

From the Acting Chief Medical Officer
Dr Elizabeth Mitchell



Department of
**Health, Social Services
and Public Safety**

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

AN ROINN

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

MÄNNYSTRIE O

**Poustie, Resydènter Heisin
an Fowk Siccar**

HSS(MD)37/2009

To: Chief Executives, Public Health Agency/ Health & Social Care Board/Trusts
Director of Public Health, Public Health Agency
Assistant Director Health Protection, Public Health Agency
Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency
Directors of Pharmaceutical Services, Health & Social Care Board/Trusts
Family Practitioner Service Leads, Health & Social Care Board
GP Medical Advisers, Health & Social Care Board
All General Practitioners (*for onward distribution to practice staff*)
Consultants in Communicable Disease Control, Public Health Agency
All Community Pharmacists
Medical Directors, HSS Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Consultants, Occupational Health Physicians*)
Nursing Directors, HSS Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Community Nurses*)

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Our Ref: HSS(MD)37/2009
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Dear Colleague

UPDATE ON PANDEMIC (SWINE) INFLUENZA VACCINATION PROGRAMME 2009

1. Further to our letter of 1 July 2009 we are writing to give you information about the priority groups for the H1NI Swine flu vaccine. This should help you in your planning for the implementation and delivery of the first stage of the vaccination programme in your locality. Preparations continue to be made to extend the programme beyond these initial priority groups and Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) will consider this matter further and report back in due course.

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Vaccine Supplies and Licensing

2. The Department has placed orders for H1N1 swine flu vaccine with GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) and with Baxter. The vast majority of the initial deliveries are expected to be GSK vaccine. The Department intends to supply GSK vaccine primarily, and expects that there will be enough to vaccinate all those in the priority groups (listed below).

The manufacturers are seeking approval for their swine flu vaccines from the European Medicines Agency (EMA). Subject to satisfactory review of the data, the manufacturers anticipate that licenses may be granted in late September or October. The vaccination programme will commence once vaccines are licensed and stock has been distributed around the country. Based on these assumptions, the earliest a vaccination programme could begin is mid- October.

Prioritisation

3. Following advice from independent expert committees including the Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), the following groups should be prioritised for vaccination in the following order, once the vaccine has been licensed:
 - I. Individuals aged between six months and 65 years in the current seasonal flu clinical risk groups*;
 - II. All Pregnant women, subject to licensing conditions on trimesters;
 - III. Household contacts of immunocompromised individuals;
 - IV. People aged 65 and over in the current seasonal flu vaccine clinical at-risk groups

*Until further information is available from a case control study of hospitalised patients currently being undertaken, the current definition of asthma used for seasonal flu vaccination programme will be used.

These groups were selected because they are at highest risk of severe illness. In practice, it is likely that as vaccines become available, priority groups i-iii may be vaccinated concurrently, rather than in order of priority.

Immunisation of Frontline Health & Social Care Workers

4. In addition to these groups front line Health and Social Care Workers will be prioritised to receive the vaccine at the same time as the first clinical risk group as they are at increased risk of infection and of transmitting that infection to susceptible patients. Frontline healthcare workers eligible for this vaccination programme are those also eligible for seasonal influenza vaccination, as detailed in the Green Book. Eligibility guidance for vaccination for frontline health and social care workers is included in the annexes to this letter.

Vaccination of Wider Population

5. Subsequent use of the vaccine in the wider healthy population will depend upon the evolution of the pandemic as well as new and emerging clinical data on the use of the vaccine. This will be kept under close review.

Arrangements for Vaccination Programme

6. The Department continues to work closely with our colleagues in the Public Health Agency and Health and Social Care Board to finalise how the vaccination programme will be implemented. Details of agreed arrangements will be circulated at the earliest opportunity.

Seasonal Influenza Programme 2009/10

7. The annual seasonal flu programme will continue as normal.

Further Information

8. Further guidance on the implementation of the swine flu vaccination programme will be issued in due course. This will include information on issues such as communication materials, data collection, and training materials. As further information becomes available, this will be placed on the DHSSPS website at www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

In addition to the information materials on the vaccination programme, a communication strategy has been developed by the Department which advises the general public what they should do if they think they have swine flu. Leaflets and posters will be distributed to GPs, hospitals and community pharmacies.

We will do our best to keep you up to date as new information becomes available. The successful implementation of this important new vaccination campaign depends upon your continued efforts and professionalism. We would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge your hard work and to thank you all.

Yours sincerely

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Acting Chief Medical Officer Chief Nursing Officer

DR NORMAN MORROW
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer

cc Top Management Group Members
Mr A Elliott, Director of Health Development, DHSSPS
Dr E Reaney, Medical Officer, DHSSPS
Ms C Jendoubi, Director of Primary Care, DHSSPS

Annex A

Definition of Frontline Health Care Worker for H1N1 Swine Flu Vaccination Programme

Immunisation against Infectious Disease - the 'Green Book' and Seasonal Influenza Vaccination for Frontline Healthcare Workers

The Green Book is published by the Department of Health, London and is the reference guide on the latest UK immunisation recommendations and information on vaccines and vaccination procedures. It is based on scientific advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

The Green Book was last updated in full in 2006 and is available on line at http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Healthprotection/Immunisation/Greenbook/DH_4097254 and distributed in hard copy to GPs, GP surgeries, practice nurses, health visitors, midwives, immunisation and flu co-ordinators, and a large number of other health professionals and the Royal Colleges.

The online version of the Green Book is updated when the JCVI make a new recommendation or makes changes to an existing recommendation.

Chapter 12 covers immunisation of healthcare and laboratory staff and sets out which healthcare workers should be routinely offered a vaccination against seasonal influenza as an occupational health vaccine (pages 85-87) i.e. those staff involved in direct patient care. It also sets out those that would not be expected to be offered this vaccine routinely.

Staff involved in direct patient care

This includes staff who have regular clinical contact with patients and who are directly involved in patient care. This includes doctors, dentists, midwives and nurses, paramedics and ambulance drivers, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and radiographers. Students and trainees in these disciplines and volunteers who are working with patients must also be included.

Seasonal influenza immunisation helps to prevent influenza in staff and may also reduce the transmission of influenza to vulnerable patients. Influenza vaccination is therefore recommended for healthcare workers directly involved in patient care, who should be offered influenza immunisation on an annual basis.

Non-clinical staff in healthcare settings

This includes non-clinical ancillary staff who may have social contact with patients but are not directly involved in patient care. This group includes receptionists, ward clerks, porters and cleaners.

Seasonal influenza vaccination is not routinely recommended in this group.

Annex B

Definition of Frontline Social Care Worker for H1N1 Swine Flu Vaccination Programme

The definition for social care workers is: “**social care staff who are employed to provide personal care to children and adults, both in care homes and in the community**”.

The UK Government & devolved administrations have agreed the following definition, that “Personal care” means:

- physical assistance given to a person in connection with:
 - eating or drinking (including the administration of parenteral nutrition),
 - toileting (including in relation to the process of menstruation),
 - washing or bathing,
 - dressing,
 - oral care, or
 - the care of skin, hair and nails (with the exception of nail care provided by a chiropodist or podiatrist); or
- the prompting, together with supervision, of a person, in relation to the performance of any of the activities listed in paragraph (a), where that person is unable to make a decision for themselves in relation to performing such an activity without such prompting and supervision.

Some examples of staff who would be included in this definition are:

- Care home staff in residential/nursing homes who provide personal care to residents
- Domiciliary care workers employed by agencies who provide personal care to service users in their own homes
- Personal assistants – staff employed to provide personal care to a single service user
- Students and trainees in these disciplines

And examples of people who would not be included are:

- Social workers
- Informal carers – family members and/or friends
- Non care staff in residential/nursing homes
- Housing staff – those who work in managing sheltered and similar housing
- Staff working in child or adult safeguarding
- Foster carers