

To: Community Pharmacies
GP Practices
HSC Trusts

27th September 2023

Dear Colleagues,

COVID-19 vaccine type 2023/24 - Transition from BA.4.5 to XBB.1.5

I am writing to you with further information regarding the COVID-19 vaccines to be used within the Autumn COVID-19 and Influenza (flu) vaccination programme 2023/24.

In previous letters issued from the [Department of Health](#) and PHA we advised that all providers would begin the vaccination programme using Comirnaty BA.4.5 (Pfizer) vaccine until the latest variant vaccine became available in Northern Ireland. This reflected the availability of vaccines within the UK when the decision was made to start the programme on 18th September.

The latest variant vaccine (Comirnaty XBB.1.5) is now available and the PGD for this vaccine has been issued to providers (this can be found on GP and Community Pharmacy intranets). Vaccine ordered from 27th September will be fulfilled using XBB.1.5. This vaccine can be used as soon as it is received by providers.

To ensure a smooth transition from one vaccine to the other, providers can use BA.4.5 if they do not have XBB.1.5 stock available up until 8th October. If both are available, XBB.1.5 should be used in preference to the BA.4.5 with immediate effect. **From 9th October providers should only use Comirnaty XBB.1.5 (Pfizer).**

Decision-making on the vaccination programme and the types of vaccines used is guided by the independent expert advice of the Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisations (JCVI). JCVI have advised that the latest COVID-19 variant vaccines become the preferred vaccines for the 2023 programme once they are available. JCVI has also advised that all of the available vaccines provide strong protection against severe illness from COVID-19.

Ordering Stock and Quotas

We are very grateful to providers who have followed previous guidance in PHA letters to only order 2 weeks in advance of their clinics. This will now help facilitate this switch in vaccines from Comirnaty BA.4.5 (Pfizer) to Comirnaty XBB.1.5 (Pfizer).

As mentioned above, **from 9th October providers should only use Comirnaty XBB.1.5 (Pfizer)**. If you have stock of Comirnaty BA.4.5 (Pfizer) you may continue to use this up until 8th October 2023 if you do not have XBB.1.5 available. However, if you receive Comirnaty XBB.1.5 (Pfizer) before 9th October you should use this supply rather than BA.4.5.

If you will not be administering existing BA.4.5 stock prior to the 9th of October you will need to reorder XBB.1.5.

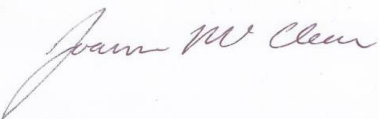
Quotas will be adjusted to reflect providers new requirements therefore it is essential that VMS records are up to date to inform this.

Please note that it may take up to 5 working days to receive your delivery

I appreciate these changes may create additional work for a small number of providers. However, I want to reiterate that the change is being made to ensure patients receive the most up to date version of the vaccine available in line with JCVI advice. We want to support providers to ensure there is minimal disruption to clinics and make this switch as seamless as possible.

I would like to thank you for your continued support and ongoing co-operation with the COVID-19 and flu vaccination programmes. If you have any queries in relation to the change of vaccine or storage issues, please contact pha.immunisation@hscni.net.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Joanne McClean
Director of Public Health