



Date: 1st September, 2020

Circular Number: NCO-10-2020

Support for General Practitioner Services During Current National Public Health Emergency

Dear Doctor,

I refer to previous communications in relation to the supports for General Practitioner services during the current National Public Health Emergency initially implemented in March 2020 (ref. Circular NCO-05-2020) and subsequently extended from 1st June, 2020 (Ref Circular NCO-07-2020). I am writing to advise that the Minister for Health, with the consent of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform has approved the continuation of payment of the Special Fee payments to General Practitioners outlined hereunder. The approval is for the extension of the following payments:

1. The payment of €30 for a COVID-19 related remote consultation for all patients.

GPs will continue to be remunerated for provision of remote consultations to patients who may have contracted COVID-19 infection including referral for testing if clinically required in line with the latest clinical algorithm which is available on www.hpsc.ie. A fee of €30 will be payable to GPs for provision of such remote consultations. **This fee will be payable in respect of all patients, regardless of eligibility status.** A claim is valid once the remote consultation has been completed whether or not the test is required. If a test is required the result will be referred back to GP and where a second remote consultation is required with the patient a further claim can be made in respect of the provision of such second consultation to that patient. In the event that the same patient requires a further test(s) at a later date the same process will apply. Claims can be submitted electronically to the HSE's PCERS using the standard Special Items of Service claim form. It is important for disease tracking and operational purposes that such claims are submitted in a timely manner and it has been agreed that GPs should use their best endeavours to ensure that claims are submitted within 14 working days of the consultation, with the date of consultation being day 1. It has also been agreed that all valid claims will be paid. The code to be used for these claims is **CB**.

2. The payment of €75 for COVID-19 related respiratory clinics for all patients where clinically necessary.

GPs will be enabled to provide dedicated respiratory clinics on their practice premises for patients who have a confirmed or presumptive diagnosis of COVID-19. A fee of €75 will be paid per consultation. **This fee will apply, to all patients who attend a dedicated respiratory clinic at your practice, regardless of eligibility status.** Claims can be submitted electronically to the HSE's PCERS using the standard Special Items of Service claim form. GPs are reminded, as at 1. above, to use their best endeavours to ensure that Claims are submitted within 14 working days of the consultation, with the date of consultation being day 1. All valid claims will be paid. The code to be used for these claims is **CA**. It is not expected that multiple claims for CA consultations in respect of individual patients would be a feature of any individual set of claims.

The payment for non COVID remote consultations with patients who hold a medical or GP visit card will cease at close of business on Friday 4th September 2020. The above fees arrangements do not, and are not intended to, set a precedent in relation to remuneration of General Practitioners for any service on behalf of the HSE. Insofar as the COVID-19 related supports are concerned, the HSE through the discharge of its standard accountability and probity assurance obligations, will endeavor to ensure that payments are targeted upon such cases and not beyond what is clinically warranted and I am asking that you would be mindful of these considerations.

It is a fundamental feature of the agreement on COVID-19 supports for General Practice that General Practitioners will not make any charge on patients for any element of consultation, in person or remotely, relating to the diagnosis and/or treatment of COVID-19, where such diagnosis and/or treatment is clinically necessary. In the event that a patient is no longer COVID-19 positive but requires treatment for a non-COVID related condition then the normal process should apply whereby the patient is either a private patient or a GMS/GPVC patient and GPs may charge their private patients accordingly or treat their GMS/GPVC patients under the GMS contract.

GPs who do not hold a GMS or other health sector contract with the HSE may also claim these fees and should contact the HSE's National Contracts Office at **044 9395519** or by email at **natcontractsoffice@hse.ie** for further information.

Consultations have also been held and agreement reached with the IMO on a range of other issues including continued support for Out of Hours (OOHs) and implementation of the Influenza Vaccination Programme for the 20/21 Influenza season which has informed the Ministers' approach to these issues and which are being approved as part of an overall package of measures to support General Practice during the current National Public Health Emergency.

3. Support for GP Out of Hours Services

The approval for continued grant assistance to GP out of Hours Co-ops until 31st December, 2020 is on the basis that the GP OOHs Service will continue to operate on the same basis as present, and that arrangements will remain in place for GP referral for COVID-19 testing at weekends without any additional fee being payable by patients (both GMS and Non-GMS) or the HSE. The formula for calculating the level of grant assistance for the period 1st September, 2020- 31st December, 2020 is being enhanced and will, for this period, be based on 100% of the cost of all in person (Treatment Centre and Domiciliary based) consultations involving GMS patients during the period 1st September, 2019- 31st December, 2019. The HSE will communicate separately with the OOHs services on this aspect of the agreement in the normal way.

4. Seasonal Influenza Vaccination Programme Winter 2020/2021

The seasonal Influenza Vaccination Programme for Winter 2020/21 will commence in October, 2020. Orders for the vaccines have been made and delivery of same is expected to commence in Mid - September. The contracted Vaccine distributors will be contacting practices in the coming days to agree the scheduling of vaccine deliveries for the 2020/2021 Programme and indeed it is possible that some practices will have received initial contact prior to the receipt of this circular.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic a number of changes are being made to the groups who will be able to access the seasonal Influenza Vaccination Programme for winter 2020/21 as follows;

- (i) All those aged 6-23 months and 13-64 years in a risk group can receive the vaccine and have it administered by their GP or community pharmacy of choice free of charge, regardless of their eligibility status.
- (ii) All those aged 65 years and over regardless of (i) whether they are in a risk group and (ii) their eligibility status can receive the vaccine and have it administered by their GP or Community Pharmacy of choice free of charge.

- (iii) All healthy children aged 2-12 years regardless of (i) whether they are in a risk group and (ii) their eligibility status can receive the vaccine and have it administered by their GP or Community Pharmacy of choice free of charge. Certain children in at risk groups will require a second vaccination and this is also covered and payable as a separate vaccination.

Children aged from 2-12 years should receive the vaccine intra- nasally (LAIV) unless they are contraindicated, while all others will receive it via the usual intra- muscular route (QIV).

Annually, Ireland starts delivering flu vaccine earlier than other EU jurisdictions and it is expected that this will also happen this year as Ireland will receive doses from the first released batches. There has been a short delay in the delivery of the QIV flu vaccine from the manufacturer. This delay is likely to be about two weeks, and it affects all customers, not only Ireland. It is caused by an administrative delay, and not by any issues in the manufacture or quality of the vaccine. In this context, deliveries of the QIV vaccine will be at a similar time as last season commencing in mid-September (provided that no further unforeseen delays occur). As normal it will be a two weekly delivery schedule to GP Practices. Notification of LAIV vaccine availability will be communicated by the National Cold Chain Service (NCCS) and it is anticipated that distribution of vaccine will commence early-mid October. Please include your PCERS Contractor Number with your orders of flu vaccine to NCCS.

The cohort of people to be vaccinated in the Programme is the same as last year for QIV (new cohort 2-12 year old children will get LAIV- nasal vaccine). Influenza vaccines supplied to your practice through the NCCS are only to be administered to the patient groups described above.

Sufficient vaccines have been ordered for the “at risk” groups (including over 65’s, pregnant women etc.). We know that circa 40% of vaccines distributed in previous years have been used for non-GMS patients. These non-GMS “at risk” patients will now have the vaccine administered free of charge and the GP will be reimbursed through PCERS for same. In previous years vaccinations administered to this non-GMS “at risk” group was not captured on the uptake reports. This season the uptake report will be comprehensive given the increase in the number of adults and children who are eligible to have the vaccine administered to them free of charge. Future season’s vaccine requirements will use information from PCERS based on this season’s reports as this will reflect requirements for each GP.

Following consultation with the IMO, the Minister for Health, with the approval of the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, has determined, pursuant to Section 42 of the Public Service (Pay and Pensions) Act, 2017, that the following fee rates should apply for the administration of the seasonal Influenza Vaccination Programme for winter 2020/21.

- The existing fee of €15 will be maintained for all QIV Influenza vaccinations, GMS and non-GMS;
- In addition to this, each GP will be eligible for a further payment of €100 for every 10 unique patients to whom he/she administers the QIV Influenza vaccination;
- A fee of €20 will be made available for vaccinations using the (nasal) Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine (LAIV) for children aged from 2 to 12 years inclusive;
- In addition, each GP will be eligible for a *further payment* of €150 for every 10 unique patients aged from 2 to 12 years inclusive to whom he/she administers the LAIV;
- GPs will continue to be eligible for a payment of €28.50 for administration of a Pneumococcal Polysaccharide Vaccine (PPV) to an eligible individual in the relevant at risk group under the GMS provided that the vaccine is not administered by the GP (or by another GP in the same practice) on the same day as an Influenza vaccine.
- The existing fee of €42.75 will continue to apply for the administration of combined Influenza and PPV vaccinations on the same day by the GP or by the GP concerned and another GP in the same practice. Each such instance of combined influenza and PPV vaccination will count as one for the purpose of calculating the level of *further adult payments (as described above)* that a GP will be eligible to receive

In determining the fee rates for the seasonal Influenza Vaccination Programme for winter 2020/21 the Minister had regard to the expansion of the Vaccination Programme for winter 2020/21, the need to achieve uptake levels, the logistical challenges in delivering the Programme during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the special arrangements

that GPs may at their discretion decide to put in place to deliver the Vaccination Programme. such as dedicated vaccination clinics some of which are likely to be held outside of practices normal surgery hours, that practices will be required to put in place. For the avoidance of doubt, these clinics are solely for the purposes of administering the vaccine and will not attract an Out of Hours Fee.

I would like once again to express my sincere gratitude to General Practitioners and their teams for their efforts to-date and for the patient centred approach in which they have organised their services in response to this public health emergency. Our focus now collectively is to ensure that patients return to attending their GP and practices in a timely manner, for their health advice and care, so that symptoms are not left untreated. I would like to wish you and your practice team every success in delivering the seasonal Influenza Vaccination Programme to your patients over the coming months.

Please be assured of the HSE's continued support at this time.

Yours sincerely,



Pat Healy,
National Director,
Community Strategy and Planning