

Date: 20th June 2023

To: Principals of all Primary and Post Primary Schools in Northern Ireland

Dear Colleague,

FLU VACCINATION PROGRAMME 2023 FOR ALL CHILDREN

In autumn 2023 we will again be offering the influenza (flu) vaccine to all children in P1 to P7 and Year 8 to Year 12. This letter and attached document include important information about the campaign.

On behalf of the Public Health Agency and the Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust school nursing teams, I would like to thank all schools in Northern Ireland for their help and co-operation in delivering last autumn's flu vaccine programme to all primary and post primary school children. I would also like to acknowledge the tremendous efforts provided by schools working tirelessly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and who are now managing further challenges as we move towards business as usual working arrangements.

The aim of the annual school-based flu vaccination programme is to protect children against flu, prevent children from spreading flu to their families or in the wider community and to reduce their time off school due to sickness. Given that the spread of flu occurs more frequently amongst children, the programme should also help to protect staff working within schools. High uptake of the seasonal flu vaccine in those eligible to receive it is very important. The school flu vaccination programme in Northern Ireland can significantly impact the spread of influenza circulating in the population.

Last year there was a decline in flu vaccine uptake compared to previous years with only 67% of primary school children and 60% of secondary school children in Northern Ireland receiving the flu vaccine. In order to address this decline in vaccine uptake and to prevent the spread of flu in the population, we are asking for schools to assist the PHA and HSC Trust school nursing colleagues by promoting all school vaccination programmes including flu with your staff, children and parents. A regional video has been developed to raise awareness of the importance of the flu vaccine and encourage parents to consent to their children being immunised. We would be grateful if the video could be shared on your school website and any

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social media channels your school utilise. The link for the video is: <https://vimeo.com/452145182>.

There has always been a very good history of schools working closely with the PHA and HSC Trust school nursing teams as demonstrated last year in the excellent cooperation received from schools. Maximising the uptake rate will only be possible with continued assistance of schools in facilitating school nursing teams work to deliver the vaccination programme. We are aware that there can sometimes be a few operational challenges such as last-minute changes to scheduled school visits or delays in returning consent forms to the school health teams. In order to support the schools to run these visits smoothly and to try and mitigate some of these issues we have developed and attached the PHA document: *Childhood Flu Immunisation Programme 2023: information for schools*. **We would appreciate if you could review the document in preparation for the delivery of the 2023 Flu programme which we anticipate will run from early October 2023 onwards (please note this date may be subject to change).**

Your local HSC Trust school health team will be in contact with you to agree the schedule for planned delivery in the autumn term. All enquiries about the flu programme should be directed to the HSC Trust school nurses, and the school should not accept consent withdrawals or declines on behalf of parents but should redirect them to the school nurse teams.

Many thanks in anticipation of your help and co-operation in this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "L Flanagan".

Louise Flanagan
Consultant in Public Health (Health Protection)
Public Health Agency