

Pharmacists extremely concerned at lack of flu vaccines

- - Even limited supply needs to be released now

- **Unprecedented pressures on pharmacists leading to administration delays**

11 November 2020: Pharmacists have urged the HSE to release any available flu vaccine supplies now, as they continue to have at-risk patients who have yet to receive their flu vaccine. The Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) was responding to newspaper reports claiming that the HSE is withholding further doses as 600,000 flu vaccines have yet to be accounted for on the HSE claims system. In response, community pharmacist and IPU Executive Committee member Caitriona O’Riordan said, “the simple fact is that healthcare professionals have faced unprecedented pressures since the start of the pandemic and we are too busy supporting patients to be fully up to date with the paperwork of accounting for every vaccine given. We will get to it, but our priority must be our patients.”

Pharmacies have been working under incredible pressure since the advent of the pandemic, as their role as the central pillar of healthcare in the community has become more important. This was backed up by a recent Behaviour & Attitudes survey, which showed that 30% of people say the pharmacist has become more important to them since March. Ms O’Riordan continued, “There has been an unprecedented demand for the flu vaccine this year, and we welcome that people are aware of the benefits of it. However, pharmacies have been inundated with requests for the vaccine and many of our patients are frustrated and some are fearful that they have been unable to obtain a vaccine. “Deliveries of this year’s flu vaccine started arriving in Ireland in the middle of September, and at this point we began hearing about ‘temporary delays’. As we still await sufficient vaccine stocks to vaccinate all patients, it is clear this delay is not temporary. We now believe that pharmacies cannot expect more deliveries of flu vaccines, or that only limited further supplies will be available. The authorities must be clear about the availability of flu vaccines for the current flu season. “This whole debacle is particularly frustrating as it should have been foreseen and prepared for. The IPU called for a concerted plan to combat flu in May, and if this had been put in place we could have had our most successful flu vaccination season to date, given the level of interest. Lessons must be learned for future years.” However, Ms O’Riordan concluded by advising parents that there is no shortage in vaccines for children aged 2 to 12. “The introduction of free vaccines for children aged 2 to 12 is one positive development. Children receive a nasal spray vaccine which differs from that provided to adults and older children. There is sufficient supply of this vaccine and we would encourage all parents to avail of this free

vaccine at their local pharmacy.”