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To: Each General Practitioner

August 2018

IMPORTANT NEWS
Re: Influenza Vaccination Campaign 2018/2019

Dear Doctor,

This letter contains important information about the 2018/2019 influenza vaccination campaign.

The World Health Organization has recommended that the seasonal influenza vaccines for the 2018/2019 season (Northern Hemisphere winter) contain:

- an A/Michigan/45/2015 (H1N1) pdm09-like virus;
- an A/Singapore/INFIMH-16-0019/2016 (H3N2)-like virus;
- a B/Colorado/06/2017-like virus (B/Victoria/2/87 lineage).

For 2018/2019

Please note the following recommendations from the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) - these will be included in revised chapters of the Immunisation Guidelines:

- Influenza vaccination is strongly recommended for most cancer patients.
 - If a person receiving chemotherapy has not received influenza vaccine 2 weeks or more before commencing treatment, the vaccine should be given during chemotherapy. However, the response to the vaccine may be blunted. A second vaccine is recommended in the same influenza season, a minimum of 4 weeks following a course of chemotherapy, if lymphocyte count is $\geq 1.0 \times 10^9/L$ regardless of whether they have received influenza vaccines in previous seasons.
 - Patients on combination checkpoint inhibitors (e.g. ipilimumab plus nivolumab) **should not** receive any influenza vaccines, because of significant increased incidence of immune-related adverse reactions.
- Families and care providers of patients with cancer should be encouraged to receive an inactivated influenza vaccine, preferably before treatment is started.
- The HSE National Cold Chain Service will provide a seasonal influenza vaccine - **Influvac** manufactured by **Mylan**. **It will come as** pre-filled syringes in packs of 10.



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- Fortnightly deliveries to all General Practitioners will commence on September 17th until January 18th 2019 (excluding Christmas holiday period). All practices will have received flu vaccine by September 28th, if they have placed an order according to their schedule.
- Patient held vaccination record cards will be sent with your vaccine delivery which should be completed and given to your patients after vaccination.
- New posters for display and a supply of leaflets for your patients will be sent to you shortly.

Seasonal influenza vaccine is provided free for all those aged 65 years and over, those in at-risk groups, pregnant women and healthcare workers (including general practice staff) as outlined in the attachment with this letter. Those that do not have a medical card or GP visit card will be liable for a fee set by you. Claims for the vaccination of medical card or GP visit card holders in the groups as per the attachment can be made through the PCRS.

The seasonal influenza vaccine supplied by the **HSE National Cold Chain Service** is specifically for those in the at-risk groups. Vaccine for individuals outside of these groups can be obtained through the private market.

There is no change in the recommendations for pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine, PPV23 (Pneumovax) i.e. for those aged 65 years and over and those in specific at risk groups.

A **once only** PPV23 booster vaccination is recommended 5 years after the first vaccination for those

- aged 65 years and older if they received vaccine more than 5 years before and were less than 65 years of age at the time of the first dose
- whose antibody levels are likely to decline rapidly e.g. asplenia, splenic dysfunction, immunosuppression, renal transplant or chronic renal disease.

Additional PPV23 booster vaccinations are not routinely recommended. This is outlined in the algorithm in the 2018/2019 Frequently Asked Questions booklet.

Further information about the influenza and pneumococcal vaccination campaign including a frequently asked questions section is available on the National Immunisation website www.hse.ie/flu and will be sent to you with the information materials.

If you wish to order more information materials please visit www.healthpromotion.ie and order materials from there. Please set up an account if you do not have one already to order larger quantities of leaflets and posters.



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Actions required by you:

1. Place use **the online vaccine ordering system** from the HSE National Cold Chain Service to place your order for Seasonal Influenza (*Inactivated Influenza Vaccine (Influvac)*) and Pneumococcal Polysaccharide vaccines PPV23 (*Pneumovax*) for this year's campaign.
2. Use the returns service provided by the HSE National Cold Chain Service for any remaining influenza vaccine and any other expired vaccine.

Maximising uptake among at-risk groups and front-line health care workers is critical in the prevention of morbidity and mortality and your support in this regard is highly appreciated. In particular, please encourage your pregnant patients to be vaccinated to protect them and their infants.

If you require any further information or have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Kelleher', with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr Kevin Kelleher,
Assistant National Director – Strategic Planning and Transformation - Public Health & Child Health
Medical registration number 19719



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The 2018/2019 seasonal influenza vaccine is strongly recommended for

- Persons aged 65 and older
- Those aged 6 months and older with a long-term health condition such as
 - Chronic heart disease including acute coronary syndrome
 - Chronic liver disease
 - Chronic neurological disease including multiple sclerosis, hereditary and degenerative disorders of the central nervous system
 - Chronic renal failure
 - Chronic respiratory disease, including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cystic fibrosis, moderate or severe asthma or bronchopulmonary dysplasia
 - Diabetes mellitus
 - Down syndrome
 - Haemoglobinopathies
 - Immunosuppression due to disease or treatment, including asplenia or splenic dysfunction and cancer patients
 - Morbid obesity, i.e. body mass index over 40
- Children aged 6 months and older
 - with any condition (e.g. cognitive dysfunction, spinal cord injury, seizure disorder, or other neuromuscular disorder) that can compromise respiratory function especially those attending special schools/day centres
 - with moderate to severe neurodevelopmental disorders such as cerebral palsy and intellectual disability
 - on long-term aspirin therapy (because of the risk of Reyes syndrome)
- Pregnant women (vaccine can be given at any stage of pregnancy)
- Healthcare workers
- Residents of nursing homes and other long stay institutions
- Carers
- People with regular contact with pigs, poultry or water fowl