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Sent via email

20 June 2024

Covid and Flu vaccination programme

We are writing to highlight GPC England's position on both the planned COVID vaccination programme and seasonal flu programme for 2024/25. The Covid 19 programme is being offered by NHS England under a new procurement process which covers the delivery of Covid 19 vaccination between 1 September 2024 and 31 March 2026: those providers who wish to participate in this programme are required to complete a response document by midnight on 27 June 2024 in order to enable participation in the 2024/25 campaign: further details are at:

[NHS England COVID-19 vaccination programme: 1 September 2024 to 31 March 2026, Site Sign-up Process | NHSBSA](#)

Details of the Enhanced Service specification are available at:

[PRN00997i-gp-covid-19-es-specification-1-sept-2024-31-march-2026.pdf \(england.nhs.uk\)](#)

LMC and GP colleagues should note the funding arrangements relating to this programme: the IoS fee for Covid vaccination during the period in which the seasonal flu programme is available is £7.54, on the basis that when both programmes are being concurrently delivered, this would allow co-administration. Outside a flu campaign period, each Covid vaccination will attract an additional payment of £2.50. In addition, a £10 additional payment for patients who are housebound will be made under the Covid-19 campaign. These funding arrangements apply to all providers and are being imposed despite the evidence and arguments that both GPC England and Community Pharmacy England have put forward to NHSE regarding the increased complexity of the Covid vaccination process

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and related administration workload compared to other vaccinations, and the costs of delivering the programme.

GPC England has made it clear to NHS England it believes current funding for all vaccination programmes is economically not viable. Covid vaccination continues to play a vital role in the prevention health agenda, and in protecting vulnerable patients. Current pricing arrangements have a significant detrimental impact upon the ability of practices to continue to provide this programme and support the delivery of other services. Given the intrinsic value and positive healthcare impact of vaccination programmes on the nation's health and the NHS, these need to be effectively resourced. GP Practices should not be placed in the position of effectively subsidising vaccination programmes, and we strongly recommend practices review whether the continued delivery of the programme is financially viable before collectively deciding whether their PCN or any other Collaborating Group sign up for the Covid programme. We have been working with NHS England to understand their cost modelling and continue to push for an uplift to all vaccination IoS fees. This is particularly important given the significant rise in staff costs over recent years. GPC England does not accept NHS England's view these fees are appropriate – an increase of 21.2% would be required merely to adjust the current £10.06 fee for inflation and this was part of the GPC England 2024/25 GP Contract negotiations.

All GP practices should have received an invitation to sign up to the 2024/25 Seasonal Flu Enhanced Service. Practices must indicate their willingness in writing to the Commissioner to participate before 23:59pm on 30 June 2024.

Details of the Enhanced Service specification are available at:

[NHS England » General practice enhanced service specification: Seasonal influenza vaccination programme 2024/25](#)

NHS England has issued guidance on the programme in their March 2024 flu letter, available at: [National flu immunisation programme 2024 to 2025 letter - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Although there are no changes in eligibility arrangements or vaccine recommendations from 2023/24, practices should note a change in the JCVI recommendations on timings. Based on the evidence that flu vaccine effectiveness can wane over time in adults JCVI have advised moving the start of the programme for most adults to the beginning of October. This is on the understanding that the majority of the vaccinations will be completed by the end of November, closer to the time that the flu season commonly starts.

The following groups are to be offered flu vaccination in line with the announced and authorised cohorts:

From Sunday 1 September 2024:

- pregnant women
- all children aged 2 or 3 years on 31 August 2024
- primary school aged children (from Reception to Year 6)
- secondary school aged children (from Year 7 to Year 11)
- all children in clinical risk groups aged from 6 months to less than 18 years

From Thursday 3 October 2024:

- those aged 65 years and over
- those aged 18 years to under 65 years in clinical risk groups (as defined by the [Green Book, Influenza Chapter 19](#))
- those in long-stay residential care homes
- carers in receipt of carer's allowance, or those who are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person
- close contacts of immunocompromised individuals
- frontline workers in a social care setting without an employer led occupational health scheme including those working for a registered residential care or nursing home, registered domiciliary care providers, voluntary managed hospice providers and those that are employed by those who receive direct payments (personal budgets) or Personal Health budgets, such as Personal Assistants

The detailed rationale for these timing recommendations is included in the March letter. NHS England has now confirmed a start date of 3 October for all adults other than pregnant women, on the basis that this date is likely to coincide with the start of the Autumn Covid 19 programme and is therefore designed to maximise the opportunity for co-administration.

As in previous years, the flu Enhanced Service offers the opportunity for individual practices to deliver the flu vaccine, and, separately, to participate in the Covid 19 vaccination programme.

GPC England understands that practices intending to participate in the seasonal flu programme will have pre-ordered vaccine, noting the most recent announcement, included in the GPCE bulletin, that the QIVr vaccine will now not be available, and alternatives have been recommended by NHS England on the advice of UKHSA

Practices may feel unable to participate in the Covid 19 vaccination programme due to the lack of economic viability. Furthermore, practices may wish to make this reasoning clear to their ICB, and explain that their ability and readiness to support the Covid19 vaccination programme would be enabled through the tariff being uplifted. We appreciate how frustrating this is for GPs and their teams. GPC England has advised NHS England all current vaccination IoS fees are uneconomic, resulting in GP practices effectively subsidising national vaccination programmes, impacting upon the delivery of core services to their patients and communities. This approach undermines practice participation in what is a cornerstone of safe, effective and efficient immunisation delivery at a population level.

Should any practice decide to express interest in the programme, it would greatly assist GPC England if colleagues could explicitly state if they believe the current £7.54 fee is inadequate to their ICB in their response. ICBs do have the discretion to resource local delivery to incentivise population uptake. This will not affect the national tariff, but LMCs are ideally placed to discuss pragmatic interventions at a local level to support their practices and the programme.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Julius Parker
Deputy Chair GPC England

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Dr Samira Anane
Deputy Chair GPC England

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