Chief Medical Officer Directorate

E: ImmunisationPolicy@gov.scot

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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Dear Colleagues,

WINTER PROGRAMME 2026 – SEASONAL FLU AND COVID-19 VACCINATION

We are writing to provide further information on the 2026/27 winter seasonal vaccination programme, in addition to the information set out in the 'Seasonal Influenza (Flu) Immunisation Programme 2026/27: Confirmation Of Adult And Child Cohorts (SGHD/CMO (2026) 05' letter issued on 23 March 2026.

The spring and summer period has been an incredibly busy and challenging time for our Immunisation Teams, and we would like to thank you for your hard work in delivering this spring's COVID-19 programme, launching the double expansion of the RSV older adult programme and introducing the one off meningococcal B (MenB) programme.

It remains essential that we continue to deliver vaccination programmes effectively to protect those most at risk, reduce pressures on primary and secondary care services, and prevent avoidable hospital admissions.

Key objectives for the winter 2026/27 programme

1. To protect those who are at higher risk of severe flu and COVID-19, 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, with a focus on those at highest risk, and those of pre-school age, for which high uptake is important for protecting wider society.

4. To achieve the World Health Organization goal of 75% population-level coverage in the 65+ age group.

From the Chief Medical Officer
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer
Chief Nursing Officer
Professor Sir Gregor Smith
Professor Alison Strath
Professor Aisha Holloway

21 September 2026

SGHD CMO (2026) 18

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,
School Nurses,
Immunisation Co-ordinators,
CPHMs,
Scottish Ambulance Service

For information
Chairs, NHS Boards
Infectious Disease Consultants
Consultant Physicians
Consultant Virologists
Chief Executive, Public Health Scotland,
NHS 24
Community Pharmacy Scotland

Further Enquiries

Flu & COVID-19 policy & medical:
Scottish Government
ImmunisationPolicy@gov.scot

Programme Delivery:
Public Health Scotland
phs.vaccination@phs.scot

PGD / Pharmaceutical:
Public Health Scotland
phs.immunisation@phs.scot

Vaccine Supply:
NHS Public Service Delivery Scotland
nss.vaccineenquiries@nhs.scot

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JCVI advice links

5. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation's (JCVI) advice on flu vaccination for winter 2026/27 is available here. The JCVI's advice on COVID-19 vaccination for winter 2026/27 is available here.

Flu Vaccination Eligibility

6. Eligibility is almost identical to winter 2025/26, with the addition of cattle & swine workers for winter 2026/27.

Childhood Flu Programme Eligibility

- 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 01/09/2026)
- All primary school children (primary one to primary seven)
- All secondary school pupils (S1 to S6)

Adult Flu Programme Eligibility

- 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 to 65 years in defined risk groups. This includes:
    - those in clinical at-risk groups set out in Influenza: the green book chapter - GOV.UK
    - pregnant women
    - 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
- Frontline health and social care workers
- All NHS staff
- Poultry workers & bird handlers (see Annex **A** in the 2026/27 Flu CMO letter for eligibility)
- Cattle & swine workers (see Annex **B** in the 2026/27 Flu CMO letter for eligibility)
- Unpaid carers and young carers
- Household contacts of those with immunosuppression

COVID-19 Vaccination Eligibility

7. Eligibility for COVID-19 vaccination remains unchanged from winter 2025/26 and spring 2026. The following groups are being offered a COVID-19 vaccination in winter 2026/27. These individuals are also eligible for flu vaccination, which will be offered together at the same appointment:

- 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).

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8. Flu and COVID-19 vaccines will be offered to individuals in accordance with the recommendations in the Influenza: the green book chapter - GOV.UK and COVID-19: the green book chapter - GOV.UK and in line with related Scottish Government Chief Medical Officer letters. Individuals who receive a letter, email or text message inviting them forward for vaccination will be considered eligible for vaccination without the need for further eligibility assessment.

Section 47 Certificate of Incapacity

9. If an individual is unable to give informed consent to vaccination, their carer should ensure that a valid Section 47 Certificate of Incapacity issued under the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000 is brought to the appointment. This certificate confirms that the assessing clinician has determined the individual lacks capacity and authorises treatment to be provided in their best interests. Vaccinators must see the certificate before proceeding and advising in advance of the appointment to bring certification will help avoid delays and ensure the appointment can go ahead smoothly. For further information please visit: Information for carers accessing NHS services | NHS inform

Health and social care workers (HSCWs)

10. Flu vaccination not only protects individual staff members but reduces the risk of transmission of flu viruses within health and social care settings, helping to protect both patients and colleagues. It is imperative that timely flu immunisation is encouraged for all frontline health and social care workers (HSCWs) in direct contact with patients/clients. In addition, non-frontline NHS staff remain eligible for the seasonal flu vaccine in 2026/27.

11. Staff vaccination remains a central element in our objective to protect the most vulnerable in our society and, as such:

- Health Boards are asked to make vaccination 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, not just their Health Board of residence, for example somewhere close to where they live, work or visit regularly.

Programme Age Limits

12. If an individual meets the age criteria on or before 31 March 2027 they will be eligible for vaccination. The only exceptions are for infants, where they must have turned 6 months on or before the programme starts on 1 September 2026 (born on or before 01 March 2026). For those pre-school children eligible for flu aged 2 years, they must have turned 2 years of age on or before the programme starts on 1 September 2026 (born on or before 1 September 2024).

13. ***Residents in care homes for older adults***: There is no age restriction for this group. All residents in care homes for older adults are eligible.

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14. ***Those who are immunosuppressed***: Individuals who are immunosuppressed must be at least 6 months of age by 01 September 2026, therefore must have been born on or before 01 March 2026.

Programme timings

15. 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. The World Health Organization (WHO) has a goal of 75% population-level coverage in the 65+ age group. We expect the vast majority of the flu and COVID-19 adult programme to be completed by 6 December 2026, and boards should endeavour to meet that national WHO goal 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. Below are the dates for the winter FVCV programme:

- **Early September:** Start of child flu programme and offer to pregnant women *(vaccine supply dependant)*

- **As late as possible in September:** Flexibility to begin adult flu only cohorts.

- **5 October:** Beginning of co-admin of COVID-19 and flu vaccines for those aged 18 years and over.

- **6 December**: The aim is for all eligible adults to have had the opportunity to receive their seasonal flu and COVID-19 vaccinations by this point.

- **Sunday 31 January 2027**: COVID-19 programme ends.

- **Sunday 28 March 2027:** Flu programme ends.

The National Vaccination Helpline

16. Currently, the National Vaccination Helpline (0800 030 8013) only 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

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. 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.

19. 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.

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Further information on vaccine products **(Annex A)** and programme resources and communication materials **(Annex B)** can be found in the annexes.

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,

Sir Gregor Smith	*Alison Strath*	*Aisha Holloway*
Professor Sir Gregor Smith Chief Medical Officer	Professor Alison Strath Chief Pharmaceutical Officer	Professor Aisha Holloway Chief Nursing Officer

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Annex A: Vaccine products for Scotland's winter programme 2026

Seasonal Flu

Further information on flu vaccine products can be found in **Annex C** of the 2026/27 adult and child flu CMO letter.

COVID-19

Vaccine dosage interval

The COVID-19 vaccine should usually be offered 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 can be found in the COVID-19 chapter of the Green Book.

For the winter 2026 COVID-19 programme, the following COVID-19 vaccines are advised:

For individuals aged 18 years and over:

- Moderna mRNA Spikevax XFG
- Accord (HIPRA) BIMERVAX LP.8.1*

For children aged 12 to 17 years:

- Pfizer mRNA Comirnaty XFG (30 micrograms)
- Accord (HIPRA) BIMERVAX LP.8.1**

For children aged 6 months to 11 years:

- Pfizer mRNA Comirnaty XFG (10 micrograms)

* Accord (HIPRA) BIMERVAX LP.8.1 will be available for individuals aged 18 years and over in cases where mRNA products are considered not clinically suitable. It may also be employed in limited instances for small-scale local use for supply and logistic reasons.

** Accord (HIPRA) BIMERVAX LP.8.1 will be available for individuals aged 12-17 years in cases where mRNA products are considered not clinically suitable.

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Annex B: Programme resources and communication materials

Communication materials

PHS have provided 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 have also developed 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

Public Services delivery (PSD) Scotland and PHS have developed a range of workforce education resources for both COVID-19 and seasonal flu vaccination. These are available on the PSD Scotland TURAS Learn website and include resources for both vaccinators and others who have opportunities to discuss vaccination with colleagues and/or the public:

Flu: Influenza (Seasonal flu) | Turas | Learn
COVID-19: COVID-19 | Turas | Learn
Vaccination Conversations: Vaccination conversations | Turas | Learn

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