From the Chief Medical Officer
Professor Sir Michael McBride

Department of Health
An Roinn Sláinte
Männystrie O Poustie
www.health-ni.gov.uk

HSS(MD) 44/2026

FOR ACTION
Chief Executives, Public Health Agency/HSC Trusts/NIAS
Chief Operating Officer, SPPG
GP Medical Advisers, SPPG
All General Practitioners and GP Locums (for onward distribution to practice staff)
OOHs Medical Managers (for onward distribution to staff)

PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION LIST

Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
BELFAST
BT4 3SQ

Tel: 028 9052 0563
Email: cmooffice@health-ni.gov.uk

Our Ref: HSS(MD) 44/2026
Date: 9 November 2026

Dear Colleague

MEASLES, MUMPS, RUBELLA AND VARICELLA (MMRV) SELECTIVE CATCH-UP PROGRAMME

ACTION REQUIRED

Chief Executives must ensure this information is drawn to the attention of all staff involved in the childhood vaccination programme.

The SPPG must ensure this information is cascaded to all General Practitioners and practice managers for onward distribution to all staff involved in the childhood vaccination programme.

1. You will be aware that from 1 January 2026, a varicella containing vaccine was introduced into the routine childhood vaccination programme, following the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI)[1]. The purpose of this letter is to remind colleagues of the selective catch-up programme for older children, to help accelerate control and to further reduce transmission in the population.

2. HSS(MD)37/2025 dated 31 October 2025 (THE INTRODUCTION OF VARICELLA (CHICKENPOX) PROTECTION), set out the details of the introduction of the measles, mumps, rubella and varicella (MMRV) vaccine to the schedule, including the selective catch-up programme. Please note this previous letter had a slight omission in paragraph 7a. which has now been corrected. The

[1] JCVI statement on a childhood varicella (chickenpox) vaccination programme - GOV.UK

previous letter referred to children born **after** 1 January 2020, but children born **on** 1 January 2020 are also eligible. In addition, the table on Annex A has had the second column corrected.

3. The one-dose MMRV selective catch-up programme should be delivered between **1 November 2026** to **31 March 2028** as follows (for ease of reference this is also set out in a table at **Annex A**):

    a. One dose should be offered to all children born **on or between 1 January 2020 to 31 August 2022**, inviting those with no history of chickenpox disease or two doses of varicella vaccination, to attend for vaccination.

    b. There is no requirement for practices to check the history for those who respond to the catch-up offer, however if parents volunteer that the child has had previous chickenpox infection or two prior varicella-containing vaccines, they do not require the MMRV vaccine.

    c. There are no safety concerns with giving the vaccine to a child who has already had chickenpox infection or previous varicella vaccination.

    d. For children who have missed routine doses of MMR, these children should be brought up to date using the UKHSA uncertain or incomplete immunisation algorithm, which is being updated to reflect these changes.

4. A 'varicella-only' vaccine will not be offered in the selective catch-up programme.

5. GP practices delivering this programme though an enhanced service, will be paid an Item of Service fee per dose for each MMRV vaccination delivered as part of the selective catch-up programme.

6. The programme will use two combined MMRV vaccines, Priorix-Tetra® (GSK) and ProQuad® (MSD). The vaccines are considered clinically equivalent and interchangeable. However, Priorix-TETRA may be preferred for children who do not accept porcine gelatine and can be preferentially ordered by practices in the same way that MMR is.

7. MMRV vaccine will be available to order through the normal channels as with all childhood vaccination programmes. Providers should ensure that local stocks of vaccine are rotated in fridges so that wastage is minimised. It is recommended that practices hold no more than two weeks' worth of stock.

8. Detailed clinical guidance on varicella and MMRV vaccination will be covered in the following chapters of the Green Book:

    - Measles: Chapter 21
    - Mumps: Chapter 23
    - Rubella: Chapter 28
    - Varicella: Chapter 34

9. GP practices and public health nursing teams should ensure that their staff are appropriately trained to deliver the selective catch-up MMRV vaccine programme under the regional PGD and are aware of the training resources available to them.

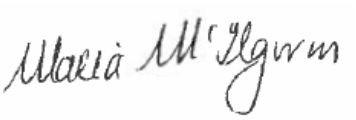
10. For any operational queries, please contact the PHA Immunisation Team at pha.immunisation@hscni.net

11. We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in the commissioning and operational delivery of the routine childhood immunisation programme in Northern Ireland.

Yours sincerely



Professor Sir Michael McBride
Chief Medical Officer



Professor Maria McIlgorm
Chief Nursing Officer



Professor Cathy Harrison
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer

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This letter is available on the Department of Health website at https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/professional-medical-and-environmental-health-advice/hssmd-letters-and-urgent-communications

Annex A

MMRV vaccination eligibility by date of birth

Date of Birth	Age on 31 December 2025	Programme Schedule	Child's full schedule for MMR/MMRV
01/01/2020 to 31/08/2022	3 years 4 months to under 6 years	Selective catch-up from 1 November 2026 to 31 March 2028 for those who have not yet had chickenpox infection or 2 doses of varicella vaccination *	12m – MMR 3y4m – MMR MMRV offered between 01/11/2026 and 31/03/2028 if no history of chickenpox or two varicella vaccines

**There is no requirement for practices to check the vaccination and infection history for those who respond to the offer.*

NB. Any child with an incomplete immunisation history for their age should be managed according to the UKHSA uncertain or incomplete immunisation algorithm.