# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Availability of flu vaccines** |
| **DATE** | **1 November 2019** |
| **BY** | **Vaughan Gething AM, Minister for Health and Social Services** |

**CHILDREN’S FLU VACCINES**

I am writing to inform Members that due to factors beyond our control, the primary school flu immunisation programme for children aged 4-10 years will be re-scheduled due to a delay in vaccine supply.

Public Health England, which is responsible for procuring the vaccines on behalf of the UK, has informed us that there will be a delay to some deliveries of the nasal spray vaccine (Fluenz Tetra®) used in the children’s flu vaccination programme. The delay will affect deliveries due to be received during November and relates to issues around routine testing by the manufacturer and is not related to the safety of efficacy of the vaccine. An alternative supplier of vaccine is not available.

To ensure that the delay in vaccine supply does not impact on those who are most vulnerable, the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) has written to health boards and GPC Wales asking them to re-prioritise vaccination in primary care of children:

* aged 2 and 3 years
* aged 2 to 17 years in a clinical risk group (including those who would normally receive a vaccine in school).

Ordering of children’s flu vaccines for primary care commenced on 18th October and there is sufficient stock and unaffected planned deliveries to see this element of the programme through to completion. To maximise protection for all children in clinical risk groups, the CMO has requested general practice colleagues vaccinate these priority groups as early as possible.

Over 80,000 doses of vaccine had already been received by health boards for the school programme by the half term break – this is sufficient for 46% of the total number of children vaccinated last year in schools. England may be able to carry on with their schools programme for longer, but that is only because they will have used proportionately less of their allocated stock in October.

I anticipate that the full allocation of vaccines for Wales will be received over the course of the season, and that the school programme will recommence as soon as sufficient supplies are available. Health boards which have vaccines already available in pharmacies can continue an ongoing school programme for as long as is possible, or use the stock to support general practices.

The CMO has asked health boards to reschedule those school vaccination sessions which are being postponed, and to ensure that parents’ local information needs are met. Public Health Wales has developed materials to support health boards and practices during this period including template letters and Frequently Asked Questions.

Whilst this situation is unfortunate and challenging, our priority is to protect as many children as possible from the effects of flu and help reduce its spread in the community to other vulnerable individuals.

**ADULT VACCINES**

Members may also be aware that there have been delays in the availability of a quadrivalent vaccine manufactured by Sanofi, recommended for at risk adults under 65 years of age. The delay in announcing the vaccine composition for this winter has put additional pressure on manufacturers to produce the millions of vaccines required for the northern hemisphere by the usual time. The vaccines that take longer to produce have been affected more, and in this case have resulted in staggered deliveries to practices.

General practices and pharmacies in Wales order injectable flu vaccines directly from manufacturers or suppliers; they are not supplied through the NHS. Other vaccines for at risk people under 65 years of age were available to order and these have not been delayed. Vaccines for over 65s have also not been affected.

Flu doesn’t tend to start to circulate until mid-December but I appreciate that any delays in receiving the vaccine are worrying. If a suitable vaccine is not available at GP surgeries, individuals in at-risk groups should consider having the vaccine at a local pharmacy that offers the NHS flu vaccination service.

I acknowledge the impact that disruption to vaccine supplies has on delivering the flu vaccination campaign. I am grateful for the support of general practice staff, the school nursing service and other NHS staff during this challenging period.