



## **Briefing note**

# **Omicron Response Update Test & Tracing and Vaccination Programme Plans**

15/12/2021

## Update on COVID-19 Booster Test and Trace Programme

- HSE has increased our PCR testing capacity from 100,000 in October to 250,000 per week by Christmas, with an additional 30,000 per week coming on line in January.
- HSE has also increased antigen test capacity to 100,000 antigen test kits per week.
- This provides a total COVID PCR and Antigen testing capacity of 350,000 tests per week from a base of 100,000 in the summer
- HSE has opened six additional testing centres in the last number of weeks and put additional mobile testing units in place.
- Contact Management Programme has introduced enhanced surveillance in cases related to the Omicron variant.
- Contact Management Programme has also increased capacity through automation and additional resources over the last few months in response to the threat of a new variant. We are contacting around 30,000 people per week.
- HSE and Department of Health will continue to monitor the impact of the Omicron variant and adjust their surge plans as needed.
- Defence Forces were also brought on board in November to support the test and trace programme and they continue to provide vital support.

## Update on COVID-19 Booster Vaccination Programme

- We commenced the Vaccine Booster Programme on 4th October 2021 in line with NIAC guidance and as of 14th December have administered 1.2m booster vaccines and over .99,000 third doses to immunocompromised individuals – a total of c1.3m doses administered.
- We are currently fourth in Europe in terms of uptake of additional doses (based on total populations) with Austria and Hungary (in first and second place respectively) having started their campaigns in August as a result of receiving their guidance much earlier than in Ireland.
- Uptake has been a challenge in recent weeks as society is in a different place to where we were last summer. As a result the original model in the primary vaccination programme, where we worked through groups sequentially using predominantly an appointment based system and dedicating particularly cohorts to Vaccination Centres or GPs, was changed. The reason for this was to increase uptake. This has meant using a mix of appointments and walk in clinics in Vaccination Centres. It has also meant allowing VC's, GP's and Pharmacy to

vaccinate the same patient cohorts at the same time, where cohorts were previously directed via specific channels.

- The change in approach while more complex has resulted in significant increased activity in the last week with higher uptake in our vaccination centres.
- The programme is continuing to ramp up capacity and we had our highest day yesterday with over 47,000 doses administered in total (c.45,000 booster & c.2,000 primary doses).
- Our vaccination centres also had their highest throughput last Sunday with over 23,000 doses administered.
- Last week (w/c 6th December) nearly 224,000 vaccines were administered across all courses against a target of 220,000 - 240,000, despite being significantly impacted by storm Barra. This included:
  - Over 15,000 primary doses, (c.5k dose 1s; over 7k dose 2s, and c.2k immunocompromised 3rd doses).
  - Over 208,000 booster doses.
- Our aim is to ensure that all the risk groups identified by NIAC have all either been vaccinated with a booster, had an appointment or an opportunity to attend a walk in clinic in a vaccination centre or pharmacy by the end of the year. This is everyone over 50, medically vulnerable, healthcare workers, pregnant women and long term care residents.
- Pregnant women will be able to receive their Booster from their GPs, Pharmacy or through walk-in clinics in vaccination centres.
- The plan for commencing the remaining age cohorts will be reviewed in the coming weeks in line with NIAC guidance and progress on uptake in each cohort.
- We have continued to scale up our resources to drive boosters, third doses primary vaccination of 5-11 year old in line with NIAC guidance being issued.
- Given the emergence of recent data on Omicron we have updated our plan building on existing capacity measures. The revised plan incorporates the following:
  - Extending the hours of our Vaccination Centre's from the end of this week to open from 8am to 8pm operating a mixture of scheduled appointments and walk in clinics. This will include increased capacity in some centres, for example UCD will increase booth capacity from 10 to 15 booths from next week.
  - In addition, the HSE will be opening a number of new vaccination center's which have been in planning over recent weeks;
    - Richmond Barracks in Dublin will open this week

- RDS in Dublin will open week commencing the 27<sup>th</sup> of December
- Cork City will open a second centre in early January
- We currently have around 1700 WTE in our vaccination centres, with over 2500 people employed.
  - 700 WTE vaccinators now working in the Vaccination Centres.
  - Hospitals and Community Healthcare Organisations are redeploying clinical staff to support the vaccination programmes
  - Recruitment is continuing with further panels in place through our National Recruitment Service
  - Additional Defence Forces staff are in place with further requested
  - HSE has requested additional administrative support from other public and civil service bodies to address our programme acceleration
  - There are also c. 960 WTE supporting other roles such as administration, pharmacy, cleaning, ICT, Security etc.
- We continue to work closely with the IMO and with their support GPs have played a significant role to date with over 75% of Practices delivering the Booster Programme and over half a million doses administered. There are 1300 GP Practices across the Country and the objective now is that all Practices will play a part in this next phase. We are asking patients to understand that everything except the most urgent of care may be delayed as part of this national effort.
- We are increasing the number of pharmacies participating from 550 who are actively providing boosters, to 700 this week. Our aim is to increase this closer to 1000 in the new year.
- Following NIAC guidance the HSE will commence the vaccination of high risk children from the week commencing 20<sup>th</sup> of December.
  - This will commence initially through the Paediatric hospitals and the rollout will continue over the following weeks through the Vaccination Centres.
  - We will then open the portal on the 28<sup>th</sup> December for registration for the remaining priority one groups of 5-11year olds and the HSE will commence these children from the week commencing the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January.
  - The remaining 5-11 year olds will commence following the Paediatrics priority one group and in line with 30-39 year olds (as per NIAC guidance).
- The HSE will commence vaccination of people between the ages of 40 and 49 from the week commencing 27<sup>th</sup> of December.

- Ongoing and targeted communications to support increased uptake are continuing with our campaigns continuing over the Christmas period.