

Gateway Ref: 12421

13 August 2009

Dear Colleague

Further details about the H1N1 swine flu vaccination programme 2009-2010

Early details of the H1N1 swine flu vaccination strategy were circulated to PCTs in a letter¹ from the Director of Immunisation in June, and further information was provided at the recent held in London². Today we are publishing the JCVI advice, simultaneously in all four nations about the priority groups for H1N1 vaccine. Ministers have accepted this advice and are now working with BMA and NHS organisations to reach a comprehensive swine flu vaccine implementation for this first stage of the programme. Preparations continue to be made to extend the programme beyond these initial priority groups and JCVI will consider this matter further and report back in due course.

Vaccine supplies and licensing

The Department of Health (DH) has placed orders for H1N1 swine flu vaccine with GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) and with Baxter. The vast majority of the initial deliveries are expected to be GSK vaccine. We therefore intend to supply the NHS with the GSK vaccine primarily, and expect that there will be enough to vaccinate all those in the priority groups (listed below).

The manufacturers are seeking approval for their swine flu vaccines from the European Medicines Agency (EMA). Subject to satisfactory review of the data, the manufacturers anticipate that licences for their vaccines may be granted in late September or October. The vaccination programme will only commence once vaccines are licensed and stock has been distributed around the country. Based on these assumptions, the earliest a vaccination programme could begin is mid-October.

Prioritisation

Following advice from independent expert committees including the Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), the following groups should be prioritised for vaccination in the following order, once the vaccine has been licensed:

- i. individuals aged six months and up to 65 years in the current seasonal flu vaccine clinical at-risk groups³
- ii. all pregnant women, subject to licensing conditions on trimesters
- iii. household contacts of immunocompromised individuals
- iv. people aged 65 and over in the current seasonal flu vaccine clinical at-risk groups

¹ http://www.immunisation.nhs.uk/Library/News/H1N1_Swine_Flu_Letter

² http://www.immunisation.nhs.uk/Professional_information/Events/Event/flu_July2009

³ Until further information is available from a case control study of hospitalised patients currently being undertaken, the current definition of asthma used for the seasonal flu vaccination programme will be used.

These groups were selected because they are at highest risk of severe illness. In practice, it is likely that as vaccines become available, priority groups i-iii may be vaccinated concurrently, rather than in order of priority.

Frontline health and social care workers

In addition to these groups, frontline health and social care workers will be offered the vaccine at the same time as the first clinical risk group as they are at increased risk of infection and of transmitting that infection to susceptible patients. Frontline healthcare workers eligible for this vaccination programme are those also eligible for seasonal influenza vaccination, as detailed in *Immunisation against infectious disease* (The Green Book)⁴. Eligibility guidance for vaccination for frontline health and social care workers is included in the annexes to this letter.

Subsequent use of the vaccine in the wider healthy population will depend upon information about the evolving nature of the pandemic as well as new and emerging clinical data on the use of the vaccine. These will be kept under close review.

The DH is aware of the current burden and pressure for all health care providers and of the potential resource implications of delivering a swine flu vaccination programme.

Next steps

Further guidance on the implementation of the swine flu vaccination programme will be sent to Primary Care Trust (PCT) immunisation coordinators and Strategic Health Authority (SHA) immunisation leads. This will include information on issues such as communication materials, data recording, data collection, and training materials. As further information becomes available, this will be placed on the website at www.dh.gov.uk/swinefluvaccinationprogramme⁵, and flagged up in the immunisation newsletter *Vaccine Update*⁶.

This information will also be going to other key stakeholders, such as SHA Influenza Lead Directors, as well as all NHS Staff. We will do our best to keep you up to date as new information becomes available. The successful implementation of this important new vaccination campaign depends upon your continued efforts and professionalism. We would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge your hard work and to thank you all.

Yours sincerely



**SIR LIAM DONALDSON
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER**

⁴http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_102825.pdf

⁵ Also at www.immunisation.nhs.uk

⁶ www.immunisation.nhs.uk/Professional_information/Vaccine_Update