

# WELSH HEALTH CIRCULAR



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

**Issue Date:** 8 March 2023

**STATUS: ACTION**

**CATEGORY: PUBLIC HEALTH**

**Title:** COVID-19 spring booster vaccination programme 2023

**Date of Expiry / Review:** **Not applicable**

**For Action by:**

Chief Executives, Health Boards/Trusts  
Immunisation Leads, Health Boards/Trusts  
Immunisation Coordinators, Health Boards  
COVID-19 Vaccination Leads, Health Boards/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  
Executive Director of Public Health, Public Health Wales  
Head Vaccine Preventable Disease Programme, Public Health Wales  
Director of Planning, NHS Wales Delivery Unit  
Community Pharmacy Wales  
General Practitioner Council, Wales  
General practitioners  
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Dear Colleague,

The Welsh Government has accepted the latest advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), which advises an additional spring COVID-19 booster dose for our most vulnerable citizens.

The primary aim of the COVID-19 vaccination programme continues to be the prevention of severe disease (hospitalisation and mortality) arising from COVID-19. Older people, residents in care homes for older adults, and those who are immunosuppressed continue to be at highest risk of severe COVID-19.

The JCVI has recommended, as a precautionary strategy, a booster vaccine dose in the spring for:

- adults aged 75 years and over;
- residents in a care home for older adults, and
- individuals aged 5 years and over who are immunosuppressed (as defined in table 3 or 4 in the Green Book)

This letter is aimed at health professionals who are responsible for commissioning and delivering the COVID-19 vaccination programme in Wales. We encourage you to share this guidance with all those involved in delivering the programme in your area.

### **Programme ambitions**

In line with the expectations we have had for the COVID-19 vaccination programme throughout its lifespan, health boards are expected to continue to maximise vaccine uptake, minimise vaccine waste, retain their focus on reaching the most vulnerable, and understand and address inequity by ensuring access for all eligible people. With this in mind, we expect:

1. All those eligible for a spring booster to receive an invite for vaccination;
2. 75% of those eligible to receive their vaccination, and within that;
3. That uptake levels are maintained or improved for those over 75 years of age and those resident in a care home for older adults (against uptake levels achieved during the spring booster 2022 programme);
4. That uptake levels are improved for the immunosuppressed, so that the 75% target is achieved specifically for this group; and
5. Health boards to reduce the gap between uptake rates in the least and most deprived areas across the health board area (against uptake levels achieved during the spring booster 2022 programme).

## **Programme start and end date**

The COVID-19 spring booster programme will start on 1 April and end on 30 June 2023, with some limited flexibility into July, for those that are eligible for a booster but were not able to receive it within the main programme window, due to illness.

On the basis of advice from the JCVI, the Minister for Health and Social Services announced in February, the end of the 'universal' offer of a primary COVID-19 vaccine course to all those aged over 5 years. This offer will come to an end in line with the end of the spring booster programme, on 30 June, 2023. The offer of a 'universal' booster vaccine, which has been available in Wales since 2021, comes to an end on 31 March, 2023.

## **Vaccine supply**

The JCVI has made the following recommendations on the vaccine products for each cohort for the spring programme:

### **For all adults aged 75 years and over:**

- Pfizer-BioNTech mRNA (Comirnaty) bivalent vaccine authorised for adults.
- Moderna mRNA (Spikevax) bivalent vaccine authorised for adults.
- Sanofi Pasteur COVID-19 vaccine (VidPrevtyn Beta) booster vaccine authorised for adults (with operational flexibility to use for those over 65 years of age that are resident in a care home for older adults).

### **For those aged 5 years and above who are immunosuppressed:**

- Aged 5-11 years - Pfizer-BioNTech mRNA (Comirnaty) monovalent or bivalent vaccine paediatric formulation. Dose 10 micrograms.
- Aged 12-17 years - Pfizer-BioNTech mRNA (Comirnaty) bivalent vaccine authorised for persons aged 12 years and older. Dose: 30 micrograms.
- Aged 18-74 years - Pfizer-BioNTech mRNA (Comirnaty) bivalent vaccine authorised for adults. Dose: 30 micrograms; and Moderna mRNA (Spikevax) bivalent vaccine authorised for adults. Dose 50 micrograms.

The Pfizer and Moderna bivalent vaccines being deployed include the updated COVID-19 variants – BA.4-5 alongside the original strain. They are, therefore, new vaccines to the programme. However, their technology is the same as previous versions of these vaccines and so are familiar to the programme.

The Sanofi vaccine is new to the programme. The JCVI has advised that the Sanofi Pasteur COVID-19 vaccine (VidPrevtyn Beta), which was approved by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) in December 2022, can be deployed alongside the two mRNA vaccines. In clinical trials, the antibody levels generated against different Omicron sub-variants by Sanofi Pasteur COVID-19 vaccine (VidPrevtyn Beta) were comparable to levels generated by COVID-19 mRNA vaccines.

For people with a history of allergy, as described in the Green Book, the 15 minute observation period remains. For those without a history of allergies (as described in the Green Book), observation times are as follows.

The following categories should continue to have a 15 minute observation period:

- Individuals registered as learning disabled receiving a COVID-19 vaccine brand for the first time
- Individuals lacking capacity receiving a COVID-19 vaccine brand for the first time.

As is usual, the revised Green Book chapter will provide further clinical advice on the use of the vaccine.

Those who are intolerant or allergic to mRNA vaccines and who cannot have Sanofi Pasteur COVID-19 vaccine (VidPrevtyn Beta) are advised to receive Novavax Matrix-M adjuvanted monovalent wild-type vaccine (Nuvaxovid).

## **Finance**

Health boards and Trusts have previously been advised of their budget allocations for COVID-19 vaccination during 2023-24 via a letter from Sioned Rees, Director of Health Protection.

## **Longer term planning**

The JCVI has already advised that there should be an autumn COVID-19 vaccination booster programme in 2023. The Welsh Government has accepted that advice and we await further details from the JCVI on eligibility and vaccine type. We're aware health boards are already planning for this programme and should do so on the assumption that eligibility will mirror that for the 2022-23 programme, which is currently drawing to a close.

We expect to run an integrated COVID-19 and flu programme again in 2023-24, as we did in 2022-23 under the Winter Respiratory Vaccination Programme. [WHC 2022/31](#) has already issued on the flu element of the programme on the basis of the [JCVI advice](#) received. Further information and detail will be circulated when available, including the decision on whether to include healthy 50-64 year olds for flu vaccination.

2023 will also see significant change to other vaccination programmes, notably HPV and Shingles. I want to thank your teams for their engagement and work to prepare for these changes; we look forward to continuing to work together to effectively implement the planned changes from later this year.

Looking to the future, there are two final things I wanted to make reference to:

First, we do not know what is around the corner. We may yet see another COVID-19 variant that is a cause for real concern. I am grateful for the engagement of your teams in work done recently around planning for a surge scenario. This phase of the planning work is nearing completion. However, it is not only COVID-19 that we need to be prepared to respond to, as we saw in 2022 with Mpox for example. Therefore,

I would like to see a second phase to surge planning work, which considers our vaccination response in other scenarios. Further information will follow on this.

Secondly, during 2023 we will see the implementation of some of our key ambitions set out in the [National Immunisation Framework for Wales](#) – our strategy for future vaccination services – published in October 2022. I am grateful to your teams for their ongoing commitment and engagement to deliver our ambition for vaccination to protect individuals, our communities and population. .

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in the COVID-19 vaccination programme, and all our other vaccination programmes, for their ongoing hard work and commitment. The impact you all have on protecting and safeguarding the people of Wales cannot be overstated. Thank you.

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**