

20th Dec. 2021

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan,
Dáil Éireann,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2

Issued via email to: cian.ocallaghan@oireachtas.ie

PQ Number: 62580/21

Question: To ask the Minister for Health when walk-in vaccine slots and access to pharmacy booster vaccination will be made available for those who initially received just one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine (Janssen); and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy O'Callaghan,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question which has been referred by the Minister for Health to the Health Service Executive for direct response.

The policy regarding the roll out of the additional doses of COVID-19 vaccine is determined by NIAC and the Department of Health. Please note that as of 19th December, over 1.5m booster doses have been administered to eligible cohorts and almost 100k 3rd doses have been administered to immunocompromised individuals.

The purpose of the additional COVID-19 vaccine dose, as outlined by NIAC, is to address the following possible issues:

- Inadequate response to primary vaccine series
- Waning immunity following vaccination
- Reduced protection against variant(s) of concern

On 26th November NIAC advised that in addition to prior recommendations in the next order of priority, a booster dose of an mRNA vaccine is recommended for:

- all pregnant women aged 16 years and older
- all those aged 40 - 49 years who received any COVID-19 vaccine including COVID-19 vaccine Janssen
- those aged 16 - 39 years, who received an mRNA vaccine in descending order by age cohort; 30 - 39 years, 20 - 29 years and 16 -19 years
- Those aged 16 - 29 years who received COVID-19 vaccine Janssen can be offered a booster vaccine in parallel with those aged 30 - 39 years.

In light of the Omicron variant, NIAC recommends reducing the interval between the primary course and the booster dose to facilitate earlier protection. NIAC now recommends that people should be administered an mRNA booster vaccine after a minimum interval of three months in the order of priority as previously recommended. This means the time to complete an age cohort is dependent on the person's original vaccine completion date.

We are sequencing the rollout of the booster programme and prioritising cohorts as set out by NIAC. Therefore, whilst eligibility plays an important part in scheduling booster appointments, there may be a waiting period to ensure we broadly adhere to the NIAC priority sequence. We also have to factor in eligibility so we are commencing some cohorts in parallel to maximise capacity. Planning to operationalise these recommendations is underway.

General Practice has been a key component in the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme. Over 1,300 practices have received booster deliveries/opted into the booster programme. For practices not participating they have an option to refer patients to a Vaccination Centre. Pharmacies are also playing an important part in the programme and providing additional choice and convenience to people in terms of vaccination location. Approximately 700 Pharmacies are currently participating in the programme with the intention to increase this 1,000 in the New Year. GPs and pharmacies are now able to vaccinate 40-49 year olds by appointment. This age group can also attend planned walk-in clinics at Vaccination Centres and information can be found at the following link - <https://www2.hse.ie/services/covid-19-vaccination-centres/>

Please note that all vaccination channels will be open to individuals from all cohorts. Capacity is being created across all channels to offer an optimum number of appointments to complete each group as quickly as possible.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely,



Damien McCallion
National Director
National Lead Test & Trace and Vaccination Programme