



# Coronavirus Pandemic – Impact on Flu Vaccination Service 2020-2021



The UK flu vaccination programme for 2020-2021 would usually commence from the beginning of September 2020 and run until the end of March 2021.

In light of the current pandemic and taking into account social distancing measures together with the need for PPE, we need to consider the operational measures that will be needed to protect the public from flu and also protect pharmacists who may wish to provide the service.

## **Background**

The NHS community pharmacy flu vaccination programme is predominantly an English issue. Wales does commission the service, but take-up is limited. Scotland and Northern Ireland trialled the service in 2019. The procedures detailed below refer mainly to the English programme, but the generic principles are applicable across the UK.

September may seem a long way away, but as this document explains, plans for the 2020-2021 season flu vaccination programme started in September 2019 and some companies have already (as at 29.04.2020) sold all their production quota for the UK.

For the 2019-2020 season, approximately 1.5 million NHS flu vaccinations were administered in community pharmacies. Many pharmacies also offer non-NHS paid for vaccinations (essentially to anyone who requests it and where it is not contraindicated).

The annual England flu letter is usually published at the end of March. We are still awaiting the flu letter for the 2020-2021 season. Following the March letter, the Annual NHS England PGD would be signed off sometime during June and this would form the legal basis on which English pharmacies could take part in the NHS funded Flu programme which would usually commence from the 1<sup>st</sup> September.

## **Training (Initial information which may change)**

Any pharmacist that offers a vaccination service would need to complete both initial face-to-face training (if they had never offered a vaccination service before) together with completion of an online assessment. In addition, each pharmacist would need to complete a Declaration of Competence (which requires completion of other modules including consultation skills and so on) before offering this vaccination service.

As there will be no face to face training this year, only those that offered a vaccination service in the last 2 years can offer it for 2020-2021. Health Education England, in conjunction with Public Health England is offering a free online refresher (mandatory and has to be completed every year) as part of the process.

## Experience from New Zealand and Australia

The Southern hemisphere winter flu programme started earlier than usual and there has been a significant increase in demand. Many pharmacies have seen a doubling in the number of patients that have come in for vaccination.

Managing the supply chain and stocks has proved challenging.

In addition, the logistics of vaccination, including the 15-minute post vaccination observation time has proved difficult.

## Considerations for UK Flu Programme 2020-2021

- Consider starting vaccinations earlier, say from 1<sup>st</sup> August rather than 1<sup>st</sup> September whilst weather is warmer and less people have seasonal colds.
- Vaccinations by booked appointments so that social distancing can be observed.
- All preliminary forms including consent forms to be sent to patient (by email or post) and completed prior to arrival at pharmacy.
- Consideration of reserving early vaccination season only for highest risk groups (for example those over 65 or residents in care homes)
- Full PPE to be provided to all vaccinators.
- Full risk assessment of all vaccinators so as to protect them from risk of catching COVID-19 especially if they are in high risk groups or living with vulnerable family members.
- Modified SOPs that reflect the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to protect high risk groups within the population and also the pharmacy team.
- Consideration of creating hubs for mass vaccinations (for example in community halls where social distancing can be observed more easily).
- Pharmacies to work co-operatively rather than competitively in the provision of this service.