

COVID-19 VACCINE BULLETIN 36

Welcome to Bulletin 36 from the HSE National Immunisation Office which highlights changes in clinical guidance for the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

NIAC Recommendations

The National immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) has extended their recommendations for booster doses to include healthcare workers. This recommendation has been accepted by the Department of Health.

This means that a COVID-19 booster dose is recommended for the following groups:

- People aged 60 years and older
- Healthcare workers

NIAC has not recommended a booster COVID-19 vaccine for any further groups at this time.

[Read NIAC guidelines here](#)

Medicines protocols, clinical guidance for vaccinators and information materials for the public, training and supporting materials are being updated.

NIAC recommendations for booster doses for healthcare workers

- All unvaccinated or incompletely vaccinated healthcare workers (HCWs) and their close contacts are strongly encouraged to complete a primary COVID-19 vaccination course. Seasonal influenza vaccine can be given at the same time to those for whom it is recommended.
- HCWs and their close contacts must continue to observe the recommended public health and social measures. The use of masks, physical distancing, hand hygiene, ventilation of indoor spaces and optimising the physical infrastructure are key to reducing transmission of SARS-CoV-2.
- Booster doses will not immediately contribute to outbreak management or take the place of public health and social measures.
- A booster dose of an mRNA vaccine is recommended for HCWs who have completed a primary vaccine course with any COVID-19 vaccine. Frontline workers should be prioritised.
- A full dose of Comirnaty (0.3ml/30 micrograms) or half dose of Spikevax (0.25ml/50 micrograms) should be given after an interval of six months or longer, following completion of the primary course.
- An interval of five months may be used when necessary for operational reasons.
- In exceptional circumstances, a minimum interval of two months can be used between the booster dose and the last dose of an authorised COVID-19 vaccine.
- The booster dose can be given at the same time or at any interval before or after seasonal influenza vaccine
- If a HCW has had a laboratory-confirmed breakthrough infection since their last dose of COVID-19 vaccine, the booster dose should be delayed for at least 6 months.
- Booster doses of mRNA vaccines have not shown any unexpected short term safety concerns. The risk of myocarditis or other rare adverse reactions following an mRNA booster dose has yet to be characterised and will be closely monitored

Note that the booster dose of Spikevax® recommended by NIAC and licensed by the EMA is 0.25mls. This is half the volume of the dose in the primary vaccination course.

(Individuals who are immunocompromised and receiving an additional dose as an extended primary course should receive 0.5mls)

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Rationale for booster vaccination of healthcare workers

- Although COVID-19 antibody levels wane over time, vaccine effectiveness against severe disease and death is generally sustained.
- However, protection against infection and mild disease declines.
- A booster dose of COVID-19 vaccine, homologous or heterologous, effectively increases antibody levels. Booster doses have been shown to reduce breakthrough infections.
- Booster doses for HCWs will reduce their incidence of breakthrough infection, provide additional protection for patients, and may also help support continuity of healthcare services.

Frequently asked questions about booster doses

? What if an mRNA vaccine is contraindicated or not recommended?

If mRNA vaccines are contraindicated, NIAC advises consideration can be given to boosting with an authorised viral vector vaccine following an individual benefit-risk assessment.

? Can pregnant healthcare workers have a booster COVID -19 vaccine?

Yes, the booster dose can be given to healthcare workers at any stage of pregnancy, following a discussion with their obstetric care giver about their individual risks and benefits of vaccination.

? Is it recommended to check serology before administering a booster COVID-19 vaccine dose?

No. This is not recommended. It is not recommended to perform serological testing prior to administering an additional dose of vaccine. There is no agreed or recommended correlate of protection (there is no agreed or recommended antibody level above which you would not vaccinate, or below which you would vaccinate).

? What if the booster dose is given before the minimum interval?

See Table below

Interval between Comirnaty® or Spikevax® booster dose and last dose of any authorised COVID-19 vaccine	Action required
Less than 2 months	This is not considered a valid vaccine. However there is no evidence of the safety and efficacy of any additional doses. Revaccination is not recommended
2 to less than 5 months	No further action needed This is a valid vaccine.
More than 5-6 months	This is a valid dose.

Frequently asked questions are continued on page 3



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Frequently asked questions about booster doses (continued from page 2)

What if a person is given a booster dose of 0.5mls dose of Spikevax® vaccine instead of the recommended and licensed 0.25ml dose?

The person should be informed of the error. The error should be reported to the HPRA, and an incident form completed. The person should be informed of the potential risks of very rare side effects from the vaccine including myocarditis and pericarditis.

Volume of dose of COVID-19 vaccines used in the COVID-19 vaccination programme:

	Comirnaty®/Pfizer-BioNTech	Spikevax®/Moderna	COVID-19 Vaccine Janssen®
Primary vaccination course	0.3mls	0.5mls	0.5mls
Additional dose for immunocompromised	0.3mls	0.5mls	
Booster dose	0.3mls	<u>0.25mls</u>	

Vaxzevria® (AstraZeneca Vaccine)

Vaxzevria® was last distributed in July 2021 and all remaining stocks were donated and therefore there is no stock currently in Ireland. If a viral vector vaccine is required, COVID-19 vaccine Janssen can be supplied. Clinical guidance and training are being updated to reflect this.

Covaxin granted approval by the World Health Organization

Covaxin, a COVID-19 vaccine developed and produced by Bharat Biotech in India has been granted emergency use listing by the World Health Organization. The vaccine is now therefore approved by the WHO.

A Reference Guide for COVID-19 vaccination given outside Ireland is now available from our website. This information provides guidance to vaccinators when providing additional COVID-19 vaccines to people who have received COVID-19 vaccines outside of Ireland which have or have not been approved by the World Health Organization (WHO).

This information is valid at the time of sharing. It is based on guidance from NIAC and the WHO.

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COVID-19 Vaccine and Pregnancy

COVID-19 infection in pregnancy is associated with an increased risk of hospitalisation, an increased risk of premature delivery if symptomatic in the third trimester and a significantly higher risk of ICU admission.

Skilled communication with a trusted healthcare professional has been shown to increase acceptance of vaccines and is a key evidence-based intervention to increase vaccine uptake.

There are many resources available to support healthcare professionals in communicating with women and their partners about COVID-19 vaccines in pregnancy:

The HSE National Immunisation Office has developed a webpage signposting to specific information and resources for healthcare professionals on communicating with women on COVID-19 vaccine in pregnancy.

[Click here](#)

Included are:

- Resources to communicate with pregnant women who may be unsure about COVID-19 vaccines
- Frequently asked questions for healthcare professionals which include questions and answers relating to COVID-19 vaccination in pregnancy
- Training programme for COVID-19 vaccination www.HSEland.ie
- Links to resources developed by The Institute of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Rotunda Hospital and the National Immunisation Advisory Committee, including Q&A and a decision aid. These have been endorsed by the National Women and Infants Health programme. Visit www.rcpi.ie

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GPS AND PHARMACISTS CAN
Order LAIV Nasal Flu
Vaccine **now** from
the vaccine order
portal



www.hse.ie/flu

#YourBestShot

Seasonal Influenza Vaccination Programme

Reminder: GPs and Pharmacies order LAIV now

The Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine (LAIV) or Nasal Flu Vaccine is available to order for children aged 2 to 17 years for the 2021/2022 influenza season. GPs and Pharmacies can order as much LAIV vaccine as required.

LAIV is given intra nasally and is the recommended flu vaccine for all children aged 2 to 17 years at the time of vaccination. It is also the recommended vaccine for children who are considered medically at risk.

Note: QIV vaccine should only be offered to children who have a contraindication to LAIV vaccine.

The LAIV vaccine provides the best protection for children from flu this winter.
Vaccinating children also helps reduce the spread of flu to other high-risk persons.

Place your orders for the LAIV vaccine through your national cold chain account today.

Order LAIV Vaccine



Click here

Download LAIV Toolkit and Factsheet

Click here



Further information and resources

While anyone can catch flu, some people are more at risk of becoming seriously ill if they get flu.
The flu vaccine is the best way to protect yourself, and others from flu this winter.



Niamh Moore
Patient Services Manager

WATCH: Why healthcare workers get the flu vaccine



Dr Maeve Eogan
Consultant Obstetrician & Gynaecologist

WATCH: Why it is important for pregnant women to get the flu vaccine

Learn more about HSE 2021/2022
Seasonal Influenza Vaccination Programme

Click here

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Website

Visit our website www.immunisation.ie regularly for the most up to date information to support vaccinators and health professionals responding to queries.

Our dedicated COVID-19 Vaccination section contains

- Information from the National Immunisation Advisory Committee
- Clinical guidelines
- COVID-19 vaccine studies
- IM injection technique reminders
- Dedicated pages for the licensed COVID-19 vaccines

[Visit here](#)

HSeLand COVID-19 Vaccination Training Programme

You can access updates to the National Immunisation Office COVID-19 Vaccination Training Programme for Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Janssen vaccine through your HSeLand account.

[Visit HSeLand](#)

We would encourage you to log in and complete the updated content in each programme to refresh your knowledge and ensure you are up to date with your COVID-19 Vaccination Training.

If you have any issues with the platform please contact HSeLand directly.

[Contact HSeLand](#)

Do you have queries?

Clinical queries from healthcare professionals can be directed to our HSE email address.

[Send your query](#)



Should vaccines be exposed to temperatures outside of parameters please contact the National Immunisation Office pharmacists immediately. Contacts include:

- Achal Gupta: mobile 087 4064810
- Mariangela Toma: mobile 087 7575679
- Cliona Kiersey: mobile 087 9915452

Queries that are not clinical or technical cannot be answered by the National Immunisation Office

Read about the role of the National Immunisation Office in supporting the COVID-19 vaccination programme on our [website](#).

Recommendations about COVID-19 vaccine are changing as more information becomes available so please visit our [website](#) for the most up to date information.