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Dear Colleague

SCOTTISH IMMUNISATION PROGRAMMES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

1. Further to the CMO letter issued on 20 March highlighting that immunisation programmes should not be classified as non-urgent work, we are writing to provide you with further information about managing immunisation programmes in Scotland during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. During this time, it is crucial to maintain our national immunisation programmes, where safely and practicably possible. This will assist in avoiding outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases and allow us to provide important protection to children and other vulnerable groups. It will also avoid increasing further, the numbers of patients requiring health services and hospitalisation from vaccine-preventable diseases.
3. Whilst it is crucial to maintain our routine immunisation programmes, especially at this time, we also recognise that delivery of some programmes, such as school based immunisation programmes and shingles immunisation for adults aged 70 and over, will be logistically difficult due to COVID-19 restrictions and official advice. We would therefore like to take the opportunity to set out our expectations for the immunisation programmes in Scotland, whilst taking into account COVID-19 official advice.

Infant and preschool vaccinations

4. Routine childhood immunisations should continue as a high priority, where possible and safe to do so.
5. Providing those attending for vaccination (including parents of babies) are well, are not displaying symptoms of COVID-19 or other infections and are not self-isolating because they are contacts of suspected COVID-19 cases, immunisation should proceed.

**From the
Interim Chief Medical Officer**
Dr Gregor Smith
Chief Nursing Officer
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For action:

Practice Managers
Practice Nurses
General Practitioners
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For information:

Scottish General Practitioners
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COVID-19 Infection prevention and control – personal protective equipment

6. Current guidance relating to infection prevention and control including personal protective equipment can be found at the Public Health Scotland (Health Protection Scotland) COVID-19 website and should be referred to:

<https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/a-to-z-of-topics/covid-19/>

7. The COVID-19 response is evolving rapidly and guidance will change as information becomes available. Practitioners should refer to the website to ensure that they are accessing the most current guidance.

Communications for parents

8. Please ensure that parents are made aware of the importance of vaccination and understand that appointments should be attended. Vaccination appointments are exceptional circumstances to the advice to *Stay at Home*. Parents should be directed to www.nhsinform.scot/immunisation for more information. They can also follow <https://twitter.com/NHSImmuniseScot> for updated advice on immunisation.

Neonatal programmes

9. Neonatal immunisation for Hepatitis B and BCG should continue.

School programmes

10. As Scottish schools are currently closed, school programmes continue to be temporarily suspended. It is important that sessions are quickly rescheduled when schools re-open.

Adult programmes

11. Immunisations for pregnant women and post-natal women should continue (pertussis and MMR).

12. The routine shingles programme has been suspended temporarily in line with the current COVID-19 advice for adults aged 70 and over. However, if a patient is well and presents for any other scheduled appointment, they can be opportunistically vaccinated.

13. Pneumococcal vaccination for those in risk groups from 2 to 64 years of age and those aged 65 years and over should continue (subject to supplies of PPV23 and clinical prioritisation). Those aged 70 years and older can be opportunistically vaccinated if presenting for another scheduled appointment (subject to supplies of PPV23 and clinical prioritisation).

At-risk individuals

14. Children and adults in at-risk clinical groups should continue to receive immunisations in line with advice in the Green Book.

Travel vaccines

15. In light of COVID-19 travel advice and restrictions, travel vaccination is a low priority and should only be offered if essential.

Influenza Vaccination Programme 2020-21

16. The influenza programme 2020-21 will be strategically important in the context of the COVID-19 situation, and planning for it should continue as a priority. Our annual influenza vaccination programme CMO letter will be issued as soon as possible.

17. In light of COVID-19 it is imperative that we maximise protection for our population from preventable diseases, and we recognise that this would not be possible without the ongoing support of those staff involved in the delivery of our immunisation programmes.

18. We continue to acknowledge and appreciate the extraordinary work to date of all NHS staff in responding to this global outbreak of COVID-19, and applaud all health staff for their continued hard work and dedication in responding to the increased pressure during this rapidly evolving situation.

Yours sincerely,

Gregor Smith

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Chief Nursing

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