COVID-19 VACCINE BULLETIN 18

Welcome to Bulletin 18 from the HSE National Immunisation Office which highlights changes in clinical guidance for the COVID-19 vaccination programme. Bulletins will be published every week or more frequently, if required.

Updated Recommendations

NIAC recommendations on the COVID-19 Vaccine Janssen®, Vaxzevria® and mRNA vaccine dose intervals. (Published 26.04.21)

NIAC reviewed its recommendations following the European Medicines Agency's (EMA) review of the COVID-19 Vaccine Janssen® and Vaxzevria® (previously known as the COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca) in relation to cases of Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS) post vaccination.

NIAC reiterates although TTS is a very rare side effect of both these adenovirus vector based vaccines, the benefits overall outweigh risks in all ages. As there may be evidence of increased risk of TTS post vaccination in younger adults and because of the availability of mRNA vaccines, NIAC has recommended COVID-19 Vaccine Janssen® and Vaxzevria® be used for those aged 50 and over (including those with underlying health conditions that puts them at high or very high risk of severe COVID-19) . Furthermore, they do recognise that in adults under the age of 50 where a two-dose mRNA vaccination schedule is not suitable, the single-dose COVID-19 vaccine Janssen® can be considered.

For people who have received 1 dose of Vaxzevria®:

- Individuals aged under 50 years who have health conditions that puts them at very high or high risk of severe COVID-19 should get their second dose 12 weeks later as planned
- People aged under 50 years who do not have underlying health conditions that puts them at very high risk or high-risk of severe COVID-19 will have their second dose delayed to 16 weeks. This will enable NIAC to review further evidence and provide guidance in due course. However, after being fully informed of the risk and benefits, these individuals can choose to receive their second dose of Vaxzevria® 12 weeks later.
- Those who have a blood clot with low blood platelets after their first dose of Vaxzevria® should not have the second dose of Vaxzevria®.

Lastly, the report recommends that the timing between the two doses for the mRNA vaccination schedule (for Comirnaty® Pfizer/ BioNTech or COVID-19 Vaccine Moderna®) remains at 4 weeks.

Read more here

HSE is currently working to operationalise all the new NIAC recommendations - further details to follow.

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NIAC recommendations on the use of COVID-19 vaccines in pregnancy (Published 26.4.21)

In light of emerging evidence on risk and benefits of COVID-19 vaccination in pregnancy; NIAC have amended their recommendations on the use of COVID-19 vaccines in pregnancy. In particular, they note that pregnant women who contract the virus are at higher risk poorer maternal and foetal outcomes.

The revised recommendations state that "pregnant women should be offered mRNA COVID-19 vaccination between 14-36 weeks gestation following an individual benefit/risk discussion with their obstetric care giver".

Pregnant women are recommended to receive mRNA vaccines, as there is more data available on their use in pregnancy compared with viral vector vaccines.

Read more here

NIAC recommendations on COVID-19 vaccination after laboratory confirmed COVID-19 infection (Published 26.4.21)

NIAC reviewed the emerging evidence on the impact of vaccination on immunity in those who have previously had COVID-19. The recommendations vary based on the underlying risk factors.

They advise that people with a history of laboratory confirmed COVID-19 infection within 6 months and aged under 50 years old only require a single dose of COVID-19 vaccine to be considered fully vaccinated. However, the following risk groups should get their full two dose vaccine schedule even if they have had COVID-19: adults aged 50 years or older and the immunocompromised.

Furthermore, if individuals after their first dose of COVID-19 vaccine are infected with COVID-19 within 6 months, they should complete the full vaccination schedule.

Read more here

HSE is currently working to operationalise all the new NIAC recommendations - further details to follow.

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EMA releases graphics that contextualise the risks and benefits of Vaxzevria®

Following the listing of TTS as very rare side effect of Vaxzevria® the EMA have maintained that the overall benefits outweigh the risks in all ages.

To aid policy makers in member states, the EMA have modelled the benefits of the vaccine (in preventing hospitalisations, ICU admissions and deaths) with the risks of TTS across different age groups within the context of low, medium and high circulating infection rates. Stratification by sex was not possible with the available data.

They have presented their interim findings in a visual format. The data shows the benefits of the vaccine increase with age and higher circulating infection rates.

Read more here

Latest from Research

Impact of vaccination on household transmission of COVID-19

This pre-print article from Public Health England examines the impact of vaccination (with Comirnaty® Pfizer/ BioNTech or Vaxzevria® COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca) on transmission. They reviewed over 365,000 households with a case of COVID-19 and their 1 million contacts in England where the vaccine has been rolled out since December 2020.

Vaccinated people are less likely to develop symptomatic infection based on evidence from trials and other studies. However some people post vaccination may become infected with COVID-19. In such cases a single dose of either vaccine (21 days after vaccination), reduces the risk of transmission from cases to their household by 38-49% compared to unvaccinated individuals. This impact on transmission was evident from 2 weeks after vaccination. Furthermore, age of the case or contact was found to have limited impact on these findings. This real world study provides further evidence that vaccines may not just prevent infection but may also prevent transmission in cases of vaccine breakthrough.

Read more here

Effectiveness of mRNA COVID-19 vaccines on hospitalisation in older adults

This case control study examines the effectiveness of the mRNA based COVID-19 vaccines (from Pfizer/ BioNTech and COVID-19 vaccine Moderna®) against hospitalisation in older adults (aged 65 years and older) across various hospital sites in the United States between January and March 2021. The sample size was 417 patients. They estimate that the vaccines are 94% effective at reducing hospitalisation with COVID-19 after being fully vaccinated (2 weeks after second dose) and 64% effective following partial vaccination (2 weeks after first dose). Effectiveness in a real-world setting was therefore very similar to that seen in the trials of the vaccines.

Read more here

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UK COVID-19 Infection Survey: Impact of vaccination

Two pre-print articles examine the impact of the COVID-19 vaccines (with Comirnaty® Pfizer/ BioNTech or Vaxzevria® COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca) on the general population based on data from the COVID-19 Infection Survey (a large UK surveillance database).

The first study examined the impact of vaccination on antibody response in over 45,000 adults. Post vaccination with a single dose the antibody levels rose over time for all ages but in older adults (aged over 60 years) they increased at a slower rate and remained lower overall. However after two doses the antibody levels were high across all ages. There is some evidence of waning antibody levels after some time following the first dose of Comirnaty® (this is not seen after one dose of Vaxzevria®). Those who have previously had COVID-19 infection had high level of antibodies 28 days after a single dose of vaccine; similarly to those who are fully vaccinated without prior infection.

The second study examined the impact of vaccination on laboratory confirmed COVID-19 infection rates. Data included swab results from over 370,000 people between December 2020 and April 2021 A 65% reduction in infections was noted following a single dose of both vaccines and 70% reduction following two doses of Comirnaty® (second doses of Vaxzevria® were not widely rolled out yet). Furthermore, infections in those who had been vaccinated had a lower viral load; therefore less likely to transmit the virus. The vaccines appear to be effective against the B.1.1.7 variant that is dominant in the UK and in Ireland.

Read more here

Preliminary data on safety of COVID-19 vaccines in pregnancy in the United States

This study highlights initial findings from safety reports following vaccination with mRNA COVID-19 vaccines during pregnancy in the United States between December 2020 and February 2021. The study reviewed data for pregnant women who received the mRNA based COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer/ BioNTech or Moderna. Majority of the reported side effects were expected, mild to moderate and similar to non-pregnant individuals. Over 800 participants had a completed pregnancy; within this group maternal and foetal outcomes in the vaccinated cohort were similar to those seen in unvaccinated individuals pre-pandemic. Although the duration of follow-up was limited no safety signals were raised for these vaccines in pregnancy through the national adverse events monitoring database.

Read more here

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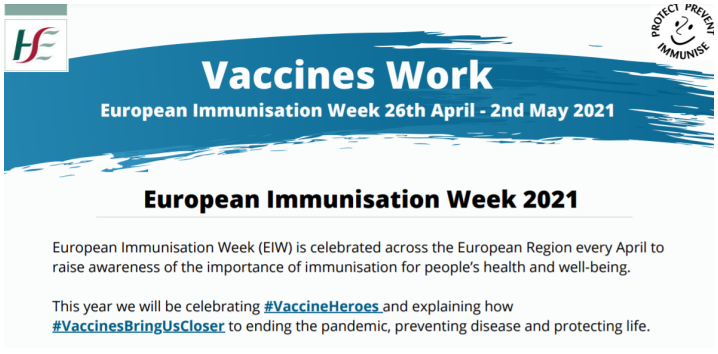
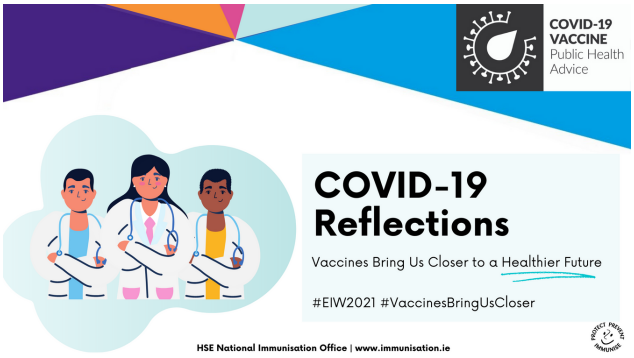
European Immunisation Week - Vaccines Bring Us Closer

This week is European Immunisation Week and the HSE National Immunisation Office joins the World Health Organization (WHO) and countries across Europe in highlighting this year's theme "Vaccines bring us closer".

European Immunisation Week highlights the importance of routine vaccination in protecting health and well-being throughout life, as well as focusing on COVID-19 vaccination as a vital tool in the fight against the virus.

Join us as we celebrate stories of our **#VaccineHeroes** and explain how **#VaccinesBringUsCloser** to ending the pandemic, by preventing disease and protecting life.





See our #VaccinesWork factsheet here

Watch our #VaccineHeroes Series here

Check out the HSE National Immunisation Office **Twitter**, **Instagram** and **YouTube** where we are sharing vaccination facts, advice and stories.

What are you looking forward to vaccines bringing you closer to?
Join in the conversation by tagging us on Twitter @HSEImm or Instagram @hseimm and tell us what you think using the hashtag #VaccinesBringUsCloser.

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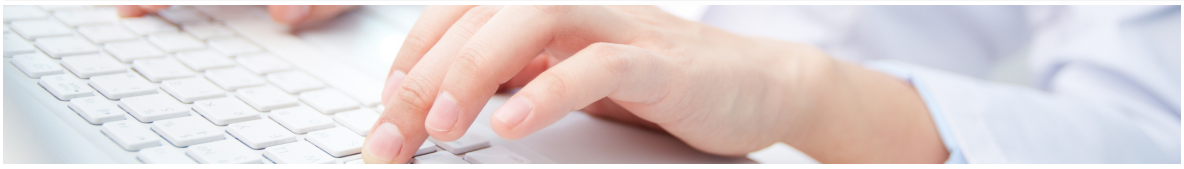

Training Updates

Make sure you are giving people the latest version of information leaflets available on the HSE website.

All materials are updated frequently.

See materials here

Website

Visit our website www.immunisation.ie regularly for the most up to date information to support vaccinators and health professionals responding to queries.

Our dedicated COVID-19 Vaccination section contains

- Information from the National Immunisation Advisory Committee
- Clinical guidelines
- COVID-19 vaccine studies
- IM Injection technique reminders
- Dedicated pages for the licensed COVID-19 vaccines

Visit here

COVID-19 Vaccination Training Programme

There are now over 12,000 completions for the National Immunisation Office "COVID-19 Vaccination Training Programme" on HSELand.

The programme covers topics like

- Recommendations and contraindications
- Preparing vaccines for administration
- Communications and consent

The programme is updated regularly to include the most up to date information to support vaccinators who are competent in giving vaccinations.
You will be notified by email when new content is available for completion. Follow the instructions in the email to complete the updates. You do not need to redo the entire programme.

Register here

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Do you have queries?

For questions about the COVID-19 Vaccination programme

- Transfer of client services, queries or complaints, please email C19vaccinequery@hse.ie
- COVID-19 vaccine orders or deliveries to GPs, please email gpvaccines@hse.ie
- Health Professionals for your own COVID-19 vaccination appointments, please email Covid19.support@hse.ie
- Legal queries, potential challenges related to vaccination and obtaining a consent, please email lead.integratedcare@hse.ie and dervelagray@rcpi.ie
- For clinical queries, please email immunisation@hse.ie

Should vaccines be exposed to temperatures outside of these parameters please contact the National Immunisation Office immediately. Contacts include:

- Achal Gupta: achal.gupta@hse.ie mobile 087 4064810
- Mariangela Toma: mariangela.toma@hse.ie mobile 087 7575679
- Cliona Kiersey: cliona.kiersey@hse.ie mobile 087 9915452
- Email the immunisation inbox: immunisation@hse.ie

Queries that are not clinical or technical cannot be answered by the National Immunisation Office.

The National Immunisation Office is not involved in the allocation or delivery of COVID-19 Vaccines.

Recommendations about COVID-19 vaccine are changing as more information becomes available so please visit our **website** for the most up to date information.