



From the Chief Medical Officer
Dr Michael McBride

HSS(MD)4-2007

To:

Chief Executives, HSS Boards/Trusts
Directors of Public Health, HSS Boards
Consultants in Communicable Disease Control, HSS Boards
Directors of Primary Care, Health & Social Services Boards
Director of Nursing, HSS Boards
Directors of Pharmaceutical Services, HSS Boards/Trusts/CSA
GP Medical Advisers, HSS Boards
Medical Directors, HSS Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Consultants, Occupational Health Physicians*)
Nursing Directors, HSS Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Community Nurses*)
All General Practitioners, locum & sessional GPs, out of hours centres (*for onward distribution to practice staff including practice nurses*)
Regional Epidemiologists, CDSC (NI)
Dr Jill Mairs, Regional Procurement Pharmacist
Dr Delia Skan, HSENI
Liz Redmond, DARD
Collette McMaster, DARD
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Dear Colleague

SEASONAL INFLUENZA VACCINATION PROGRAMME FOR POULTRY WORKERS 2006-07.

1. I am writing to seek your co-operation in implementing a seasonal flu immunisation programme to poultry workers in 2006-07. As a precautionary public health measure, I have taken the decision, in line with my colleagues elsewhere in the UK, to offer poultry workers the seasonal flu vaccination to minimise the theoretical risk of avian influenza mixing with seasonal influenza and possibly mutating into a strain with pandemic potential. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has endorsed this advice.

Action

2. From the date of this letter to 31 March 2007, each Health & Social Services Board is required to make arrangements to ensure as far as possible that poultry workers in their geographic area are offered seasonal influenza vaccine. The immunisation is not compulsory. It should be offered free of charge to those workers who satisfy the criteria (refer to paragraph 3).

The target population

3. The following definition of a 'poultry worker' has been devised based on the risk of exposure to avian influenza (bird flu) virus for the purposes of this scheme. This definition forms the basis of selection and includes:

(a) An individual who while on poultry premises and in the course of his or her employment (including self employment):

- (i) Accesses enclosed poultry rearing or egg production areas;
- (ii) Performs initial sorting of poultry eggs if the sorting area is an integral part of the production unit;
- (iii) Catches or culls poultry within enclosed poultry rearing or egg production areas; or
- (iv) Performs the final clean down of poultry sheds following depopulation of a poultry house

(b) an individual who while on poultry premises and in the course of his or her employment (including self-employment) collects or removes poultry manure or litter from within enclosed poultry rearing or egg production areas of poultry premises; or

(c) an individual who while on poultry premises and in the course of his or her employment (including self-employment):

- (i) catches or handles live birds;
- (ii) kills or eviscerates birds; or
- (iii) cleanses or disinfects areas and equipment contaminated by poultry faeces.

4. Poultry in this context means poultry and other captive birds.

5. Poultry premises in this context means:

(a) those premises/ units **which** have 50 or more birds; or

(b) premises which are a slaughterhouse and for this purpose "slaughterhouse" means an establishment used for slaughtering poultry, the meat of which is intended for human consumption.

Exclusions

6. The following workers are **not** considered to be at higher than normal risk of exposure to avian influenza (bird flu) viruses and are not included in this programme:

- Workers in poultry premises/units that have less than 50 birds i.e. 49 or fewer;
- Workers in and around farms that have registered poultry units, but do not enter the enclosed poultry management areas or egg sorting facilities;
- Workers delivering materials to poultry units;

- Workers collecting or delivering eggs or poultry (live or dead) from poultry premises (unless undertaking duties included in (a) (iii) above;
 - Workers in poultry processing units handling poultry carcasses but not involved in killing or eviscerating poultry (unless also undertaking duties included in (c) (iii) above).
 - Workers in non-approved poultry slaughterhouses.
 - Bird swabbers who take samples or swab dead shot birds, and other dead birds as part of the avian influenza surveillance of wild birds.
7. Poultry premises with fewer than 50 birds are **not** included, nor are people who only work on such premises. This is based on epidemiological evidence of avian influenza in people in the outbreaks in SE Asia and other countries, which shows that intense and very close contact with infected birds is needed for people to become infected with avian influenza. Such contact does not usually occur in small flocks of fewer than 50 birds. If avian influenza risks increase, or there is an outbreak locally, then the risk will be reviewed.

Pregnant Women

8. Poultry workers should defer vaccination in the first trimester to avoid wrongly associating spontaneous abortion or the later identification of birth defects with flu vaccination. However, there is no evidence of risk from vaccinating pregnant women at any stage of pregnancy. Nor is breastfeeding a contraindication. Women who have a medical condition such as severe asthma, that increases their risk of complications from influenza, should be vaccinated regardless of the stage of pregnancy.

Contraindications

9. The vaccine should not be given to those who
- Are allergic to hen's eggs
 - Have had a serious reaction to flu vaccine in the past
 - Currently have flu symptoms, e.g. a temperature of 39°C and above
 - Have already had a flu immunisation this year.

Further information about contraindications to the flu vaccine is contained in chapter 19 of the new *2006 Immunisation against infectious disease* (the Green Book) which can be accessed at <http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/14/17/61/04141761.pdf>

Register of Poultry Premises

10. Northern Ireland Bird Register
 Unlike the rest of the UK, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in Northern Ireland requires all keepers of birds to register on the Northern Ireland Bird Register, with the exception of caged pet birds kept in the owner's home. Keepers with 49 or fewer birds are not covered by this programme.

11. Food Standard Agency Register (FSA)

All approved poultry slaughter and processing premises are required to register with the FSA.

Identifying poultry workers

12. The majority of poultry workers (including catchers and cullers who work on registered poultry premises) can be identified through their place of employment using the statutory databases held by DARD and the FSA in Northern Ireland.
13. From the date of this letter, each HSSB will be able to access a contact list of registered poultry premises/units (housing 50 or more birds) and lists of hatcheries and egg packing stations within its geographic area. This information will **only** be issued to one named individual within each HSSB who is the identified lead for the poultry workers vaccination programme for that HSSB. The named individual should contact: Janet Moore, DHSSPS tel. 028 90 522799) who will arrange to have a hard copy of the information forwarded to that individual.
14. Information on poultry slaughter and processing premises can be accessed via the FSA website link:
www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/meat/meatplantsprems/meatpremlcence
or contact Janet Moore, DHSSPS tel. 028 90 522799 for an excel spreadsheet of these addresses.

Data Protection responsibilities

15. The information on poultry premises/units has been provided by confidential agreement to DHSSPS by DARD.
16. The information provided has been passed to DHSSPS on behalf of the HSS Boards, on the understanding that the data will not be used for any other purpose and can only be used under the following conditions:
- The data will not be used for any purpose other than for the purposes of this poultry workers vaccination programme 2006-07.
 - The data will not be copied at all to any person or body other than those directly assigned to this purpose within DHSSPS and the Health Boards.
 - No material will be published or distributed other than to those directly assigned to this purpose within DHSSPS and the Health Boards.

Contacting poultry workers, catchers and cullers and issuing appointments

Poultry workers

17. Each Board should decide how best to contact poultry premises/units including poultry slaughterhouses, egg packing stations and hatcheries in their area in order to make arrangements to ensure poultry workers who want to be immunised are offered the vaccine and in order to determine the number of individuals to be vaccinated. This will assist in planning, including the ordering of vaccine supplies. A draft letter which could be used for this purpose is attached at Annex 1.

18. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland (DARD) has agreed to issue a letter to all bird keepers on the Bird register with 50 or more birds advising them of the vaccination programme. This will issue within the next two weeks.

Funding and contractual arrangements

19. This programme is different to contractual arrangements for the routine seasonal influenza vaccination programme, which is reviewed annually, nationally negotiated and covered by a Direct Enhanced Service. Boards have flexibility to determine the most appropriate way to achieve the aim of this vaccination programme in their geographic area. Boards may consider entering into a local agreement with independent contractors or alternative service providers to cover the immunisation of poultry workers in their geographic areas. Boards may wish to consider use of a Local Enhanced Scheme (LES) where this vaccination programme is being delivered by General Practitioners. A draft LES outline is attached at Annex 2. The arrangements each Board will put in place to immunise poultry workers may continue in future years but presently only covers the period up to 31st March 2007.

20. The DHSSPS is allocating additional resources to Boards to meet the costs of implementing this poultry workers vaccination programme. The amount allocated to each Board by the Department is not on a per capita basis, and is based on information on the geographic distribution of poultry premises provided by Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD).

21. A benchmark rate of £7.51 has been set for administering this vaccine, in line with the current rate for flu immunisation. Boards should therefore reimburse those who have been commissioned to provide this service up to £7.51 as an item of service payment or if it chooses as a cost per vaccination. In addition the allocation to Boards includes for the payment of a data collection and return fee based at £1.75 per patient.

Vaccine uptake data collection

22. For this vaccination programme, each Board is asked to supply a minimum data set on the uptake of seasonal 'flu immunisation by poultry workers for local and regional monitoring purposes. This should be returned directly to Janet Moore, Health Protection Team, Room C.4.14, Castle Buildings, DHSSPS. Email: janet.moore@dhsspsni.gov.uk. Data collection needs to be consistent across the Board areas, and directed to a single source for reporting purposes. A proforma to be used for data collation and return is attached at Annex 3. A draft template to assist individuals/organisations delivering the programme in recording details of individual workers immunised is attached at Annex 4.

Vaccine supply and ordering

23. There is sufficient seasonal influenza vaccine available in Northern Ireland to cover this immunisation programme. For the purposes of vaccinating poultry workers:

- any GP ordering vaccine should place orders only with Castlereagh Pharmaceuticals. Orders may be faxed or emailed and the attached form at Annex 5 must be used when placing orders.
- Trust Occupational Health Services should follow their usual procedure of ordering vaccine through their nominated hospital pharmacy department. All orders must indicate that they relate to the poultry workers vaccination programme 2006/07.

If there are any other queries regarding availability or supply arrangements for influenza vaccine for this purpose please contact Regional Pharmacy Procurement Service on tel. 028 90 522386.

Obtaining consent

24. It is essential that appropriate information and advice about the influenza vaccine is given and that the person's consent is given. Individuals coming forward for vaccination should be given a reasonable opportunity to discuss any concerns before being immunised. For further information on consent, please see the 2006 edition of *Immunisation against infectious disease* (the Green Book) at

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/14/17/61/04141761.pdf>

A hard copy of the Green Book is also available upon request by telephoning David Nugent, Health Protection Team on 028 90 522059.

25. In the event of a poultry worker being vaccinated in a setting/by a service provider other than their own GP, a sample data release form to inform the poultry worker's GP of vaccination is attached as Annex 6.

