

HSE NATIONAL IMMUNISATION OFFICE

IMMUNISATION BULLETIN 63

THIS EDITION COVERS

- World Health Organization lifts global public health emergency for COVID-19
- NIAC recommendations for a Spring COVID-19 booster vaccine in 2023
- NIAC recommendations for COVID-19 booster vaccination in pregnancy
- NIAC recommendations on intervals for the Primary Vaccination Schedule
- Comirnaty Original/Omicron BA.4-5 vaccines and primary vaccination
- Recommended dosage for Spikevax bivalent Original/Omicron BA.4-5 booster
- Accessing HSeLand programme to support the Spring Booster 2023
- MMR vaccine
- NIO Lunch and Learn session

COVID-19 vaccination

World Health Organization lifts global public health emergency for COVID-19

We welcome the statement by the WHO Director-General that “COVID-19 is now an established and ongoing health issue which no longer constitutes a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC).”

However, work continues to be required to manage the ongoing impact of COVID-19 in Ireland and globally. The importance of vaccination is clear and we encourage everyone who is eligible to come forward for vaccination.

NIAC recommendations for a Spring COVID-19 booster vaccine in 2023

NIAC now recommend a Spring COVID-19 booster vaccine for:

- Those aged **70 years and older**
- Those living in **long term care facilities for older adults**
- Those aged **5 years and older with immunocompromise associated with a sub-optimal response to vaccination.**

This Spring 2023 COVID-19 booster dose is recommended irrespective of the number of previous booster doses or types of COVID-19 vaccines received.

The recommended intervals for the Spring COVID-19 booster for those eligible, are:

- For those **aged 50 years and older** an interval of **6 months** is recommended following any previous COVID-19 vaccine dose or SARS-CoV-2 infection.
- For those **aged less than 50 years** an interval of **9 months** is recommended following any previous COVID-19 vaccine dose or SARS-CoV-2 infection.
- For those **aged 5 years and older with immunocompromise associated with a suboptimal response to vaccination**, an interval of **6 months** is recommended following any previous COVID-19 vaccine dose or SARS-CoV-2 infection.



A minimum interval of at least 3 months following the last COVID-19 vaccine dose or SARS-CoV-2 infection may be used in exceptional circumstances, e.g., heightened epidemiologic risk or if required for operational reasons (such as ensuring those in eligible groups receive the Spring booster before the end of May if possible and to enable timely access to the Autumn boosters when they become available later in the year).



[Read more on the NIAC recommendations](#) for a Spring COVID-19 booster vaccine in 2023.

NIAC recommendations for COVID-19 booster vaccination in pregnancy (April 2023)

For pregnant adolescents and adults, a COVID-19 booster vaccine is recommended once in pregnancy.

If a pregnant person has not had a previous COVID-19 booster, the first booster dose is recommended at least **4 months** after their last COVID-19 vaccine dose or SARS-CoV-2 infection. For pregnant persons who have had a booster prior to pregnancy, they should receive a booster once in pregnancy at an interval of **6 months or more** since their last booster dose or SARS-CoV-2 infection.

- Booster doses can be given at any stage in pregnancy but ideally should be given between 20-34 weeks.
- If it is **more than 12 months** since their previous COVID-19 vaccine or infection administration earlier in pregnancy should be considered.

Of note: For those who are pregnant and are immunocompromised, a **second booster dose within the same pregnancy** may be considered if **6 months** has elapsed since their last booster dose or SARS-CoV-2 infection.



[Read more on the NIAC recommendations](#) for COVID-19 booster vaccination in pregnancy.

COVID-19 vaccination updates continue on page 3

COVID-19 vaccination (cont. from page 2)

NIAC recommendations on intervals for Primary Vaccination Schedule (April 2023)

1. *For those **aged ≥30 years**: two doses, with an interval of **four weeks** between doses.
2. *For those **aged 5-29 years**: two doses, with an interval of **eight weeks** between doses.
*(A minimum interval of three weeks may be used if there is urgency to achieve protection)
3. For **immunocompromised individuals aged 5 years and older**: 3 doses, with an interval of **4 weeks** between dose 1 and dose 2, and **eight weeks** between dose 2 and dose 3 (the additional dose).
4. The interval between the primary course and the first booster COVID-19 vaccine remains at 4 months. In exceptional circumstances a 3 month interval may be used.



Read more on the recommended intervals for the COVID-19 primary vaccination course and booster vaccines in Chapter 5a of the NIAC Immunisation Guidelines for Ireland (27 April 2023), Table 5a.1.

Comirnaty Original/Omicron BA.4-5 vaccines may be used for primary vaccination

In December 2022, the EMA's Emergency Task Force concluded that Comirnaty Original/Omicron BA.4-5 vaccines may be used when necessary in primary vaccination of previously unvaccinated children and adults.

The National Immunisation Advisory Committee recommend:

- Comirnaty monovalent vaccine is recommended in the primary schedule. If Comirnaty Original/Omicron BA.4-5 is given as a dose in the primary course, it can be regarded as a valid dose.
- The Department of Health recently endorsed this EMA recommendation and the use of Comirnaty Original/Omicron BA.4-5 vaccines for primary course vaccination is now operational.

Recommended dosage for Spikevax bivalent Original/Omicron BA.4-5 booster

Spikevax bivalent Original/Omicron BA.4-5 vaccine is indicated for booster vaccination of individuals aged 30 years and older. The recommended dosage for Spikevax bivalent Original/Omicron BA.4-5 vaccine is 50 micrograms, 0.5ml.

Of note: The dose of Original Spikevax when used as a booster dose was 0.25ml. This product is no longer in use.

HSeLand programme to support the Spring Booster 2023

Health and care workers can access e-learning materials on www.hseland.ie to support the administration of the Spring Booster.

In line with the NIAC latest recommendations the NIO has updated the HSeLand training module called "**New mRNA COVID-19 Vaccine Formulations**".

If you are a health professional please visit HSeLand

- If you have an existing account, login using your username and password
- If you do not have an existing account click 'Register' and register.

Once you have entered into HSELand page go to '**Courses**' and then "**Catalogue**" at the top of page

- Select "**Clinical Skills**"
- Select "**National Immunisation Office**"

You can now see all of the programmes developed by our office:

- Select - **COVID-19 Vaccination Training Programme**
- Scroll down to the bottom and press - **New mRNA COVID-19 Vaccine Formulations**
- Click on the title of the programme and click enrol button below the appropriate session.
- Click confirm enrolment.
- Click Launch on the programme.

If you have completed the programme before you do not need to re-enrol on the programme but you will need to watch the updated 30-minute video to ensure you have access to the most up to date information.

MMR vaccine

Be alert about measles

Measles cases are rising right now. Already in 2023, increase in measles cases and outbreaks have been reported in countries like UK, United States, South Africa, Nepal and Austria.

Measles is highly infectious and can be an acute and serious infection. It causes a rash illness, with cough, runny nose, conjunctivitis and high fever.

Complications of measles include ear infections, pneumonia, febrile seizures and less commonly encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) and even death.

In Ireland children get two doses of the MMR vaccine so they can be fully protected against measles. However, uptake rates of the first and second doses of the MMR vaccine have dropped below the 95% rate recommended by the WHO to stop measles from spreading.

Unvaccinated, young children are most at risk of infectious diseases like measles.

The best thing you can do for your patients is:

- Remind them about the importance of getting vaccinated on time
- Follow up with people who may be late getting vaccinated
- Report suspected cases of Measles to your local public health department so appropriate measures can be initiated.



[See Public Health Department contacts](#)
[Read more on how to notify infectious diseases](#)

Is serology recommended after the MMR vaccine?

Those who have documented evidence of receiving one MMR vaccine are considered immune to Rubella infection irrespective of Rubella serology. Serology is not recommended after the MMR vaccine as serology is not accurate after vaccination.

One MMR vaccine dose provides protection from Rubella in 99% of people.

Those who have documented evidence of receiving two doses of MMR vaccine (given at least 28 days apart) for protection against Measles, Mumps and Rubella infection from the age of 1 year are not recommended to receive a 3rd MMR vaccine dose.

Lunch & Learn webinar

Watch or listen back to April's Lunch & Learn

The NIO hosted the April Lunch and Learn earlier this month and covered **vaccine hesitancy and communicating about vaccines**.



[Watch back the webinar on YouTube.](#)
[Listen back to our webinar on Spotify.](#)
[Download the presentation slides](#) from our speakers.

We plan to host a lunch and learn session each month. The topic for May will be **Vaccines in Pregnancy**.



[Sign up to our mailing list](#) to be notified of upcoming Lunch & Learn webinars.

Website



[Visit our website](#)

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

HSeLanD Vaccination Training Programme



[Visit HSeLanD](#)

You will find programmes developed by our office by logging into your account on www.hseland.ie selecting **courses** then selecting **clinical skills** and finally selecting **National Immunisation Office**.



[Contact HSeLanD](#)

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

Do you have queries?



[Send your query](#)

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

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

- email pharmacynio@hse.ie
- Leah Gaughan: mobile 087 1881667
- Achal Gupta: mobile 087 4064810
- Cliona Kiersey: mobile 087 9915452

If you have a query about errors or changes to records on COVAX, please contact the Contact Management Programme on 01 240 8786.

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



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