

E: immunisationprogrammes@gov.scot

Dear Colleague

Details of the Shingles (Herpes Zoster) Immunisation Programme 2020/21

1. We are writing to:
 - advise that the temporary suspension of the programme will be lifted from 1 September 2020 and;
 - provide information on the 2020/21 shingles immunisation programme (1 September 2020 to 31 August 2021).

Background

2. A CMO letter issued on 9 April 2020 ([https://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/cmo/CMO\(2020\)10.pdf](https://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/cmo/CMO(2020)10.pdf)) provided information about managing immunisation programmes in Scotland during the COVID-19 pandemic. It highlighted the temporary suspension of the shingles immunisation programme, in line with the COVID-19 advice at that time for adults aged 70 and over, although opportunistic vaccination could take place if a patient was well and presented for any other scheduled appointment.

2020/21 Programme

3. From 1 September, the temporary suspension of the programme will be lifted. Whilst the Autumn months present a good opportunity to vaccinate eligible patients against both flu and shingles, shingles is not a seasonal infection. The shingles vaccine can be administered at any time of the year, it does not need to be given at the same time as the flu vaccine. There will be opportunities for those eligible to be vaccinated once the flu immunisation programme has concluded.
4. This winter, the seasonal flu vaccination programme will be strategically important in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is therefore essential that we help to protect the most vulnerable and ensure that the impact of potential co-circulation of flu and COVID-19 is kept to an absolute minimum by focusing on administering the flu vaccine and maximising uptake in eligible groups.
5. If GP practices have capacity and decide to offer the shingles vaccine at the same time as the flu vaccine they may do so but please prioritise maximising flu vaccine uptake. Please also be aware that there are important differences in contraindications for the two vaccines.

From the Chief Medical
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Dr Gregor Smith
Professor Fiona McQueen
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SGHD/CMO(2020) 21

For action

General Practitioners
Practice Nurses
Primary Care Leads, NHS
Boards
NHS Board Immunisation
Coordinators
NHS Board Medical
Directors
Nurse Directors, NHS
Boards
Directors of Public Health
Infectious Disease
Consultants
CPHMs

For information

NHS Board Chief
Executives
Directors of Pharmacy
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Health Protection Scotland
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2020/21 programme eligibility

6. Eligibility for the 2020/21 programme is as follows:
- Routine vaccination of 70 year olds (defined by the patient's age at 1 September 2020); and
 - Opportunistic vaccination of 71–79 year olds who have not previously been vaccinated (defined by patients age at 1 September 2020) particularly those patients affected by the temporary suspension of the programme.
 - Vaccine should not be offered to anyone aged 80 and over, even if they have previously been eligible.

Live vaccine

7. Zostavax® contains a **live, attenuated virus** derived from the Oka/Merck strain of varicella zoster virus. **This vaccine is contraindicated in some patients (eg immunosuppressed).**

Administration

8. **The vaccine must not be given intravascularly.** The Zostavax® vaccine can be administered by intramuscular (IM) or subcutaneous (SC) injection, preferably in the deltoid region of the upper arm. Intramuscular injection is the preferred route of administration, as injection-site adverse reactions were significantly less frequent in those who received the vaccine via this route of administration. For individuals with a bleeding disorder, Zostavax should be given by deep subcutaneous injection to reduce the risk of bleeding.

Screening tool for contraindications to shingles vaccine

9. To support the shingles vaccination programme, an easy to use screening tool has been created for use by healthcare practitioners to help determine eligibility and screen for contraindications. This can be accessed at:
<https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/web-resources-container/screening-tool-for-contraindications-for-shingles-vaccine/>

Immunisation against Infectious Disease (The Green Book)

10. The shingles chapter (chapter 28a) within Immunisation against Infectious Disease (The Green Book) can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/shingles-herpes-zoster-the-green-book-chapter-28a>.

Action

11. GP Practices and NHS Boards are asked to note the contents of this letter, and to take action as necessary, to support and implement this important immunisation programme. **Annex A** to this letter provides additional details about the shingles immunisation programme. **Annex B** contains communication materials for patients and education resources for registered healthcare practitioners.
12. Thank you to you and your practice staff for your continued support in ensuring vulnerable individuals are protected against this painful disease.

Yours sincerely

Gregor Smith

Fiona McQueen

Rose Marie Parr

Gregor Smith
**Interim Chief Medical
Officer**

Fiona McQueen
Chief Nursing Officer

Rose Marie Parr
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer

ADDITIONAL DETAILS ABOUT SHINGLES IMMUNISATION PROGRAMME

Eligibility

13. The shingles vaccine can be administered at any time of the year – it does not need to be given at the same time as the seasonal flu vaccination. If GP practices decide to offer the shingles vaccine at the same time as the flu vaccine, please also be aware that there are important differences in contraindications for the two vaccines.
14. Vaccination should be routinely offered to people aged 70 years, and those aged 71-79 years, not previously vaccinated with Zostavax®. This is defined by the patient's age on 1st September 2020. A cohort of patients who were aged 70 years last year may have missed the opportunity to be vaccinated due to temporary suspension of the programme during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic.
15. Vaccine should not be offered to anyone aged 80 and over, even if they have previously been eligible.
16. NHS Boards and GP practices are reminded of their responsibilities in the vaccination of eligible persons who are housebound and those in care homes and long-term hospital care.

Vaccine supply

17. Central vaccine supply of Zostavax® must only be used for those in the eligible cohorts.

Call and recall

18. There will be no centralised letter for the shingles vaccination programme, Patients should be directed to <https://www.nhsinform.scot/shingles> for further information about the vaccine and eligibility. We continue to encourage all GP practices and/or NHS Boards to put in place call and recall arrangements by way of a letter. A template letter will be available from 1 September 2020 to help with this (see <http://www.publichealthscotland.scot/shingles>).

Uptake rates in 2019/20

19. It is important that every effort is made to ensure uptake is as high as possible. The benefits of shingles vaccine should be communicated and vaccination made as easily accessible as possible for those eligible. The cumulative uptake in Scotland for the 2019/20 programme (September to March inclusive) are:
 - 39.3% for the age 70 cohort (compared to 36.8% in the same time period 2018/19)

Vaccine usage

20. Full details on use, dosage, administration, concomitant administration with other vaccines, contraindications, consent and reporting of adverse reactions with Zostavax® is set out in chapter 28a of the Green Book. This is available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/shingles-herpes-zoster-the-green-book-chapter-28a>.

Patient Group Direction (PGD)

21. A national specimen Patient Group Direction (PGD) for administration of Zostavax® is available on the Health Protection Scotland website at: <https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/publications/patient-group-directions/>

Supply

22. Zostavax® should be ordered through NHS vaccine holding centres. GP practices and vaccine holding centres must liaise closely to ensure sufficient vaccine is available prior to the scheduling of vaccination appointments. GP practices should ensure that stock with the shortest expiry date is used first to preserve vaccine supplies.

Storage

23. Vaccines should be stored in the original packaging at +2°C to +8°C and protected from light. All vaccines may be sensitive to some extent to heat and cold. Heat speeds up the decline in potency of most vaccines, thus reducing their shelf life. Do not freeze. Freezing may cause increased reactogenicity and loss of potency for some vaccines. It can also cause hairline cracks in the container, leading to contamination of the contents.

Vaccine stock management

24. Please ensure sufficient fridge space is available for the vaccine. Each site holding vaccine is asked to review current stocks of all vaccines. No more than 2 to 4 weeks of stock is recommended, and higher stock levels should be reduced to this level. A review of available fridge space will be necessary to ensure adequate storage capacity at the start of the programme.
25. Effective management of vaccines throughout the supply chain is essential to reduce vaccine wastage, including the use of appropriate cool boxes/bags for transporting the vaccine during home/care home visits. Local protocols should be in place to keep vaccine wastage to a minimum. Even small percentage reductions in vaccine wastage have a major impact on the financing of vaccine supplies.

Reporting of adverse reactions

26. Suspected adverse drug reactions (ADR) to vaccines should be reported via the Yellow Card Scheme (www.mhra.gov.uk/yellowcard). Chapter 9 of the Green Book gives detailed guidance about which ADRs to report and how to do so. Additionally, Chapter 8 of the Green Book provides detailed advice on managing adverse events following vaccination. Information on the side effects of Zostavax® is available in Chapter 28a of the Green Book. These chapters are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england/series/immunisation-against-infectious-disease-the-green-book>.

GP contractual arrangements

27. For information on payments associated with the shingles vaccination programme please refer to the forthcoming circular from Primary Care Division, Scottish Government.

COMMUNICATIONS - INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS AND EDUCATION RESOURCES FOR REGISTERED HEALTHCARE PRACTITIONERS

Communication materials for patients

1. An updated information leaflet on shingles vaccination programme will be provided by Public Health Scotland and will be available online from September 1st 2020 – patients should be direct to www.nhsinform.scot/shingles to access this and further information about the vaccine.
2. These materials, along with a template shingles invitation letter and screensaver (to display on GP practice screens and websites), will be available to download online from 1 September 2020 at www.publichealthscotland.scot/shingles.
3. The leaflet will also be available in Arabic, Mandarin and Polish, and in Easy Read, BSL and audio formats at www.nhsinform.scot/shingles (under 'Further Information'). Public Health Scotland is happy to consider requests for other languages and formats. Please contact 0131 314 5300 or email nhs.phs-otherformats@nhs.net

Workforce education resources for registered healthcare practitioners

4. NHS Education for Scotland, in partnership with Health Protection Scotland, has produced educational resources for registered healthcare practitioners. These resources will be available at <http://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/education-and-training/by-theme-initiative/public-health/health-protection/immunisation/shingles.aspx>