

Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport

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Convener
Health and Sport Committee

By email: HealthandSport@parliament.scot

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Dear Lewis

I am writing to you ahead of the announcement of an expansion of the Scottish Government's seasonal flu vaccination programme. As I know the Committee will appreciate, the seasonal flu vaccination programme will be more important than ever this winter, to help to protect the most vulnerable, and alleviate pressure on the NHS, especially in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

I am pleased to inform the Committee that, this flu season, we will extend free eligibility to the following new groups:

- households of those on the Covid-19 shielding list;
- social care workers who provide direct personal care;
- all 55 – 64 year olds; and
- look to include 50 to 54 year olds if vaccine supply allows.

The inclusion of these new cohorts is based on clinical advice and careful consideration of who would be most at risk from concurrent infection of Covid-19 and flu.

Those who will continue to be eligible for the free flu vaccine this year includes those aged 65 and over, those who have an underlying health condition which increases risk, pregnant women, children aged 2-5 (not yet at school), primary school children, health care workers and young and unpaid carers. The most effective way to protect against the seasonal flu, is to continue to prioritise these groups. This flu season, we will aim to vaccinate more people within those groups than ever before, over and above the expansion of free eligibility to new cohorts.

NHS Boards will be delivering this expansion, and will be taking a phased approach. This allows NHS Boards to begin vaccination for different groups, as soon as the necessary supply of vaccine becomes available, whilst prioritising those most at risk. The first phase will begin in October, as planned, and will include; those who are already eligible, household

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members of those shielding, and front-line social care workers. The second phase is planned to begin in December, and will incorporate those aged 55 and over not otherwise eligible. Our priority will remain to drive up participation of those at greatest clinical risk, but we will look to expand further to those aged 50 to 54 year olds if vaccine supply allows.

Getting the seasonal flu vaccine, especially when you have free eligibility, is one of the key ways that individuals can protect themselves, one another and contribute to supporting the NHS winter. I would be grateful for the Committee's support in encouraging flu vaccine uptake this season.

JEANE FREEMAN