

E: seasonalfluprogramme@gov.scot

**SEASONAL FLU ADULT PROGRAMME 2023/24:
INCLUSION OF POULTRY AND OUTBREAK RESPONSE
WORKERS AT HIGHEST RISK IN SCOTLAND**



Dear Colleagues

1. This letter is to advise that poultry workers at highest risk this winter are eligible for a seasonal flu vaccine until the end of the programme on 31 March 2024. This is a preventative measure to reduce the risk of coinfection with human and avian influenza viruses, consequent potential reassortment and theoretical risk of a resulting human transmissible virus.
2. Given the recent avian influenza (H5N1) activity in birds and the number of outbreaks being notified in the UK, the Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) considered a request for advice on seasonal influenza vaccination of poultry workers and those involved in outbreak response.

Eligibility

3. The Committee considered that while the probability of human transmissible infection in a poultry worker was likely to be very low, it was reasonable to offer inactivated seasonal influenza vaccination to people who are considered by JCVI to be **those at highest risk who are undertaking culling or cleaning at confirmed avian influenza outbreak premises or handling live unwell birds**, in order to reduce the risk of reassortment of avian influenza with circulating seasonal human influenza viruses.
4. Further information on the wider Seasonal Flu Programme is contained in the Chief Medical Officer Adult Seasonal Flu Programme 2023-24 letter which was published on 18 April 2023 and can be found [here](#). As in previous years eligibility across the whole adult programme will be reviewed again next year.

**From Chief Medical Officer for Scotland
Chief Nursing Officer
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer**
Professor Sir Gregor Smith
Professor Alex McMahon
Professor Alison Strath

20 December 2023

SGHD/CMO(2023)22

Addresses

For action

Chief Executives, NHS Boards
Medical Directors, NHS Boards
Nurse Directors, NHS Boards
Primary Care Leads, NHS Boards
Directors of Nursing & Midwifery, NHS Boards
Chief Officers of Integration Authorities
Chief Executives, Local Authorities
Directors of Pharmacy
Directors of Public Health
General Practitioners
Practice Nurses
Immunisation Co-ordinators
CPHMs
Scottish Prison Service
Scottish Ambulance Service
Occupational Health Leads

For information

Chairs, NHS Boards
Infectious Disease Consultants
Consultant Physicians
Public Health Scotland
Chief Executive, Public Health Scotland
NHS 24
Chief Veterinary Officer, Scotland
Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer, Scotland

Further Enquiries

Policy Issues

Vaccination Policy Team
ImmunisationPolicy@gov.scot

Medical Issues

Dr Lorna Willocks
Senior Medical Officer
St Andrew's House
Lorna.Willocks@gov.scot

PGD/Pharmaceutical Issues

William Malcolm
Public Health Scotland
William.Malcolm@nhs.scot

Vaccine Supply Issues

National Procurement
nss.vaccineenquiries@nhs.scot

5. We want to reassure Health Boards that we have already procured sufficient vaccine to support uptake for the season, including this new occupational cohort. However ongoing effective management of vaccine supply at a local level will be essential as under the offer, individuals will self-identify and similar to other cohorts, the self-registration portal will be utilised for appointments.

Protection

6. Health Boards may recall that in 2005, JCVI recommended that poultry workers should be offered seasonal flu vaccination, to minimise the theoretical public health risk of avian influenza mixing with seasonal flu and possibly mutating into a pandemic flu strain. Vaccination was offered in seasons 2006/07 through to 2009/10 before the offer ceased, with uptake during that time being low across Scotland.
7. The flu vaccine only offers protection against seasonal flu viruses, and offers no protection against avian influenza. This latest offer is not linked to historical vaccinations and should not be compared in terms of delivery and approach

Green Book Chapter

8. Information about flu vaccinations and eligible cohorts is available [here](#). Further information can be found in [Chapter](#) 19 of the Green Book.

Vaccine Information

9. The vaccine of choice for this occupational group is QIVc - Cell-based Quadrivalent Influenza Vaccine (Seqirus). Some people may already be eligible for a flu vaccine if they have a health condition or they are aged 50 and over. Individuals only need one flu vaccination each season, however we recognise that they should be offered an age appropriate vaccine if for example they are also aged 65 and over (and in this instance aQIV is preferred over QIVc).

Self-Referral Appointment

10. Those eligible will be able to make an appointment, at a time suitable using the online booking portal, at a clinic in their area.
11. In the event of enquiries, eligible people should be encouraged to visit www.nhsinform.scot/wintervaccines to book an appointment. If they are unable to access the online booking portal, they should call the Vaccination Helpline on **0800 030 8013**.

NHS Board Health Protection Teams

12. Immunisation teams may wish to engage with Health Protection Leads locally to identify sites and groups of people who may be involved in outbreak situations or in clean-up operations thus maximising possibilities to promote the offer at relevant local sites.

Resources for NHS Boards

13. To help raise awareness of this vaccine offer, Boards are encouraged to use the template attached at Annex A to cascade information about this offer to eligible people in their area where known. This letter gives information on how people can access the online portal or telephone the National Helpline to arrange an appointment.
14. To assist further in raising awareness, PHS will make available posters for use to display in appropriate settings encouraging people to take up the offer of flu vaccination this season. The blank areas can be tailored to provide details on where to get vaccinated or promote the online booking portal. Please see Annex B for an illustration of this resource.
15. Flu resources, including leaflets, are available in a range of languages and further information can be found at [Flu vaccine | NHS inform](#). Requests for other translations can be requested from PHS at phs.otherformats@phs.scot.
16. PHS have produced and will make available a full range of national accessible information materials to support informed consent for all eligible cohorts.

National Protocols & PGDs

17. The Scottish Government National Protocol for administration of Inactivated influenza vaccine and the national specimen patient group direction Inactivated Influenza produced by Public Health Scotland are both being updated to reflect the addition of highest risk poultry workers into the Programme this year. These will be shared with Boards as soon as they are finalised.

Action

18. NHS Boards are asked to note and support this offer by implementing the arrangements outlined in this letter.
19. Thank you to you and your colleagues for all your assistance with the planning and delivery of the Seasonal Flu Programme 2023-24.

Yours sincerely,

Gregor Smith

Professor Sir Gregor Smith
Chief Medical Officer

Alex McMahon

Alex McMahon
Chief Nursing Officer

Alison Strath

Alison Strath
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer

Template Letter for NHS Boards

Dear [Name]

I am writing to you to advise that poultry workers at highest at risk are entitled to a free seasonal flu vaccination as part of the Scottish Government's Seasonal Flu Immunisation Programme this year.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) considered that given the recent avian influenza (H5N1) activity in birds in the UK, it would be reasonable to offer seasonal flu vaccination to **those at highest risk who are undertaking culling or cleaning at confirmed avian influenza outbreak premises or handling live unwell birds.**

It will give eligible workers the best protection against normal seasonal influenza, which typically occurs over the winter months. It may also contribute as a public health measure to prevent a new pandemic strain of influenza from developing, in the very unlikely event that a new strain of influenza could arise if the usual human seasonal flu and avian influenza viruses are present, together allowing the viruses to mix.

Please note that this flu vaccine offers good protection against normal seasonal human flu; it offers no protection against avian influenza.

Important Hygiene Measures

Good hygiene is always essential and the risk can be reduced by making sure attention is paid to some simple hygiene measures, such as hand washing after contact with poultry, and before eating and drinking.

Compliance with relevant personal protective equipment remains important (and vaccination does not reduce the need for this).

Seasonal flu is an illness caused by a virus. Because flu viruses are always changing, people need the new vaccine each year. Appointments can be booked on the booking portal on NHS inform www.nhsinform.scot/wintervaccines or by calling the Helpline on 0800 030 8013.

Yours faithfully

Example of poster for display:

[Flu vaccine for poultry workers - Publications - Public Health Scotland](#)