

Fewer people to receive winter flu and Covid vaccinations

Fewer people will benefit from the free winter vaccination programme which launched in West Lothian this week.

While 72,000 people qualify for both flu and Covid jabs, some who previously qualified including teachers, prison officers and unpaid carers, will not get vaccinated this year.

Also excluded from this year's flu programme are those between 50 and 64 and household contacts of the immunosuppressed who did receive the jabs in previous years.

Frontline and non-frontline NHS and social care staff continue to qualify.

The exclusions, based on clinical evidence, have been decided on by the UK government's Joint Committee and Vaccination (JCVI). These groups were added as part of the pandemic response which is no longer required.

Flu-only jabs began on Monday, but delivery delays means that Covid jabs will not start until the end of the month.

The vaccine programme will run daily seven days a week, with the plan for 85% of those eligible to have been vaccinated before Christmas.

Neil Ferguson, the general manager of Primary Care and Community Services told a meeting of the Integration Joint

Board: "The HSCP will continue to deliver its programme within GP practices across West Lothian to promote easy, local access for citizens.

"Additionally, a single Partnership Centre within Armadale will be used. Due to low uptake within community pharmacy clinics last year, West Lothian's Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) has taken the decision not to offer vaccines in these settings."

Limitations on scheduling mean that those over 75 who receive appointments by letter may not be invited to their nearest clinic, though it will still be at a West Lothian venue.

The national call centre will be able to alter unsuitable scheduled appointments. All other eligible adults will receive a letter to prompt self-booking via the national portal.

Mr Ferguson told the meeting: "Drop-in clinics will be accommodated based on available staffing and by monitoring overall progress of the programme.

"As in previous years, 'Mop up' clinics will be utilised to maximise uptake for eligible citizens after the completion of the scheduled programme."

Last year West Lothian achieved a 52.6% uptake for flu and a 53.5% uptake for Covid which was in line with the Scottish national average. The uptake this year is likely to be similar nationally. There is variance with age groups and uptake is significantly higher in the frail, elderly population.

Mr Ferguson told the meeting that a scheme which promoted the jabs programme will be repeated. "Bespoke clinics can be arranged in geographic areas where lower uptake is evidenced. Coordination with GP practices in deprived areas of West Lothian has produced successful clinics in previous years and

it is intended to replicate that success within this year's programme."

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter