

From the Chief Medical Officer

Dr Michael McBride

HSS(MD) 5/2017



For Action:

Chief Executives, Public Health Agency/Health and Social Care Board/HSC Trusts/NIAS
GP Medical Advisers, Health and Social Care Board
All General Practitioners and GP Locums (*for onward distribution to practice staff*)

Please see attached full addressee list

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Your Ref:
Our Ref: HSS(MD) 5/2017
Date: 11 April 2017

Dear Colleague

NEW ADVICE ON VITAMIN D INTAKE

ACTION REQUIRED

The HSCB must ensure that this information is cascaded to all General Practitioners and Community Pharmacies.

Chief Executives must ensure that this information is drawn to the attention of all relevant staff.

1. I am writing to draw to your attention the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition's report on Vitamin D intake, which was published on 21 July 2016¹.
2. As a result, the Department of Health is giving updated advice to the public on how much vitamin D they need and how to obtain it, as follows. This replaces the advice that was previously issued in 2012. This advice relates to the general public and does not, for example apply to those who are being treated for an underlying medical condition or deficiency with pharmacological doses as prescribed by their clinician.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sacn-vitamin-d-and-health-report>

For infants from birth up to 1 year of age

3. Infants from birth to one year of age who are either exclusively² or partially breastfed, are recommended to receive a daily supplement containing 8.5 to 10 micrograms vitamin D.
4. Exclusive breastfeeding until around six months helps protect babies from illness and infection. Babies who aren't breastfed are more likely to get diarrhoea, vomiting and respiratory infections. For mothers, breastfeeding decreases the risk of breast cancer and it may also offer some protection against ovarian cancer. Breast milk should continue to be given alongside an increasingly varied diet once the baby is introduced to solid foods.
5. Infants fed infant formula should not be given a vitamin D supplement unless they are receiving less than 500 mls (about a pint) of formula a day because formula is fortified with vitamin D and no other supplementation is required.

Children aged 1 to 4 years

6. Children aged 1 to 4 years of age are recommended to receive a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms vitamin D.

People aged 5 years and above

7. **Between late March/early April and September**, the majority of people aged 5 years and above will probably obtain sufficient vitamin D from sunlight when they are outdoors, alongside foods that naturally contain or are fortified with vitamin D. As such, they might choose not to take a vitamin D supplement during these months.
8. **From October to March** everyone over the age of five, including pregnant and breastfeeding women, should consider taking a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms of vitamin D.
9. However, some groups of people with very little or no sunshine exposure will not obtain enough vitamin D from sunlight. People from these groups should take a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms vitamin D throughout the year. They are:
 - people who are seldom outdoors such as frail or housebound individuals and those who are confined indoors e.g. in institutions such as care homes
 - people who habitually wear clothes that cover most of their skin while outdoors.

²Exclusive breastfeeding is when a baby receives only breastmilk. They are not given any other liquids or solid foods except medicines, vitamin drops or oral rehydration solutions when necessary.

- People from minority ethnic groups with dark skin such as those of African, African-Caribbean and South Asian origin.

How to obtain Vitamin D

10. Some children aged up to four years and pregnant women will be entitled to free Healthy Start Vitamins³
11. All other people should be advised to purchase a Vitamin D supplement from their local community pharmacy, supermarket or other retail outlet. Vitamins should not be prescribed.
12. The new advice is provided on these websites directed at the general public:

http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/VitaminD_6ppA5_02_17.pdf

<https://www.food.gov.uk/northern-ireland/nutrition/scientific-advisory-committee-on-nutrition-publish-vitamin-d-and-health-report>

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-minerals/pages/vitamin-d.aspx>

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Summerhealth/Pages/vitamin-D-sunlight.aspx>

<http://www.nhs.uk/start4life/super-supplements>

<http://www.nhs.uk/start4life/baby-foods>

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/free-milk-fruit-vegetables-and-vitamins>
13. This updated advice on vitamin D can help reduce potential deficiency in at risk groups. As health professionals, you can make a significant difference to people's health by making those at risk aware of how important it is to make sure they get enough vitamin D.
14. I thank you for your continued help and support with raising awareness of this issue, which in turn should raise the levels of vitamin D in those at risk, and vulnerable groups.

Yours sincerely



Dr Michael McBride
Chief Medical Officer



Professor Charlotte McArdle
Chief Nursing Officer



Dr Mark Timoney
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer

³ It should be noted that the current Healthy Start vitamin product does not contain 10mcg of vitamin D, but it does contain 7.5mcg, which is a useful contribution towards the recommended intake of 10mcg, and also contains A and C as well. A new product which will be fully compliant with the SACN recommendations will be available from September 2018 onwards.

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

CIRCULATION LIST

Executive Medical Director/Director of Public Health, Public Health Agency (*for onward distribution to all relevant health protection staff*)

Assistant Director Public Health (Health Protection), Public Health Agency

Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency

Assistant Director of Pharmacy and Medicines Management, Health and Social Care Board (*for onward distribution to all Community Pharmacies*)

Directors of Pharmacy HSC Trusts

Director of Social Care and Children, HSCB

Family Practitioner Service Leads, Health and Social Care Board (*for cascade to GP Out of Hours services*)

Medical Directors, HSC Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Consultant Obstetricians, Paediatricians and other relevant staff*)

Directors of Nursing, HSC Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Community Nurses, and Midwives*)

Directors of Children's Services, HSC Trusts

RQIA (*for onward transmission to all independent providers including independent hospitals*)