

Date: 17th June 2024

To: Principals of all Primary and Post Primary Schools in Northern Ireland

Dear Colleague,

FLU VACCINATION PROGRAMME 2024/25 FOR ALL CHILDREN

In autumn 2024 we will be offering the influenza (flu) vaccine to all children in P1 to P7 and Year 8 to Year 12. This letter and attached document include important information about the campaign.

On behalf of the Public Health Agency (PHA) and the Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust school nursing teams, I would like to thank all schools in Northern Ireland for their help and co-operation in delivering last autumn's flu vaccine programme to all primary and post primary school children.

Flu is an unpredictable virus that can kill many people during a flu season. The flu vaccine is the best defence we have against it. Vaccination for children is based on a recommendation of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), the independent expert advisory group that advises the Government on vaccination.

The aim of the annual school-based flu vaccination programme is to protect children against flu and reduce their time off school due to sickness. Children can play a key role in the transmission of flu in the community, including to those who may be at higher risk from the complications of flu such as the elderly. The programme will also help to protect staff working within schools. Research has shown vaccinating large numbers of children has reduced the circulation of flu in our community, reduced the number of GP consultations for flu-like illness for both the vaccinated children and the wider community and has also reduced hospital admissions from flu. Delivering the programme through schools makes it more accessible to pupils which results in higher vaccine uptake levels.

Last year there was further decline in flu vaccine uptake rates compared to previous years, with only 68.6% of our primary school children and 56.5% of secondary school children in Northern Ireland receiving the flu vaccine. This was a decline of 2.1% and 4.5% respectively.

Improving Your Health and Wellbeing

In order for us to achieve the highest uptake possible for flu vaccines in children in Northern Ireland, we would encourage you to help us in promoting all vaccination programmes including flu, amongst your staff, children and parents.

A regional video has been developed to raise awareness of the importance of the flu vaccine and encourages parents to provide consent for their children to be immunised by the school nursing team attending school. We would be grateful if the video could be shared on your school website and any social media channels your school utilise. The link for the video is: <https://vimeo.com/452145182>.

There has always been a very good history of schools working closely with the PHA and HSC Trust school nursing teams as demonstrated by the excellent cooperation received from schools. Maximising the flu vaccine uptake rate will only be possible with continued assistance from schools in facilitating school nursing teams to deliver the vaccination programme. We are aware that there can sometimes be a few operational challenges such as last-minute changes to scheduled school visits or delays in returning consent forms to the school health teams.

To try and help things run smoothly again this year and mitigate some of these issues we have developed and attached the PHA document: '*School-based flu vaccination programme 2024-25: information for schools*' which sets out details on how you can support the school nursing teams. **We would appreciate if you could review the document in preparation for the delivery of the 2024 flu programme. We anticipate the programme will run from September 2024 onwards (please note this date may be subject to change).**

Your local HSC Trust school nursing team will be in contact with you to agree the schedule for planned delivery in the autumn term. All enquiries about the flu programme should be directed to the HSC Trust school nurses, and the school should not accept consent withdrawals or declines on behalf of parents. Parents can be redirected to the school nursing teams.

Many thanks in anticipation of your help and cooperation in this matter.

Yours sincerely



Louise Flanagan
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Public Health Agency