

# Pharmacists urge Government to extend free flu vaccine to 13-17-year olds

- Low take-up of children's vaccine could mean doses expire unused

**23 November 2020:** The Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) has urged the Government to expand eligibility for the free nasal flu vaccine for children to include teenagers. The flu vaccine is currently available for free to children aged 2-12, and community pharmacists believe this should be expanded to include 13-17-year olds also. The uptake of the nasal flu vaccine has reportedly been low, and there is a risk that a significant portion of the 600,000 vaccines for children which were ordered by the HSE could expire unused due to a lack of demand. The IPU understands the vaccines will begin to expire in January and while 450,000 have been distributed, so far only about one quarter are recorded as having been administered. The IPU has urged parents to ensure their children get vaccinated. Community pharmacist and IPU committee member Jonathon Morrissey said, "Flu is a very serious and contagious respiratory illness. While it disproportionately affects older people, it is deeply unpleasant at all ages and can have serious long-term impacts. It is very concerning that there has been such a low uptake in parents getting their children vaccinated, despite a very high-profile campaign by the HSE advertising that the vaccine is available for free to children." Mr Morrissey concluded by reminding parents what is at stake; "If there is a possibility that doses of the nasal flu vaccine could expire unused, then the criteria to qualify for the free vaccine should be expanded to include all those over 2, and up to 18. We currently can't stop COVID-19 but we can stop flu. We should all do what we can to protect our health service and the vulnerable members of our community. Reducing the risk of children and teenagers spreading flu is one important step."