

Pharmacists should be permitted to vaccinate all those eligible for Janssen vaccine



Arbitrary age cap is not consistent with NIAC guidelines and is slowing vaccine rollout

29 June 2021: The Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) has called on the HSE to extend the eligibility for pharmacy vaccinations to match the NIAC guidelines. Pharmacies are only permitted by the HSE to provide the Janssen vaccine to patients aged 50 and over. NIAC currently advises that the Janssen vaccine is appropriate for those aged over 40 however it is expected that it will today recommend to Government for the age cohort which is eligible for the Janssen vaccine to be significantly lowered.

IPU Secretary General Darragh O'Loughlin called on the HSE to take a common-sense approach by addressing this discrepancy. "Pharmacies successfully commenced providing the Janssen COVID 19 vaccine in almost 800 locations nationwide, earlier this month. The response has been overwhelmingly positive from those who have opted to receive them. However, the number of people we can vaccinate is artificially constrained to those over 50, despite the fact that NIAC has advised that this vaccine is appropriate for those aged over 40 and is expected to advise a further reduction in the eligible age cohort today.

"Currently everyone aged 35 or over is entitled to register for a COVID-19 vaccine. There is no

clinical or public health reason to exclude people in that age category from opting for a vaccine in a pharmacy. All we are asking is for consistency between NIAC guidelines and what the HSE authorises us to do.”

This would present a series of practical benefits according to O’Loughlin. “Many patients have legitimate reasons for preferring their local pharmacy over a vaccination centre. Where possible, as it is for the 40-50 age group, the HSE should empower the patient to make that choice”.

“One of the major advantages of the Janssen vaccine is that it involves just one single dose. This makes it particularly suitable to individuals under 50 who for a range of lifestyle reasons may find it more difficult to avail of the two shot options. Across the country there is strong demand from people under 50 for vaccinations in pharmacies. Despite there being no clinical reason preventing us, we cannot fulfil that demand.

“For pharmacies extending the cohort significantly increases the efficiency of pharmacy-based vaccinations. Each vial of the Janssen vaccine contains five doses, which must be administered within 3 hours. Scheduling vaccine clinics in groups of five has logistically proven challenging for many pharmacies. It is frustrating when those under 50 ask about vaccination and there is no clinical reason why they could not be included.

“Growing concerns about the Delta variant makes it all the more important that we use our resources effectively. Pharmacists have the capacity to vaccinate large numbers of people in their own communities. Currently the HSE are not maximising the capacity of pharmacies.

Darragh O’Loughlin, Secretary General of the IPU concluded “We all want to re-open our society safely. Pharmacists want to play their part to make this happen. We hope the HSE can empower us to do so.”