

To: All General Practitioners
All Practice Nurses Working in Practice

Copy: Community Pharmacists

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20 November 2009

Dear Colleague

Extending the H1N1 swine flu vaccination programme 2009/2010

This letter provides information on the extension of the H1N1 swine flu vaccination programme.

Swine flu is still affecting most parts of the UK and although it continues to be, generally, a mild disease it can be very serious for some. Those who are in the clinical risk groups due to an underlying health condition, who are pregnant or who are very young are particularly at risk. The swine flu vaccination programme is now well under way and it is important that we maintain this momentum.

The initial phase of the vaccination programme, described in my letter of 15 October, targets those in the clinical at risk groups and frontline health and social care staff. It is vital that all these groups are offered vaccine as quickly as supplies permit.

All GPs in the country were allocated an initial supply, and PCTs are now able to place orders so that vaccine can be targeted to where demand is greatest. The total quantity of vaccine available for ordering depends on deliveries into the country but, based on the manufacturer's forecasts, we expect to have significantly more stock of Pandemrix available from the end of this month. This is good news and will enable us to extend the programme.

Extending the vaccination programme

I know that many surgeries are still very busy with organising and delivering swine flu vaccines to the clinical risk groups, and completing this work remains the priority. However I wanted to inform you of the next phase of the swine flu vaccination programme.

The swine flu vaccination programme will be extended to offer the vaccine to all children over six months of age and under 5 years old. The extension of the vaccination programme is supported by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), the committee which provides expert advice to Ministers on vaccine issues.

This is an important extension because I have been concerned that the rate of hospitalisation of children under 5 years of age is higher compared to other age groups.

In addition, JCVI has advised that the main carers for elderly or disabled persons whose welfare may be at risk if their carer falls ill should be encouraged to receive the vaccine. The Department will discuss the implementation of this advice with carers' organisations.

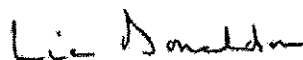
While we are still to finalise the logistics of how the vaccine will be delivered to children over six months and under five, we expect that general practice will want to continue to be a key component in the delivery of vaccines. This would enable families to have their children vaccinated in a setting that is familiar to them, as well as allowing parents flexibility in when their children are vaccinated.

We are currently working with the BMA and the NHS to agree exactly how this will take place, and I will provide you with a further update as soon as we have one. We expect that, once negotiations are complete, GP practices will be able to begin vaccination of children over six months and under five as soon as they finish vaccinating their patients in the priority groups. We are that expecting parents will be invited to bring their child in for vaccination, should they wish to take up the offer.

The date by which individual GP practices will be in a position to start this second phase of the programme will vary from practice to practice, and we would encourage all practices to move as quickly as they can towards this.

The response of the NHS so far has been outstanding. Thank you for all that you are doing to minimise the impact of the pandemic.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Liam Donaldson'.

**SIR LIAM DONALDSON
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER**