

March 2018

PSNC Briefing 018/18: Flu Vaccination Service 2018/19 – important update for contractors

Earlier this year, NHS England [wrote to community pharmacy contractors and general practices](#) to advise them that for the 2018/19 flu vaccination campaign, **adjuvanted trivalent influenza vaccine (aTIV)** (Fluad, Seqirus) should be offered to all those aged 65 and over, whilst adults aged under 65 in clinical at-risk groups should be offered a **quadrivalent influenza vaccine (QIV)**.

Information on orders for adjuvanted trivalent influenza vaccine

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation's (JCVI) advice to use aTIV in the age 65 and over group has been issued because it is the most effective vaccine currently available for this group of patients.

Seqirus, the manufacturer of aTIV has confirmed to the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), Public Health England (PHE) and NHS England that they can supply enough vaccine for the population aged 65 years and over in the UK. The manufacturer has increased planned production and, following a request made by PSNC, has **extended the window for ordering aTIV to Thursday 12th April 2018**.

Deliveries of aTIV to pharmacies and general practices across the UK will be phased:

- 4 million doses will be available for delivery in September;
- 2 million doses by mid-October; and
- 3 million doses in early November.

To ensure all pharmacies and general practices receive at least some of their order of aTIV early in the season, Seqirus have confirmed to PSNC that all orders (from pharmacies and general practices) will be re-phased, once they have all been placed, with the aim of giving all customers split deliveries across September, October and November. The volume of vaccine in each drop (month) is expected to be in line with the proportional availability of vaccine detailed above. PSNC supports this arrangement which should ensure that pharmacies, general practices and most importantly, patients will have equitable access to the vaccine.

These phased delivery arrangements are for the 2018/19 season only.

Once pharmacy contractors have considered the above information on the phasing of aTIV supplies, they may wish to review their existing orders; Seqirus will accept orders for aTIV until **Thursday 12th April 2018**.

The practical implications of phased aTIV supplies

NHS England have noted that because of the phasing of deliveries in 2018/19, additional planning and activity will be necessary for pharmacy contractors and general practices, but it will ensure that patients benefit from the most effective vaccines.

The start of the influenza season varies each year – usually from December onwards, though occasionally activity can start in November. Where supplies allow, it is better for patients to be vaccinated as early in the vaccine campaign

as possible up to November, bearing in mind it takes two weeks to develop an immune response. In 2017/18 around 65% of those aged 65 years and over had taken up the offer of immunisation by mid-November, this rose to 72.6% by the end of January.

The phased deliveries mean that a prioritisation approach will probably need to be adopted for the 65 years and over cohort. The [Flu Letter No. 1](#), issued by NHS England, DHSC and PHE on 26th March 2018, states that initial priority for vaccination with aTIV should be those aged 75 years and above, as this age group are likely to derive little clinical benefit from the standard non-adjuvanted influenza vaccine and are at highest risk of serious outcomes from infection with flu. Once this group has been covered, 65 to 74 year olds should then be targeted as further deliveries of vaccine are made.

Some contractors have asked whether it would be better to immunise patients that are 65 years and older with QIV instead of waiting for supplies of aTIV; NHS England have stated that given the clear evidence about the potential clinical benefits, aTIV is a more appropriate choice than QIV vaccine for older people. If this advice is not followed, NHS England may make enquiries to understand how the evidence of clinical efficacy of aTIV was taken into account when deciding to offer alternative vaccines to patients 65 years and over.

The presentation of the aTIV in 2018/19

Due to the increased volume of aTIV to be produced, the manufacturer will, for the 2018/19 season only, deliver most of the supply in pre-filled syringes (Luer Lock) with a separate needle which will require attachment prior to administration of the vaccine. The vaccine can be ordered in packs of 1 and 10 but a limited amount of the single packs will be available.

From the 2019/20 season onwards, aTIV will be supplied in the more usual presentation of a pre-filled syringe with an attached needle.

Managing the risks associated with having a single supplier of aTIV

The JCVI's advice to use aTIV in the age 65 and over group means that only one vaccine will be used in this cohort of patients, overturning previous guidance to pharmacy contractors and general practices to split orders for flu vaccine between different suppliers in order to mitigate the risk of supply difficulties, should there be a supply or manufacturing problem.

Vaccines are biological substances, with complex manufacturing processes and although rare, batch failures can occasionally happen, and this can affect all manufacturers. Manufacturers mitigate these risks as far as possible within their production processes and supply chain.

PSNC has sought assurances from NHS England that they have appropriate plans in place to deal with any supply problems with aTIV, but details of their plans have not yet been disclosed; we will continue to push for information to be shared on their contingency arrangements.

Information on orders for quadrivalent influenza vaccine

The JCVI's advice to offer QIV to adults aged under 65 years in clinical at-risk groups group has been issued because it is the most effective vaccine currently available for this group of patients.

The [Flu Letter No. 1](#), issued by NHS England, DHSC and PHE on 26th March 2018, provides details on page 21 of QIV which will be available in 2018/19.

Further information

The Service Specification, Patient Group Direction and other service documentation for the 2018/19 Community Pharmacy Seasonal Influenza Vaccination Advanced Service will be published once they have been finalised by NHS England, PHE and PSNC.

PSNC also plans to work with NHS England and the GP Committee of the British Medical Association to develop practical guidance for community pharmacy and general practice teams on how to deliver the 2018/19 vaccination campaign to the 65 years and older age group.

[Flu Letter No. 1 \(NHS England, DHSC & PHE\)](#)

If you have queries on this PSNC Briefing or you require more information please contact [Zainab Al-Kharsan, Service Development Pharmacist](#).