

Operating Protocol for Flu Vaccine Coordination

30 October 2018

Purpose

The purpose of this note is to set out details of the operating model that we are putting in place across the NHS in England to ensure effective delivery of the flu vaccine programme. This builds on previous guidance issued on delivery of adjuvanted trivalent vaccine (aTIV) in the flu programme.

Background

Following advice from the Joint Committee on Immunisation and Vaccination (JCVI) and Public Health England (PHE), NHS England wrote to GPs, CCGs, community pharmacies and NHS trusts on 5 February 2018 stating the recommended flu vaccines that should be used in 2018-19:

- Adjuvanted trivalent (aTIV) is the recommended vaccine for people 65 years and over;
- Quadrivalent inactivated influenza vaccine (QIV) is the recommended vaccine for adults under 65 in at risk groups and healthcare workers;
- Non-adjuvanted TIV is not recommended for any group.

There is currently only one manufacturer of the aTIV vaccine – Seqirus. Whilst there is enough vaccine supply available to the NHS in England to meet expected demand, it was necessary to have phased deliveries in 2018-19 to enable the vaccine to be available for this year's flu season.

NHS England has set out in previous communications that, for 2018-19 the aTIV deliveries to all practices and pharmacies will be phased; 40% being available in September, 20% in October and 40% in November. This phasing is slightly later than the delivery pattern of vaccine in 2017/18, and we understand that the older population is normally vaccinated early in the season. For this reason we are putting in place clear protocols around the monitoring and oversight of flu vaccinations this year.

NHS England issued a Q&A about staged delivery to practices and pharmacies in March 2018 confirming this and advising them to begin plans for vaccination clinics based on this schedule.

Every GP practice that ordered before the stated April deadlines should have received their own delivery schedule in August 2018. Seqirus has advised all stock should be distributed to GP practices and pharmacists by 17 November.

Guidance was issued in August and September 2018 from NHS England relating to delivery of the flu vaccine programme:

- Letter and guidance for GPs and Community Pharmacies August 2018
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/flu-vaccination-programme-delivery-guidance-2018-19/>
- Local guidance for NHSE, CCGs, GPs and Community Pharmacies September 2018
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/local-actions-to-ensure-ativ-is-offered-to-individuals-aged-65-years-and-over/>

The arrangements set out in this paper build on the guidance that has previously been issued and aim to confirm the arrangements which are now expected to be in place across the system.

Surveillance System

We have obtained CCG and practice level data on supplies of aTIV that have been distributed from the manufacturer Seqirus. We also have practice level data on eligible cohorts and numbers vaccinated (via Immform data weekly sentinel survey). This data is currently incomplete as data from practices using the EMIS system is not available. However, we expect the data quality to improve when EMIS begins to upload data from 1 November. Where practice level data on supply is available we are able to cross-reference it against the data on practice population and uptake to give an overall assessment of local supply and demand.

This practice level data is experimental (see caveats on spreadsheets) and we will work to improve data quality, but it provides a tool to enable:

- Overall levels of supply nationally to be monitored; and
- Targeting of areas where there are potentially localised supply issues.

Data from Seqirus will be made available to NHS England on a weekly basis. Updates to the national data should occur every Monday.

National Coordination

A national Flu coordination group has been put in place which serves to provide high level surveillance over the supply and demand situation nationally and to coordinate any actions across NHS England, PHE and the Department of Health.

Regional Coordination

There is a named flu coordinator in place in each NHS England region who is to be able to act as a point for liaison between NHS England and its local Public Health Commissioning Teams.

Every NHS England Public Health Commissioning Team has a named flu lead in place with telephone and e-mail details which have been shared with CCG local coordinators.

Local Coordination

A named CCG flu coordinator is in place in every CCG and their email and telephone contacts have been cascaded to GP practices locally. A copy of the letter to GP practices is included as an Annex to this operational update. The role of the CCG flu coordinator is to:

1. Monitor current supply and take up of vaccine across local practices using nationally available sources of data supplemented with local intelligence, to include;
 - a. prioritised phone calls to practices where there are risks/actual lack of vaccine supply to meet demand;
 - b. receiving escalation calls from practices that have shortage of supply;
 - c. maintaining this data in a spreadsheet for you practices and supplement with any local intelligence/data.
2. To continue to maintain details of the supply available locally on a practice by practice basis and to continue to develop local data through gaining additional information/assurance from practices where national data indicates that there may be a shortage of vaccine:
 - a. where uptake rates appear to be high compared to the volume of doses supplied;

- b. where no uptake data is available, but where stocks supplied appear to be low comparative to the overall size of the population.
3. To support GP practices (see below) where issues relating to the availability of supply are identified.
4. Identify and track where a surplus of vaccine may be available locally, including the integration of data from community pharmacy suppliers into CCG tracking; proactive calls to local pharmacies near to practices with short supply to test whether any surplus exists.
5. To support GP practices (see below) where issues relating to the availability of supply are identified by track where a surplus of vaccine may be available locally, including from other practices and local community pharmacies, and agreeing the transfer of supply where appropriate.
6. Ensure escalation of concerns about local stock availability to the named flu lead in NHS England's Public Health Commissioning Teams.

Support for GP Practices

Where concerns about the availability of vaccine emerge the CCG coordinators are able to respond by using several possible control mechanisms:

1. Directing practices to community pharmacies or other practices where there is an excess of vaccine locally;
2. Facilitating transfer between those with supply and those with a gap in supply, where help is needed to arrange this;
3. Escalation to Regional and National level to investigate redirection of supplier deliveries to locations with highest priority.

Community Teams

Some Community Services Trusts provide flu vaccination via community nursing teams. Where this is the case and where they have identified vaccine shortages (from a recent national assurance exercise) CCG coordinators should liaise with the Trusts to help address such shortages.

APPENDIX 1

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ORDERING ADJUVANTED TRIVALENT FLU VACCINE FOR 2018-19

1. Which flu vaccine should I be ordering for those aged 65 years and over for 2018-19?

On 5 February NHS England stated that GP practices and community pharmacy providers should offer the **adjuvanted trivalent influenza vaccine (aTIV)** to all those aged 65 and over in 2018/19. This is the most effective vaccine currently available for this group. This is based on current Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) advice on aTIV that was published in the Green Book in December 2017.

2. Which flu vaccine should I be ordering for those aged under 65 years for 2018-19?

In the letter of 5 February NHS England stated that GP practices and community pharmacy providers should offer adults aged under 65 in clinical at-risk groups the **quadrivalent influenza vaccine (QIV)** which protects against four strains of flu. This reflects updated Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) advice on QIV that was published in the Green Book in October 2017.

3. Why is aTIV preferred to a quadrivalent vaccine for people aged 65 years and over?

In those people aged 65 and over aTIV has been shown to be more efficacious than non-adjuvanted vaccine. aTIV is therefore preferable to a non-adjuvanted QIV in this age group. There is currently no adjuvanted quadrivalent vaccine available for use in the UK. In other eligible populations aged under 65 the quadrivalent influenza vaccine has been shown to be more effective compared to the trivalent influenza vaccine; aTIV is not licensed for those aged under 65s.

4. When will adjuvanted trivalent flu vaccine (aTIV) be delivered?

Seqirus, the manufacturer of aTIV has confirmed that they can supply enough vaccine for the population aged 65 years and over in the UK. To meet the additional demand resulting from using the most effective vaccine, that is aTIV, the manufacturer has increased planned production and **extended the window for ordering to 12 April 2018**. Delivery to providers across the UK will be phased; 4 million doses will be available for delivery in September, 2 million doses by mid-October and 3 million doses in early November. GP Practices and pharmacies will need to order in line with an accurate forecast of the vaccines needed to cover the population aged 65 years and over to avoid wastage of vaccines by over-ordering. From May onwards, Seqirus will communicate to all customers more precise details around their expected volume by drop (month) to help GPs/Pharmacies to plan their clinics. The start of the influenza season varies each year – usually from December onwards. It is better to be vaccinated as early in the vaccine campaign as possible up to November, bearing in mind it takes two weeks to develop an immune response. In 2017-18 around 65% of those aged 65 years and over had taken up the offer of immunisation by mid-November, this rose to 72.6% by the end of January.

5. What is the proposed delivery schedule for adjuvanted trivalent flu vaccine aTIV in 2018?

The window for ordering has been extended to 12 April 2018. The manufacturer of aTIV has advised UK deliveries will be made during September, October and early November.

6. How do I plan my clinics when all the vaccine is not available in September?

Phased deliveries will require additional planning but will ensure that patients benefit from the most effective vaccines, in good time. We will aim to provide additional information once ordering is complete and further information on the delivery is available.

7. Would it be better to immunise with QIV instead of waiting for supplies of aTIV?

Given the clear evidence about the potential clinical benefits, aTIV is a more appropriate choice than QIV vaccine for older people and is the clear recommendation to GP practices and community pharmacy providers based on JCVI advice.

8. In what presentation will aTIV be supplied?

Due to the increased volume of aTIV to be produced, the manufacturer will, for the 2018/19 season only, deliver most of the supply in pre-filled syringes (Luer Lock) with a separate needle which will require attachment prior to administration of the vaccine. From the 2019/20 season onwards, aTIV will be supplied in the more usual presentation of a pre-filled syringe with an attached needle. The vaccine can be ordered in packs of 10 and there is a limited amount of single packs.

9. People who have their 65th birthday before 31st March 2019 will be eligible for influenza vaccine so may not be 65 when they are immunised, which vaccine should they have?

Public Health England in consultation with NHS England are of the opinion that it is appropriate to offer aTIV "off label" to those becoming 65 before 31st March 2019 and who are thus eligible to receive influenza vaccine under the current definition of the 'over 65' group. Although aTIV is not licensed in those less than 65 years of age "off label" use is an option. The Public Health England (PHE) Patient Group Direction (PGD) for inactivated influenza vaccine for 2018/19 is likely to incorporate this off label indication. This will be confirmed later when the PGD has completed the authorisation process.

10. The letter of 5 February recommended QIV for 'under 65s in clinical risk groups', does this apply to other eligible groups such as unpaid carers?

Yes, other eligible groups such as unpaid carers (provided they are under 65 and therefore not also eligible for aTIV) should be offered QIV as they are likely to derive greater clinical benefit from this compared to TIV.

11. Which vaccines are being used for children in 2018-19?

Vaccines for all eligible children aged from 6 months to 17 years will be supplied centrally through the ImmForm website (Fluenz Tetra® and quadrivalent inactivated flu vaccines). As for previous seasons, GPs do not need to directly order any vaccines for this age group from manufacturers/suppliers. The licence has recently changed on two quadrivalent inactivated vaccines and they are now licensed from 6 months of age. Public Health England are currently undertaking the procurement process for quadrivalent inactivated vaccines for children in the 2018/19 season and details of the vaccines will be confirmed when this process has been completed.

APPENDIX 2

TEMPLATE LETTER TO GPs (do not use this copy for circulation)

Dear Colleagues

Guidance for GP practices in England: advice for patients aged 65 years and over regarding 2018/19 flu vaccination

The adjuvanted trivalent vaccine (aTIV) has been recommended for people over 65 years as it gives the best available protection against flu. The manufacturer of aTIV, Seqirus, has confirmed there is enough vaccine supply available to the NHS in England to meet expected demand. By mid-November, the complete order for 8.3 million doses of aTIV will have been delivered to GP practices, pharmacies and other providers in England, so vaccine availability in total exceeds anticipated requirements. In 2017/18, around 7.4million over 65s were immunised against flu.

As previously advised (see Annex for existing guidance) it was necessary to have phased deliveries in 2018-19 to enable the vaccine to be available for this year's flu season. For 2018-19 the aTIV phased deliveries to all practices were on a schedule of: 40% being available in September, 20% in October and the final 40% in November. Because this phasing may be different to patients' past experiences of when vaccination can take place we are advising two key actions for all practices:

- GP practices are advised to actively encourage patients to receive the most effective vaccine available to their age group; including ensuring patients are booked into future clinics or appointments that are scheduled in line with planned deliveries
- If GP practices are experiencing any issues regarding supply of aTIV/Fluad, or have low stock, you should notify this to your nominated CCG co-ordinator [ADD LOCAL CONTACT INFORMATION HERE]. They will be able to provide advice and guidance on whether vaccine is available locally at other GP surgeries or pharmacies.

Patients can be reassured that as flu usually becomes more common from December onwards; the remaining over 65s can receive their flu jab in November and still benefit from its protective effect. Public Health England has published a leaflet that will support your communication with patients aged 65 years and over. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flu-vaccination-for-people-aged-65-and-older>

We recognise that for some practices there will be an intensive period of work to undertake flu vaccination clinics, using the last phase of deliveries over the next few weeks. We thank GP practices and all NHS staff for their continued efforts and hard work to support this year's flu vaccination campaign.

Yours sincerely

Annex

NHS England and Public Health England recommend that it is generally better to wait to have the flu jab that is most effective for the relevant age group, even if that means having the jab slightly later in the year than in previous years. NHS England issued a Q&A about staged delivery to practices and pharmacies in March 2018 confirming this and advising them to begin plans for vaccination clinics to be organised based on this schedule.

Every GP practice that ordered before the stated April deadlines should have received their own delivery schedule in August 2018. Further guidance was issued in August¹ and September² 2018

¹Letter and guidance for GPs and Community Pharmacies August 2018
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/flu-vaccination-programme-delivery-guidance-2018-19/>

²Local guidance for NHSE, CCGs, GPs and Community Pharmacies September 2018

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/local-actions-to-ensure-ativ-is-offered-to-individuals-aged-65-years-and-over/>