID-19 vaccination programme 2023.

We would like to begin by thanking you for all your hard work in delivering the spring COVID-19 vaccination programme. We understand the extreme challenges faced by Health Boards and social care colleagues across Scotland in developing plans to deliver this successful vaccination programme.

You are already aware that Scottish Ministers have continued the previous extension of eligibility for the seasonal flu immunisation programme this winter.

It remains imperative that we continue to reduce the impact of flu and COVID-19 on those most at-risk through vaccination. These efforts will help us to prevent ill health in the population and minimise further impact on the NHS and social care services. We Continue to monitor surveillance data from around the world to assist in this aim.

Key objectives for the Winter 2023 Programme

1. To protect those in society who continue to be more at-risk of severe COVID-19 and flu.
2. To increase immunity in those at higher risk of severe COVID-19 and flu during winter 2023, to prevent severe illness, hospitalisation and death.
3. To focus on a co-administration model, offering flu and COVID-19 vaccinations at the same appointment where possible.

From Chief Medical Officer for Scotland
Chief Nursing Officer
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer
Professor Sir Gregor Smith
Professor Alex McMahon
Professor Alison Strath

1 September 2023

SGHD/CMO(2023)15

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
School Nurses
Immunisation Co-ordinators
CPHMs
Scottish Ambulance Service

For information

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

Further Enquiries to:

Policy Issues

Flu Policy Team:
seasonalfluprogramme@gov.scot
Covid Policy Team:
vaccineoperationaloversight@gov.scot

Medical Issues

Dr Lorna Willocks
Senior Medical Officer
St Andrew's House
Lorna.Willocks@gov.scot

PGD/Pharmaceutical

William Malcolm
Public Health Scotland
William.Malcolm@nhs.scot

Vaccine Supply Issues

nss.vaccineenquiries@nhs.scot

Eligibility

4. The Joint Committee on Vaccination & Immunisation (JCVI) advises that for winter 2023 the following [groups](#) should be offered **both COVID-19 and flu vaccination**:

- Residents and staff in care homes for older adults
- Those aged 65 years and over
- Those aged 6 months to 64 years in a clinical risk group, as defined in tables 3 and 4 of the COVID-19 chapter of the [Green Book](#)
- Frontline health and social care workers (HSCWs)
- Those aged 12 to 64 years who are household contacts, as defined in the [Green Book](#), of people with immunosuppression
- Those aged 16 to 64 years who are carers, as defined in the [Green Book](#)
- Pregnant women

5. In addition, people in the following groups should be offered **flu vaccination only**:

- Those aged 50-64 years without an underlying clinical at-risk condition.
- Those aged 18-64 years with an eligible flu-only clinical risk condition
- Young carers under the age of 16 years
- Non frontline NHS workers (*as part of the NHS Occupational Health Scheme*)
- Nursery, primary and secondary school teachers and pupil facing support staff
- Prison population, prison officers and prison support staff who deliver direct services
- School age pupils (primary and secondary)
- Children aged 2-5 (not at school)
- Children aged 6 months to 2 years at-risk

Additional information on the seasonal flu vaccination programme can be found in the **CMO Flu letters**, the links are as follows:

[Adult Programme](#)

[Childhood and School Programme](#)

Further information can also be found at [Winter vaccines | NHS inform](#)

6. Frontline HSCWs are eligible for both flu and COVID-19 vaccinations this winter. In line with the JCVI advice and the Green Book definitions, we continue to offer vaccination to frontline HSCWs workers to protect health services from staff absences due to COVID-19 during the winter months. Information regarding definitions of frontline HSCWs can be found on page 21 of the [Green Book](#). Further detail about who is eligible for vaccination as part of this group has been sent to Health Boards.

Re-phasing of the programme and new variant BA.2.86

7. In light of the emergence of new Covid-19 variant BA.2.86, Scotland has taken precautionary action to bring forward the vaccination of those considered at higher risk of Covid-19, notably residents in care homes for adults, those aged 75 and over and those with a weakened immune system aged 12 and over, from their planned start date of 16 October.
8. BA.2.86 has been designated a variant under monitoring due to a high number of mutations, the effects of these on transmissibility and severity are as yet unknown. On 29 August 2023, the first case of BA.2.86 was identified through PCR testing in Scotland.
9. Given the extent of scheduling that has already taken place for the lower risk groups (those aged 65-74 and those aged 12+ at risk) we are unable to bring the higher risk groups forward wholesale, so there will be a degree of flexibility and difference within the Boards. All existing appointments for the 65-74 and 12+ at risk groups will be honoured.
10. Particular focus should be paid to the opportunity to start and complete care homes earlier than planned and where scheduling allows, to bring forward as many 75+ and WIS 12+ appointments forward. The national FVCV programme will work with each Health Board to support these rephasing efforts.

Programme age limits

11. The age cut off for the winter 2023 programme is 31 March 2024. If an individual meets the age criteria before 1 April 2024, 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 start on 1 September 2023. 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 below.
12. There will also be a data refresh of the at risk COVID-19 groups in mid-November to identify those who have become newly eligible since the start of the programme.

Clinical referral routes

13. If an individual knows that they are eligible for vaccination this winter as part of the at-risk group, or by virtue of being aged 50 years and older (for flu) or 65 years or older (for COVID-19), but they have not been sent an appointment or prompt, they can book via the portal or by calling the helpline.
14. If a person thinks they may be eligible as part of the at-risk group, but is unsure, they can call the helpline which will refer them to their local Health Board to ascertain eligibility and bring them forward for vaccination, if required.

15. If the individual is unsure they could also consult their GP practice or secondary care clinician who can refer their case through local referral pathways. If GP practices or clinicians are unsure of their local referral pathway, they should contact their local Immunisation Co-ordinator for more information.

The COVID-19 rolling offer has ended

16. The [JCVI interim statement](#) of 25 January signalled a move towards a more targeted offer, during vaccination campaigns, to protect those at higher risk of severe COVID-19. After 30 June 2023 5-64 year olds who do not have any underlying health conditions that make them vulnerable to COVID-19, and do not fall into any of the other eligible winter categories, aren't eligible for any COVID-19 vaccination.

COVID-19 vaccination for travel purposes

17. COVID-19 vaccination for travel is only available if you're traveling to a country that requires proof of COVID-19 vaccination for entry and you do not have the number of doses required. There are very few countries in the world that require proof of COVID-19 status to enter. Most countries have no requirements at all, and some will allow you to enter if you take a COVID-19 test prior to travel. If an individual believes they require a vaccine for travel they must contact their local Health Board to discuss their circumstances.

Planning and delivery

Dates:

18. The Winter Programme begins on 4 September 2023, starting with the flu only groups, notably those aged 50-64 years of age with no underlying clinical conditions. If someone comes forward at this time and is identified as being in an eligible COVID-19 group, they will be offered a COVID-19 vaccination at that appointment.

19. Frontline HSCWs can come forward from 4 September 2023 for both flu and COVID-19 vaccination.

20. The main combined flu and COVID-19 programme will begin on 18 September.

21. To optimise an individual's protection over the winter months and alleviate pressures on the NHS and social care, the programme will aim to complete the majority of vaccinations by 11 December, but it will run until 31 March 2024.

Appointing

22. The table below indicates how the different groups will be called forward during

winter. They will be sent their appointment via letter, email or text message, depending on their communication preference:

Age Group	Timed or Prompt	Reschedule / Cancel Option
50-64 flu only	Timed and prompt	Portal or National Vaccination Helpline
65-74 year olds	Timed and prompt	Portal or National Vaccination Helpline
75 years and above	Timed	Portal or National Vaccination Helpline
12-64 at-risk	Timed and prompt	Portal or National Vaccination Helpline
6 months to 4 year olds at-risk	Timed	National Vaccination Helpline
5-11 at-risk	Timed	National Vaccination Helpline
HSCWs	Prompt	Portal or National Vaccination Helpline
Care Homes	Arranged locally	Arranged locally

23. Household contacts of the immunosuppressed and unpaid carers are hard to identify and will not be lettered. All information sent to the other lettered groups will include details on how unpaid carers and household contacts of the immunosuppressed can book appointments. We will also reach out to these groups, at the time that the at-risk cohort is called, via national and local communications and national and local carer organisations.
24. Maternity services will be able to offer pregnant women advice on their winter flu and COVID-19 vaccinations. Some maternity services may offer one or both vaccinations at their antenatal appointments. Some Health Boards will write out to their pregnant women directly. Pregnant women can also book their winter vaccines, using the online portal or the National Vaccination Helpline.
25. All bookings or appointments can be rescheduled or cancelled using the online portal or the National Vaccination Helpline. Individuals can pick a date, time and venue anywhere across Scotland that suits them
26. The online booking portal opened on 8 August. Individuals need their username to enter the portal. Usernames can be found on previous COVID-19 vaccination letters, emails or texts and will be included in the new appointments or prompts being sent out for winter. For those who aren't sent these, individuals will be able to recover their username via the portal, or via the National Vaccination Helpline.
27. The National Vaccination Helpline will continue to operate throughout the Winter Programme, with opening hours of Monday–Friday 9am–6pm and Saturday 9am–1pm.

Vaccine supplies

Seasonal flu

28. We have procured sufficient vaccine to support expanded eligibility and higher uptake, however, ongoing and effective management at a local level is essential to the success of the programme. Health Boards and social care services should fully consider the needs of their eligible cohorts and plan appropriately and timeously in order to successfully deliver the programme.

COVID-19 vaccines

29. The [JCVI advice of 30 August 2023](#) recommends a range of different vaccines for this Winter Programme, including new XBB.1.5 formulations from Pfizer and Moderna. These vaccines are currently awaiting MHRA authorisation. Until the XBB.1.5 and Sanofi VidPrevtyn vaccines are available for deployment in Scotland we will use the Pfizer and Moderna bivalent Original 'wild-type' / Omicron BA.4-5 vaccines for all groups aged 12 and over.

30. For winter 2023-24 the JCVI has advised that those aged 6 months – 4 years and those aged 5 – 11 years of age should be given the new XBB formulations only. Previous versions of vaccines for these groups will not be deployed.

31. The principle of timeliness should take priority over the alternative UK-approved COVID-19 vaccine offered.

32. Further information on the COVID-19 vaccines being used as part of winter 2023 can be found in **Annexes A and B**.

Resources and communication materials

33. A national advertising campaign consisting of TV, radio, digital and social media advertising will go live from 4 September encouraging eligible audiences to get their winter vaccines.

34. Public Health Scotland (PHS) has provided a range of communications materials, messaging and assets to Health Boards and partners to help promote the vaccination offer to the general public and specific audiences. PHS and Scottish Government have also developed toolkits to encourage the promotion of the winter vaccinations that will support NHS and social care colleagues: [Scottish Government Marketing News \(prgloo.com\)](#).

35. The public should be signposted to NHS Inform for up to date information on the vaccination programme: [Winter vaccines | NHS inform](#).

Workforce education

36. 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

37. website:

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

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

38. In addition a variety of generic supporting resources e.g. vaccinating children and young people are also available on the NES TURASLearn site at [Immunisation | Turas | Learn \(nhs.scot\)](#).

39. To support the vaccination workforce NES/PHS intend to facilitate a webinar on the winter 2023 programme covering key features including CMO / JCVI guidance and new COVID-19 vaccines. The webinar will be recorded and placed on the NES TURASLearn site. The date for the webinar will be agreed when confirmation relating to key information such as the authorisations of the new COVID-19 vaccines and the associated Green Book Chapter update is available.

We would like to acknowledge and express our sincere gratitude for your professionalism and continuing support in planning and delivering these important vaccination programmes. Thank you for all your hard work in these most challenging of circumstances and we wish you all the best for the Winter 2023 Programme.

Yours sincerely,

Gregor Smith

Alex McMahon

Alison Strath

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

**Professor Alex McMahon
Chief Nursing Officer**

**Professor Alison Strath
Chief Pharmaceutical
Officer**

Annex A: Further Operational and Deployment Detail

Appointing

1. In previous parts of the programme all eligible groups were sent a timed appointment or a prompt, regardless of whether they have ever come forward for a vaccination before. We are continuing this approach this winter.
2. The only exception to this is the 6 months – 11 year old at-risk COVID-19 groups. This year we are only inviting those who have newly entered this group and those who have previously come forward for a dose. Those who have previously refused vaccination will not be contacted, but we will ensure we have appropriate local and national comms, so if a parent or carer changes their mind, they can still come forward and book via the National Vaccination Helpline.
3. The programme is focused on co-administration to maximise uptake, make best use of resources and to provide maximum protection from both viruses over winter. As one of our key objectives, all those eligible for both vaccinations will be offered them at the same appointment. All patients have the right to refuse co-administration and can choose to have either vaccination at a later date. Advice should be given to these patients at the vaccination clinic that they will need to book another appointment using the online portal or the National Vaccination Helpline. All current authorised COVID-19 vaccines in the programme can be co-administered with flu. Details on co-administration of COVID-19 vaccines with other vaccinations can be found in the [Green Book](#).

Data & digital

4. As part of our strategy to tackle health inequalities and our duty under the Equality Act 2010, 'ethnicity' is a compulsory field in the Vaccination Management Tool (VMT). This has facilitated more accurate data collection, which has supported targeted interventions to improve vaccination equity within Scotland. We provide guidance for vaccinators completing this field and information can be found on TURAS: [Ethnicity FAQ | Turas | Learn \(nhs.scot\)](#)

Vaccine supplies

Seasonal flu

5. National Procurement has shared vaccine ordering and delivery arrangements directly with Health Boards. Health Boards will provide ordering details to primary care contractors supporting the programme.

COVID-19 vaccines

Advised for use in adults aged 75 years and over:

Moderna (Spikevax) bivalent Original/Omicron BA.4-5 vaccine

Moderna monovalent XBB vaccine (*subject to licensure*)

Pfizer-BioNTech (Comirnaty) bivalent Original/Omicron BA.4-5 vaccine

Pfizer-BioNTech monovalent XBB vaccine (*subject to licensure*)

Sanofi/GSK AS03-adjuvanted monovalent beta variant (VidPrevtyn Beta)

Advised for use in adults aged 18 to 74 years:

Pfizer-BioNTech (Comirnaty) bivalent Original/Omicron BA.4-5 vaccine

Pfizer-BioNTech monovalent XBB vaccine (*subject to licensure*)

Moderna (Spikevax) bivalent Original/Omicron BA.4-5 vaccine

Moderna monovalent XBB vaccine (*subject to licensure*)

Advised for use in persons aged 12 to 17 years:

Pfizer-BioNTech (Comirnaty) bivalent Original/Omicron BA.4-5 vaccine

Pfizer-BioNTech monovalent XBB vaccine (*subject to licensure*)

Advised for use in persons aged 5 to 11 years:

Pfizer-BioNTech monovalent XBB vaccine paediatric formulation (*subject to licensure*)

Advised for use in persons aged 6 months to 4 years:

Pfizer-BioNTech monovalent XBB vaccine infant formulation (*subject to licensure*)

Further considerations

When mRNA COVID-19 vaccines are not considered clinically suitable, Sanofi/GSK AS03-adjuvanted monovalent beta variant (VidPrevtyn Beta) booster vaccine is a suitable alternative for adults aged 18 years and over.

Observation Periods:

6. At the time of publication of this letter, the Summaries of Product Characteristics recommend that all recipients of the Pfizer BioNTech, Moderna and Sanofi vaccines are kept for observation and monitored for a minimum of 15 minutes. In recognition of the need to accelerate delivery of the programme in response to the emergence of the Omicron variant, the UK Chief Medical Officers recommended suspension of this requirement for the two mRNA vaccines (Pfizer BioNTech and Moderna) in both children and adults. The suspension of the 15 minute observation period in individuals without a history of allergy has since been agreed by the Commission on Human Medicines. Further information on

observation periods can be found in the [Green Book](#). The Scottish Government has made further recommendations that all doses of COVID-19 vaccines be followed by a 5 minute observation period.

Resources and communication materials

7. A key focus of the Don't Let Your Protection Fade Campaign will be to encourage uptake amongst groups where uptake has been lowest, such as pregnant women, HSCWs, those with underlying health conditions, unpaid carers and certain ethnic minority groups. Information on eligibility and booking vaccines can be found on NHS inform.

Workforce education

8. Resources relating to the Winter 2023 Programme will continue to be developed and updated as the programme progresses and national information such as new vaccine MHRA authorisations and the Green Book Chapter become available and vaccines deployed. These resources will be made available on the NES TURASLearn site as soon as possible. It is essential that practitioners ensure they are accessing the most up to date information at all times.
9. To support the vaccination workforce NES/PHS intend to facilitate a webinar on the winter 2023 programme covering key features including CMO / JCVI guidance and new COVID-19 vaccines. The webinar will be recorded and placed on the NES TURASLearn site. The date for the webinar will be agreed when confirmation relating to key information such as the authorisations of the new COVID-19 vaccines and the associated Green Book Chapter update is available.

Annex B: Covid vaccinations – Use and naming conventions

Programme & Green Book	Supply Team Abbreviation	Licensed Use	JCVI Recommended Use	Winter 2023 mechanism
Moderna bivalent (Spikevax®) bivalent Original/Omicron BA.4-5 vaccine	Spikevax® Bivalent BA.4-5	6 months+	18+	National Protocol PGD
Moderna (Spikevax®) XBB.1.5	Spikevax® XBB.1.5	6 months+	18+	National Protocol PGD
Pfizer BioNTech (Comirnaty®) bivalent Original/Omicron BA.4-5	Comirnaty® Bivalent BA.4-5	12+	12+	National Protocol PGD
Pfizer-BioNTech (Comirnaty®) 30 XBB.1.5	Comirnaty® 30 XBB.1.5	12+	12+	National Protocol PGD
Pfizer-BioNTech (Comirnaty®) 10 XBB.1.5	Comirnaty® 10 XBB.1.5	5-11	5-11	National Protocol PGD
Pfizer-BioNTech (Comirnaty®) 3 XBB.1.5	Comirnaty® 3 XBB.1.5	6 months – 4 years	6 months – 4 years	PGD
Sanofi/GSK AS03-adjuvanted monovalent beta variant (VidPrevtyl Beta)	Sanofi VidPrevtyl	18+ for those who previously received either mRNA or adenoviral vector COVID-19 vaccine.	18-74 when mRNA COVID-19 vaccines are not considered clinically suitable	PGD (Those 18+ for whom mRNA COVID-19 vaccines are not considered clinically suitable and who have NOT previously received a previous mRNA or adenoviral vector COVID-19 vaccine: National PGD – off label)

Key: Current planning assumption, subject to licensure by MHRA.
 Final details to be confirmed post authorisation + subsequent updates to Green Book.