

WELSH HEALTH CIRCULAR



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Issue Date: 8 December 2022

STATUS: ACTION

CATEGORY: PUBLIC HEALTH

Title: Reimbursable vaccines and eligible cohorts for the 2023/24 NHS Seasonal Influenza (flu) Vaccination Programme

Date of Expiry / Review: Not applicable

For Action by:

General practitioners
Community pharmacists
Chief Executives, Health Boards/Trusts
Immunisation Leads, Health Boards/Trusts
Immunisation Coordinators, Health Boards
Flu Leads, Trusts
Medical Directors, Health Boards/Trusts
Directors of Primary Care, Health Boards/Trusts
Nurse Executive Directors, Health Boards/Trusts
Chief Pharmacists, Health Boards/Trusts
Directors of Public Health, Health Boards/Trusts
Director of Planning, NHS Delivery Unit
Executive Director of Public Health, Public Health Wales
Head Vaccine Preventable Disease Programme, Public Health Wales
Community Pharmacy Wales
General Practitioner Council, Wales

Sender: Chief Medical Officer for Wales

HSSG Welsh Government Contact(s):

Vaccination Directorate, Welsh Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3NQ

Dear Colleague

Influenza vaccination is part of the annual Winter Respiratory Vaccination Programme and is a key priority for Welsh Government.

Through the Vaccination Transformation Programme, in 2022-23 influenza vaccination was for the first time aligned with the COVID-19 booster vaccination programme, and NHS Wales was tasked to explore opportunities to maximise uptake and increase efficiencies, with a greater degree of co-administration of both vaccines where possible.

Both General Practices and Community Pharmacies are playing a significant role in delivery of the flu and COVID-19 booster programmes this autumn/ winter and whilst plans are yet to be finalised for the 2023-24 season, we would expect this approach to continue next year.

Uptake of flu vaccines should be maximised in eligible groups again in 2023-24, as we anticipate COVID-19 and flu will continue to co-circulate next winter as social mixing continues to return to pre-pandemic levels.

Achieving a high uptake of both vaccines is vital to reduce morbidity and mortality associated with both viruses, and to reduce hospitalisations during a time when the NHS and social care are most under pressure.

Priority cohorts

Groups who are most at risk from becoming very ill with influenza and/or infecting other members of the community remain the priority for the 2023-24 season. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has recommended the following in its latest [advice](#):

The groups eligible for a flu vaccine as part of the routine national flu programme 2023-24 are:

- children aged two and three years on 31 August 2023
- children in primary school from reception class to year 6 (inclusive)
- children in secondary school from year 7 to year 11 (inclusive)¹
- people aged six months to less than 64 years in clinical risk groups
- people aged 65 years and older
- all adult prison residents
- pregnant women
- carers
- people with a learning disability
- staff in nursing homes and care homes with regular client contact
- staff providing domiciliary care

¹ Funding for children in secondary school from year 7 to year 11 (inclusive) and for staff providing frontline NHS/Primary care services will continue as part of the routine annual flu vaccination programme. This funding is now included in health boards' core budgets.

- staff providing frontline NHS/Primary care services²
- healthcare workers (including healthcare students) with direct patient contact

2023-24 Vaccination Programme

Guidance on ordering supplies of influenza vaccines for 2023-2024 is provided below and is based on advice from JCVI.

This year's Winter Respiratory Vaccination Programme had a global vaccine uptake ambition for COVID and flu of 75%. We expect a similar approach for 2023-24. I expect general practices, pharmacies, and health boards/NHS Trusts to plan to ensure they order sufficient influenza vaccine supplies to be able to achieve the programme ambitions.

We have exceeded 75% flu vaccine uptake for those aged 65 and over for the last two years and are on track to exceed to again this year. This ambition will be retained for 2023-24 although we should, of course, be aiming to improve on this. Further advice will be communicated in the Chief Medical Officer's annual influenza letter, which will be issued in early 2023.

When developing commissioning and delivery plans, efficient and effective opportunities for co-administration of COVID-19 and flu vaccination should be taken by health boards wherever possible. Co-administration should not however, compromise the pace or accessibility of either vaccination programme.

Changes for 2023-24

Low risk 50-64 year old cohort

The advice for 2023-24 mirrors the JCVI recommendation for the 2022-23 season as the Committee considers there is insufficient data available to change the current position. However, the JCVI was of the view that whilst there would be a clear health benefit in vaccinating the lower risk 50–64-year-old cohort, it was uncertain whether this approach would meet strict cost effectiveness requirements sufficient to divert from more cost-effective interventions.

Given the extremely challenging financial context we are currently experiencing, further assessment is needed to determine whether to include this cohort in the flu vaccination programme for 2023-24. A decision will be made by Welsh Government in Spring 2023, once the uptake achieved in 2022-23, and JCVI recommendations around the COVID-19 autumn booster programme are available.

² Frontline NHS employees are to be vaccinated via Occupational health schemes and primary care contractors are covered by the national programme.

If a decision is made to vaccinate the low risk 50-64 cohort, Welsh Government will be responsible for the procurement of the most effective available vaccine for this additional cohort.

Removal of QIVe from the approved vaccines for reimbursement

Although the JCVI has not advised the removal of this particular vaccine, their advice suggests only using it in the low risk 50-64 year old cohort when other preferred vaccines are unavailable. As the decision on the inclusion of this cohort has been postponed until next spring, QIVe is no longer on the approved vaccine list for reimbursement in 2023-24.

Communicating this policy at this early stage, to coincide with publication of the JCVI's statement, is intended to provide timely clarity to enable you to place your orders for sufficient supply of the preferred vaccines for 2023-24.

Vaccines reimbursed as part of the NHS immunisation programme 2023-24

The following table provides updated advice on recommended vaccines for 2023-24, which will be eligible for reimbursement. The underlying principle is individuals should get the best vaccine available in a timely manner and practitioners should order the preferred vaccines advised for the specific groups.

Those aged 65 years and over*	Those aged 18 to less than 65 years (including pregnant women)	Children aged 2 to less than 18 years who are contraindicated/decline LAIV	Children aged 6 months – 2 years in risk groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• aQIV*• QIVr• QIV-HD• (QIVc where aQIV/QIVr is not available**)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• QIVc• QIVr	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• QIVc	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• QIVc (off label)

Key:

aQIV - adjuvanted quadrivalent influenza vaccine

QIVc - quadrivalent cell culture influenza vaccine

QIVr - quadrivalent recombinant influenza vaccine

QIV-HD – high dose quadrivalent inactivated influenza vaccine

* aQIV may be offered 'off-label' to those who become 65 years of age before 31 March 2024.

** Whether a vaccine is 'available' should be a balance of clinical and operational judgement. The potential delay in sourcing the preferred vaccine (due to a temporary or localised shortage or a national batch failure) should be weighed against the protection afforded by the alternative vaccine. Whether the flu virus is circulating or is imminent at the time would be a factor in making this judgement.

Children's Programme 2023-24

Live attenuated quadrivalent influenza vaccine (LAIV) is the recommended vaccine for use in all eligible children aged 2-17 years of age unless contraindicated or declined due to gelatine content. LAIV is supplied centrally.

Where an injectable vaccine is offered as an alternative to LAIV in the circumstances described above, it will be eligible for reimbursement.

Children under 2 years of age in a clinical risk group are recommended quadrivalent influenza cell-culture vaccine (QIVc). This is an off-label recommendation that is supported by unpublished data, which shows non inferiority immunogenicity and a very similar safety profile compared with QIVe. There is no central supply for this vaccine supply and local arrangements should be put in place for vaccine supply.

Manufacturers will start to produce volumes of vaccines shortly based on the orders they have received. Please submit your order as soon as possible, taking into account our expectations outlined in this letter.

General practices, community pharmacies and health boards/trusts should review influenza vaccine orders with an ambition for high uptake.

Thank you for your continued support to increase influenza vaccination uptake and protect more people from this potentially serious vaccine preventable disease.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frank Atherton', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Sir Frank Atherton
Chief Medical Officer / Medical Director NHS Wales

Appendix A

To: NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership to forward to:

All General Practitioners - please ensure this message is seen by all practice nurses and non-principals working in your practice and retain a copy in your 'locum information pack'.

All Community Pharmacies
Deputising Services

To: Director of Planning, NHS Delivery Unit

To: Health Boards and NHS Trusts:

Chief Executives
Medical Directors
Nurse Directors
Directors of Public Health
Chief Pharmacists
Directors of Primary, Community and Mental Health
Immunisation Coordinators

To: Public Health Wales:
Chief Executive
Director of Public Health Services
Consultants in Communicable Disease Control
Head Vaccine Preventable Disease Programme

Cc: GPC (Wales)
RCGP (Wales)
Community Pharmacy Wales
Royal Pharmaceutical Society Wales
Royal College of Nursing

Enclosure(s): None