

2nd Dec. 2021

Deputy Roisin Shortall,
Dáil Éireann,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2

Issued via email to: roisin.shortall@oireachtas.ie

PQ Number: 53339/21

Question: To ask the Minister for Health the plans that are currently in place for the roll out of Covid-19 booster vaccines for those who have been designated as being at high-risk from Covid-19; the person or body that will administer these vaccines; the timeline for any such roll out; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Shortall,

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

Please note that as of 30th November, over 756,000 booster doses have been administered to eligible cohorts and over 84,000 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 the 20th August, NIAC recommended that an additional mRNA vaccine dose should be given to those aged 12 and older with immunocompromise associated with a suboptimal response to vaccines who have completed their primary course, regardless of whether the primary course was of an mRNA or an adenoviral vector vaccine. This is an extended primary vaccination course with a minimum interval of two months following the last dose of an authorised COVID-19 vaccine. Work is continuing to identify all persons who should receive a third Primary Immunisation Dose because of their Immune system status. A referral pathway has been designed and established enabling specialist hospital services to refer eligible people for vaccination in their local CVC. As of 30th November, c. 84,000 immunocompromised individuals have received their third dose.

To date NIAC have recommended the COVID-19 Booster dose for the groups listed below with administration after six months but a minimum period of five months. This means the time to complete an age cohort is dependent on the person's original vaccine completion date.

1. **Over 60s in Long Term Residential Facilities** - Residents aged 65 and over in Long Term Residential Care facilities (c.30,000 in scope) commenced 4th October. This group has been substantially completed w/c 25th October. Some facilities will need to be revisited due to outbreaks. In the week of 8th November, vaccination teams commenced re-visiting LTRCFs to administer a booster dose to all consenting individuals aged 60 to 65 years old within their residential setting. In the week commencing 22nd November, in line with NIAC guidance, vaccination teams continued visiting LTRCFs and administered boosters to all consenting residents within their residential setting or facilitating residents to attend their CVC for their booster administration. As of 30th November, c. 26,000 residents in Long Term Residential Care facilities have received their booster vaccination.
2. **Over 80s** - GPs are administering additional doses to over 80's (c. 161,000 in scope) in Community with ca. 138,000 administered as of 30th November.
3. **Over 60s - Extension of Booster Programme** - In response to NIAC guidance received on 18th October, recommending an additional mRNA booster dose for all people aged 60 - 79, vaccination to this group commenced w/c 1st November.
 - a. **The 70-79 age group** (c. 336,000 in scope) - Vaccinations to the 70-79 age group began through the GP channel and to date over 243,000 doses have been administered as of 30th November, with the expectation of substantial completion by end November 2021.
 - b. **The 60-69 group** (c. 470,000 in scope) - Vaccinations to the 60-69 group began through CVCs. To date, c. 99,000 have been administered as of 30th November with the expectation of substantial completion by end December 2021.
4. **Health Care Workers** - In response to NIAC guidance given on 1st November, Vaccination Centres commenced vaccinations to Healthcare Workers over the weekend of the 6th and 7th November. While the HCW booster programme will run up to April (which is driven by the eligible interval between 2nd dose and booster dose), the majority of the 305,000 will be offered their booster by the end of December. Pharmacies will be included in the rollout of HCW boosters in the next few weeks to bolster capacity in vaccinating HCWs. HCWs over 60s are included in the age cohort, for whom a booster programme is commencing this week. They will be administered booster vaccinations in parallel with HCWs. To date, c.191,000 healthcare workers have received a booster dose.
5. **Extension of the Booster Programme to 16-59s** - We are sequencing the rollout of the booster programme and prioritising those most vulnerable groups as set out by NIAC. Therefore, whilst eligibility plays an important part in scheduling booster appointments, there may be a waiting period to allow for providing protection for those who need it most. We have commenced those aged 16 – 59 with underlying medical conditions over the weekend. As with other cohorts there is no need for people to contact the HSE - we will contact them to offer an appointment at a HSE Vaccination Centre, or they may choose to opt for vaccination at a participating pharmacy or GP. We will move to vaccinating those aged 50-59 in due course, in line with the prioritisation set out by NIAC. We expect to commence this group by mid-December. As with other groups they will only be eligible for a booster once five months have elapsed since their last vaccination (or three months in the case of those aged 50 - 59 who received the one – dose Jansen vaccine).



We have recently received additional advice from NIAC relating to those under 50. These cohorts are now being planned for and an operational plan will be enabled shortly.

In the week commencing 15th November, the pharmacy sector was brought on-board which will bring additional capacity to the booster programme. There are currently c. 480 pharmacies that are currently participating in the programme across the country with the aim to increase this number to c. 930 pharmacies. The list of participating pharmacies can be found on the HSE website and the below link is included:

<https://www2.hse.ie/apps/services/pharmaciesservicelist.aspx>

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely,



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