



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
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18<sup>TH</sup>. October 2019

Deputy John Curran  
TD  
Dail Eireann  
Kildare Street  
Dublin1

**PQ Number 42112/19: To ask the Minister for Health his plans to increase the uptake of flu vaccine for the winter 2019 season and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy Curran,

The above PQ has been directed to me to respond to you directly on same.

### **Key points**

1. A HSE national flu planning steering group is in place and meets monthly.
2. Each Hospital Group (HG) and Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) has provided a flu plan as per a template (based on the evidence of last season's successes and areas of concern) for the upcoming season. Funding has been allocated to HGs and CHOs to implement their flu plans.
3. A HSE Communications Plan has been developed and agreed and the campaign was launched by the Minister for Health on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2019.
4. The weekly flu report will recommence for the flu season and this year flu vaccine uptake rates by Hospital Group and CHO will be presented.
5. A schedule of surveillance reports on influenza vaccine uptake in healthcare workers, over 65s, long-term care facility residents and those in risk groups for flu will be issued as data becomes available.

### **Use of Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine in the 2019/20 influenza season**

For the 2019-20 influenza season a quadrivalent inactivated influenza vaccine will be used in Ireland for the first time. This vaccine provides protection against four strains of influenza and so gives broader protection than the trivalent vaccine previously used, which contained three strains. For the 2019/2020 influenza season, this should result in greater flu vaccine efficacy, but will be dependent on the match between the flu vaccine strains and the predominant circulating flu strain.

## Flu vaccine delivery

- 1.15 million doses of quadrivalent influenza vaccine were contracted for purchase, a 15% increase on last year's quantity due to the anticipated increased uptake as well as the aging population - meaning there are more people aged 65 years and older who require the vaccine.
- Ireland was one of the first countries in Europe to receive influenza vaccine this year and all contracted stock has been received into Ireland.
- So far 836,000 doses of influenza vaccine have been delivered to 2725 sites
- All sites were able to order their full requirement by the 10<sup>th</sup> of October and sites can avail of fortnightly deliveries.

## Public awareness campaign for influenza vaccination

The National Immunisation Office has been working with HSE communications to plan the public awareness campaign for influenza vaccination as follows:

- updated leaflets and posters were produced and delivered to GPs, hospitals, nursing homes and pharmacies in the middle of September;
- the HSE influenza web pages were updated along with protocols and guidance for hospital staff and with information for members of the public;
- advertisements for the flu vaccine have been placed in various publications including Senior Times, Easy Parenting and the Ploughing Championship catalogue;
- a social media campaign across Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn will support this year's campaign

## Launch of Seasonal Influenza Campaign 2019/2020

The launch of Seasonal Influenza Campaign 2019/2020 with Minister of Health attending took place at a launch event on 10<sup>th</sup> October.

- An awards ceremony for acute hospitals, long term care facilities and community hospitals with best uptake of influenza vaccine by staff, and the most improved in 2018/2019 campaign also took place prior to the launch.
- Promotion of influenza vaccination via mainstream media including radio ads, commenced on 7<sup>th</sup> of October. HSE and NIO social media accounts are supporting the campaign on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn by sharing the facts about the importance of getting flu vaccine.
- HSE flu spokespersons promoted importance of influenza vaccine on national and local radio and TV. There were 69 pieces of media following the launch of this year's campaign with a reach of 5.7M.
- By October 25<sup>th</sup> all sites will have had 3 opportunities to order and replenish stock and there has been no restriction on volumes ordered, once vaccines are required as per the programme for "at risk" and over 65's.

## Previous influenza vaccine uptake rates

- Influenza vaccine uptake in acute hospital based healthcare workers (HCWs) was **53.2%** in 2018/19 compared with **44.8%** in 2017/18. There has been a significant increase in uptake in acute hospital based HCWs over the past three influenza seasons.
- Influenza vaccine uptake in Long Term Care facility (LTCF) based HCWs was **42.2%** in 2018/19 compared with **33.1%** in 2017/18. There has been a significant increase in uptake in LTCF based HCWs over the past three influenza seasons.
- According to the latest weekly PCRS data available this season, seasonal influenza uptake among those aged 65 and over in Ireland by the week ending 06 10 2019 is **22.6%**. For the full 2018/2019 flu season this uptake rate was **68.5%**

The HSE 2019/2020 influenza vaccination campaign aims to improve on these vaccination uptake rates in HCWs, those aged 65 and over and those in at risk groups.

I hope this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

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

**DR. KEVIN KELLEHER, FFPHM, FFPHMI**  
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