



To: Each General Practitioner

September 2020

IMPORTANT NEWS
Re: Influenza Vaccination Campaign 2020/2021

Dear Doctor,

This letter contains important information about the **2020/2021 influenza vaccination campaign**.

The World Health Organization has recommended that the seasonal influenza vaccines for the 2020/2021 season (Northern Hemisphere winter) contain:

- an A/Guangdong-Maonan/SWL1536/2019 (H1N1)pdm09-like virus;
- an A/Hong Kong/2671/2019 (H3N2)-like virus;
- a B/Washington/02/2019 (B/Victoria lineage)-like virus
- a B/Phuket/3073/2013 (B/Yamagata lineage)-like virus.

This season, two influenza vaccines will be distributed by the HSE National Cold Chain Service:

- **Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (QIV) (split virion, inactivated)** manufactured by Sanofi Pasteur.
This is given **intramuscularly** and comes in pre-filled syringes in boxes of 10 or as single doses.
QIV is recommended for children aged 6 to 23 months and children and adults aged 13 to 64 years with chronic medical conditions, all those aged 65 years and over, pregnant women, healthcare workers (including general practice staff and students) and carers.
- **Fluenz Tetra, a live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV)** manufactured by AstraZeneca.
This is given **intranasally** and comes in prefilled nasal applicators in boxes of 10.
LAIV is recommended for all children aged 2 to 12 years at the time of vaccination.

Vaccination of children aged 2-12 years will reduce their rates of infection and also lower transmission to others and so reduce morbidity and mortality in those in the clinical risk groups and older adults.

The National Immunisation Advisory Committee has issued the following advice related to Covid-19 which is also included as an Appendix to this letter:

Post vaccination observation: As outlined in the anaphylaxis chapter of the Immunisation Guidelines, when possible, patients should remain in the vicinity for up to 15 minutes after vaccination. This applies after any child or adult vaccination because of the very rare possibility of anaphylaxis.

To reduce the risk of possible exposure to coronavirus, the person may leave the premises and remain in the vicinity for the remaining minutes provided they (or the parent/ guardian) are given post vaccination advice, and the vaccinated person is accompanied by an adult.

Fever and mild symptoms after LAIV: Mild fever (<39°C), nasal congestion, rhinitis, malaise and decreased appetite (common expected reactions) usually take about 24 hours to develop and usually resolve without treatment within 72 hours.

Further investigation is not required if the mild symptoms develop as above, within 72 hours after LAIV, unless COVID-19 is suspected.

This year seasonal influenza vaccine and administration is provided **free for all those in the groups outlined in the attachment** with this letter. Claims for the vaccination should be made through the PCERS. Please include your PCERS contractor number with your flu vaccine orders.

A suite of information and promotional materials for the QIV and LAIV campaigns will be sent to you later this month including frequently asked questions, algorithms, posters and patient leaflets. An e-learning module on LAIV is available to GPs and practice nurses through the HSE e-learning platform (www.hseland.ie) and will also be available on the ICGP website.

You will also receive a new magnet and stickers to help you maintain the cold chain and an e-learning module about the cold chain will be available to practices through the HSE e-learning platform (www.hseland.ie) in October.

Pneumococcal Polysaccharide Vaccine (PPV23)

There is no change in the recommendations for pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine, PPV23 (Pneumovax 23) i.e. for those aged 65 years and over and those in specific at risk groups.

Vaccine ordering and deliveries

Please order Influenza vaccine from the National Cold Chain Service (NCCS).. Check the NCCS online service regarding your vaccine ordering and delivery calendar. QIV deliveries will commence on 17th September 2020 and all sites will have received QIV by 30th September 2020. This is a similar time frame to last year when it started on 16th September 2019. The quantities delivered to sites will be similar to the quantities in your first order last year. At the beginning of October, it is expected that LAIV will be available to order. NCCS will notify all sites when it becomes available. Please note that **LAIV has a very short shelf life** and will expire at the end of the year so it will be important to vaccinate children as soon as possible.

As always, the seasonal influenza vaccines supplied by the HSE National Cold Chain Service are **specifically for people in the groups listed in the attachment with this letter**. Vaccine for those outside of these groups must be purchased privately. There is no change to the target groups for QIV. The HSE has procured sufficient QIV for vaccine uptake to exceed the WHO target of 75%.

In the previous influenza season, quantities of QIV distributed to GPs was sufficient for an uptake of >75% in target groups. Claims from PCRS from previous influenza seasons accounts for 62% of influenza vaccine delivered to GPs and it is assumed the balance was given to those in the target groups without a medical/GP visit card.

Patient held vaccination record cards/ post vaccination tear pads will be sent with your vaccine deliveries which should be completed and given to your patients after vaccination.

Actions required by you

- Please remove all influenza vaccines from the 2019/2020 flu season and any other expired vaccines from your fridge today or as soon as possible. Please place them in a box and return them to the HSE National Cold Chain Service by giving them to the NCCS van driver when they next deliver.
- Vaccine deliveries will be fortnightly from mid-late September so make sure you do not miss the cut-off date for ordering.
- If you wish to order more information materials, please visit www.healthpromotion.ie and order materials from there.

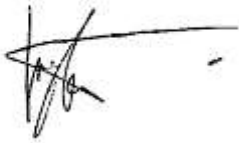
Further information about the influenza and pneumococcal vaccination campaign is available on the National Immunisation website. The website includes information in a number of languages, easy read guides, video, FAQs and algorithms. Visit www.immunisation.ie

This year it is particularly important to maximise uptake among at-risk groups and front-line health care staff so the health service is not overwhelmed with dual outbreaks of influenza and COVID-19. Patients with influenza and COVID-19 co-infection are likely to have worse outcomes. We also need to vaccinate as many children as possible to reduce their rates of infection and limit the spread of infection to vulnerable people.

Your support in this regard is greatly appreciated.

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

Yours sincerely,



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Influenza vaccination is recommended for:

- **All children aged 2-12 years at the time of vaccination **NEW****
- **Persons aged 65 and older**
- **Pregnant women (vaccine can be given at any stage of pregnancy)**
- **Those aged 6 to 23 months and aged 13-64 years with:**
 - 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
 - Cancer patients
 - 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 of 40 or over
 - On long-term aspirin therapy (because of the risk of Reyes syndrome)
 - 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
- **Healthcare workers including all General Practice staff**
- **Residents of nursing homes and other long stay institutions**
- **Carers and household contacts of people with increased medical risk**
- **People with regular contact with pigs, poultry or water fowl**