



Date: 21st April 2023

Circular Number: NCO-15-2023

COVID-19 Booster Vaccination Campaign Spring 2023

Dear Doctor,

The HSE is now progressing the implementation of a Spring Booster Vaccination Programme in line with National Immunisation Guidance Committee (NIAC) '*Recommendations for the 2023 COVID-19 vaccination strategy Version 1.1*', which are available to view on their website at <https://www.rcpi.ie/Healthcare-Leadership/NIAC/Advice-Provided-to-the-Department-of-Health>

A spring COVID-19 booster vaccine is recommended 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 suboptimal response to vaccination.

Those who are eligible will be able to avail of booster doses through participating GPs and Pharmacies, and in Covid Vaccination Centres. As in previous campaigns, those living in long term care facilities will be vaccinated by HSE mobile teams, and those aged under 12 years will be vaccinated through Covid Vaccination Centres only.

HSE mobile vaccination teams will also administer COVID-19 vaccines to persons who are housebound. Individuals previously referred by their GP for COVID-19 vaccination under the housebound programme will be contacted by HSE mobile vaccination teams in order to organise their Covid-19 booster. GPs only need to make the referral in the case of those who have become housebound (i.e. new referrals, and did not previously receive a home vaccination).

GPs can make referrals through the existing housebound COVID-19 referral pathway. Further information on housebound referrals is available here: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/gmscontracts/2019agreement/>

COVID-19 booster vaccines for those in the above eligible groups may be given irrespective of the number of previous booster doses received. You will note from the NIAC advice that there have been some key changes to recommended interval periods. It is preferable that the NIAC recommended intervals are used, but if necessary, for operational reasons, in the Spring Booster campaign, those in the eligible cohorts listed above can receive their next booster if at least 3 months have elapsed following any previous COVID-19 vaccine dose or infection.



The National Immunisation Office are currently working to update the clinical guidance and this will be available shortly. Please refer to NIO bulletins and web content at:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/immunisation/hcpinfo/covid19vaccineinfo4hps/>

or any clinical queries please contact immunisation@hse.ie.

GP practices can commence administering Spring boosters as soon as the full clinical guidance has been published by NIAC and the NIO, and staff have completed all the relevant training modules. We will notify you as soon as this material is ready and available.

NIAC has recommended that, as far as possible, those eligible for a Spring booster should receive it before the end of May. This will then allow for a sufficient interval period to elapse, to enable those vaccinated to receive another booster dose with their flu vaccine in the autumn.

HSeLanD Vaccination Training Programmes

Covid-19 training – Please ensure all staff involved in the COVID-19 vaccine programme have received appropriate training and are up to date with the current recommendations. Training programmes are available by logging into your account on www.hseland.ie. Vaccinators should complete the relevant modules on HSeLanD prior to the campaign commencing. Training modules are currently being updated to reflect the new guidance and will be available shortly.

Vaccines & Ordering

The principal vaccine which will be used for the Spring Booster campaign is Spikevax® Original/Omicron BA.4-5 (referred to as Spikevax® BA.4-5).

Vaccines should be ordered online from <https://www.ordervaccines.ie/>. Deliveries are as per vaccine delivery calendar, please note the cut-off date (marked red on your calendar).

- SpikeVax BA 4-5 will be available for eligible people aged 30 years and older. The Use Before Date is <30 days so please only order vaccine that can be reasonably used within this time and then re-order for your next delivery.
- There is no restriction on quantity of SpikeVax BA 4-5 vaccine that can be ordered and each box contains 10 vials, each vial contains 5 doses (50 doses per box).
- Comirnaty BA 4-5 (12+) will be available for eligible people aged 12 years - 29 years.
- Comirnaty BA 4-5 is restricted to 1 box containing 10 vials, each vial contains 6 doses (60 doses per box).



Any site that does not have a **scheduled COVID-19** vaccines delivery on or before April 28th can request a delivery by stating that this is a **COVID -19 vaccine order**. Please request by emailing vaccines@udd.ie and the delivery will be facilitated.

For any other queries about your order, please email NCCS customer services at: vaccines@udd.ie or phone 01-4637770.

Existing stocks of either Comirnaty BA. 4-5 or SpikeVax BA. 4-5 should be used before ordering more vaccines.

Primary Course Vaccinations

Comirnaty® BA.4-5 is now approved for Primary course vaccinations, including Additional (Immunocompromised) dose, as well as booster doses. This means that GPs can now provide Primary Course vaccinations to those 12 years and over who are not yet fully vaccinated.

Please note: Spikevax® BA.4-5 is only approved for Booster doses and must not be given as a Primary or Additional (immunocompromised) dose.

In the case of administration of primary doses, please note there have been changes to the recommended intervals between doses in some instances.

<https://www.rcpi.ie/Healthcare-Leadership/NIAC/Advice-Provided-to-the-Department-of-Health>

Please refer to the full guidance in NIAC Chapter 5a and National Immunisation Office information for healthcare professionals – the updated versions are expected to be available shortly.

Fees

The existing fee rates will be paid to GPs involved in the delivery of the Covid-19 Vaccination Programme.

- The rate to be paid for vaccinations administered by GPs will remain at €25 per dose.

Recording vaccines

To ensure the patient vaccination record is correct, take a moment to check the information entered into your GP Practice Management System or GPVax. In particular:

- Check that you are recording the dose correctly as a primary course, additional dose (for immunocompromised only) or a booster dose



- When giving a booster dose, check the patient has completed their Primary course (including additional / immunocompromised dose where applicable) before selecting to administer a Booster dose – remember, Spikevax® BA.4-5 is only approved for Booster doses and must not be given as a Primary or additional / immunocompromised dose.
- Check the recommended interval has elapsed since last vaccination or COVID-19 infection. For confirmation of the date of last vaccine dose, a 'Vaccination History Search' facility is available via the HSE's 'Health Provider Portal'. Further information is available in the Operational Guidance.
- Select the correct Vaccine name – it should be either Spikevax® BA.4-5 or Comirnaty® BA.4-5.
- Check the correct batch number and use-before date is entered.

Conclusion

I would like once again to express my sincere gratitude to General Practitioners and their teams for the efficient manner in which the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme has been delivered to date.

The Operational Guidance for Vaccination in General Practice is currently being updated to reflect the operational changes in light of the new NIAC guidance, and will be issued in due course.

Please be assured of the HSE's continued support at this time.

Yours sincerely,

Pat Healy
National Director
Clinical Programme Implementation
& Professional Development



Appendix: GP support teams (available within business hours)

Query	Telephone	Email	Commentary
Vaccine ordering & deliveries issues – NCCS	(01) 463 7770	vaccines@udd.ie	Any queries relating to quantity/allocation should be raised through the email address.
Vaccine consumables	0818 008811	gpvaccines@vision.com	Queries relating to order or delivery of vaccine consumables.
Clinical Queries - National Immunisation Office		immunisation@hse.ie	For clinical queries and queries relating to cold chain maintenance or breakdown, please e-mail.
Data Quality Errors	(01) 240 8786		For Data quality support, please contact the support team.
Payment Queries/Claims	(01) 864 7100	Pcrs.doctorsqueries@hse.ie	For any payment queries regarding any vaccines. Please do not contact PCRS for registration issues, data quality errors, clinical queries, or queries outside of reimbursement of vaccinations.
General queries & relationship management	0818 008811	gpvaccines@vision.com	Other general queries/information, please contact the relationship management team.
Healthmail Issues	(061) 203779	ictsupport@three.ie	Any queries relating to your Healthmail account including the secondary email address attached to your account.
National Contracts Office	044 9395519	natcontractsoffice@hse.ie	For contract queries.
Healthlink	01 8287145	support.healthlink@healthmail.ie for Healthmail Users and support.healthlink@hse.ie for Non-Healthmail Users	For any issues relating to Healthlink accounts, electronic reports and eReferrals.