

From the Chief Medical Officer
Dr Henrietta Campbell CB



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

An Roinn

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

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Our Ref: HSS(MD)36-2004
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Dear Colleague

UPDATE ON SUPPLY ARRANGEMENTS FOR INFLUENZA VACCINE

1. The purpose of this letter is to update the urgent communication you received on the 29th September 2004 (Circular: HSS (MD)34-2004) in relation to supply arrangements for influenza vaccine. Earlier in the year GPs and Community Pharmacists arranged to secure supplies of influenza vaccine from one of the major vaccine suppliers. This supply of influenza vaccine, Fluvirin, will now not be available to the Northern Ireland market due to a manufacturing difficulty experienced by the company Chiron. Although the Department does not have responsibility for securing influenza vaccine supplies it recognises the public health priority of the Influenza Immunisation Campaign and hence has stepped in to try and secure contingency supplies of influenza vaccine.

2. Vaccine Supply

The Department has been working with the other UK Health Departments to secure enough influenza vaccine for the Influenza Immunisation Programme in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. The Department has managed to secure adequate supplies for the delivery of the entire Influenza Immunisation Programme in 2004/05, however the new suppliers of influenza vaccine are unable to supply all the vaccine at the one time. As such, the supply arrangements for the vaccine have been as follows:

Week Commencing 28th September 2004:-

- DHSSPS released its contingency stock of 14,000 doses of influenza vaccine.
- Up to 70,000 doses of influenza vaccine available to GP Practices and Community Pharmacists who ordered their influenza vaccine supplies from suppliers other than Chiron.

Week Commencing 4th October 2004:-

- 52,000 doses of influenza vaccine to be delivered to the province to arrive on Thursday 7th October 2004.

Week Commencing 18th October 2004:-

- A further 83,000 doses of influenza vaccine will be delivered.

Week Commencing 25th October 2004:-

- Further allocations of influenza vaccine.

3. There will be sufficient supplies of influenza vaccine available for the Influenza Immunisation Programme through October and November 2004. All vaccine will be delivered to Castlereagh Pharmaceuticals and the new distribution arrangements outlined in our letter of the 29th September 2004 (Circular: HSS(MD)34-2004) still stand.
4. As Fluvirin will not be released to the market for this year's campaign Community Pharmacies must order supplies only from the emergency stocks at Castlereagh Pharmaceuticals. Existing GP prescriptions/stock orders for Fluvirin being held by Community Pharmacists should, in keeping with the above circular, be treated as generic requests and sourced from the emergency supplies.

5. Implications for Primary Care Practices

The Influenza Immunisation Programme was formally launched on the 4th October 2004 and many practices will already have made arrangements for immunising their patients. In addition, the publicity campaign has begun and the public will be aware of the need to get their influenza immunisation if it is indicated for them. However, in view of the supply difficulties we have asked GPs to reprioritise their patients for immunisation as follows –

This is an update of the prioritisation criteria of 29th September 2004:

- a. Children with an 'at-risk' medical condition including those who have previously been admitted to hospital for lower respiratory tract disease
- b. All adults aged over 75.

GPs, when organising clinics, should liaise directly with their local Community Pharmacist in relation to the supply of influenza vaccine for their practice. The Department understands that this may cause some organisational difficulties for primary care practices. However the supply difficulties in relation to influenza vaccine have been beyond the Department's control as it does not generally secure vaccine supplies for the immunisation campaign.

6. The Department will be seeking to reassure the public that influenza immunisation will be offered as normal to all those who require immunisation this year. However, due to the supply arrangements of the vaccine the most vulnerable patients must be protected first ie. young children and those aged over 75. Patients have been advised to make their appointments as usual for their influenza immunisation and practices will be able to advise individual patients whether or not vaccine is available, whether appointments will go ahead or will have to be rescheduled.

7. The Department will continue to work to ensure that influenza vaccine supplies arrive in the province as early as possible. In the meantime some practices may have to revisit their plans for the initial implementation of the Influenza Immunisation Programme to ensure that influenza immunisation is appropriately targeted at the most vulnerable patients. When the Department has further information it will be made available to you.

For further information please contact:

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Yours sincerely

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