

Immediate Public Health Advice for Community Health Organisations in responding to the health needs of people fleeing the war in Ukraine

1. COVID-19

People fleeing to Ireland from the war in Ukraine are at a high risk of COVID-19 infection. This risk is as a result of the following circumstances:

- There is currently a high rate of COVID infection in the community in Ireland.
- This cohort of people generally has a low COVID-19 vaccination rate (approx. 35% of the adult population have a primary dose and approx. 4% have a booster dose; no childhood COVID-19 vaccination).
- Many members of this community are being accommodated in relatively dense circumstances, with several people to a room, either in houses of relatives and friends or in hotel accommodation.

In order to prevent COVID-19 transmission in these settings Public Health recommends the following for this population:

Offer COVID-19 vaccine to this community in as timely a way as possible

It is important to provide accurate trusted information about the vaccine. Public Health have produced an introduction advocacy letter, explaining the high rate of vaccination in Ireland and how it is our main prevention strategy. It is translated into Ukrainian and Russian. This letter and other materials to support them in making a decision regarding vaccination will be made available on the HSE website and the HPSC Website in the coming days. All vaccines given must be recorded on COVAX including any information on doses already received and ensure that nationality is recorded.

Provide masks and hand gel for staff and residents

Masks and hand-gel should be provided to all accommodation centres / hotels. Residents and staff should be advised to wear masks in shared spaces in congregate accommodation such as hotels and on public transport.

Provide antigen test kits for staff and residents

Antigen test kits should be provided to hotels / congregate settings for use by residents and staff. All persons regardless of vaccination status should have access to antigen tests in order to identify early infection and prompt isolation.

Provide translated COVID safety materials for managers and residents

COVID safety materials and information for congregate settings/ hotels are available on the HSE website and on the HPSC website for hotel managers. Translated materials are available for residents.

PCR testing if and when advised by Public Health

If outbreak of COVID-19 is suspected, PCR testing may be requested by Public Health (i.e. for those with high risk conditions, as per general population, and on Public Health Risk Assessment).

Prevention of outbreaks is paramount. Appropriate control measures will be advised following a risk assessment by Public Health.

2. Health needs assessment

While a baseline health needs assessment on each individual is desirable, it is important that across CHOs the data collected is consistent and that a sustainable process is set up which is compatible with GP electronic systems including immunisation information systems. It is important that if the HSE collects information it has the ability to respond to the needs identified.

A joint ECDC, UNHCR, IOM, WHO, UNICEF health needs assessment tool to support front line health care workers to guide individual health assessment is expected in the coming days. In the meantime, HSE Public Health has developed an interim tool. Two CHO areas are planning to pilot this baseline health needs assessment in the coming days. They will evaluate and report back on this approach and the process will be adjusted as necessary. The final agreed health needs assessment tool will be circulated to CHOs as soon as possible.

3. Immunisation and other health assessment

It is likely that primary care services such as immunisation and other health assessments may have to be delivered for congregated accommodation settings by CHOs. To this end it is prudent to start planning for this and to start identifying a potential community response team consisting of medical, nursing and administration staff in addition to Ukrainian colleagues and trusted leaders who will be able to support the process. The National Immunisation Office will be available to support immunisations via community operations to ensure a consistent, evidence based and equitable response with appropriate recording. Suitability of the congregated settings as a location to deliver this care should be considered with contingency plans in place if an alternative location is required (e.g. dedicated assessment hub with appropriate IPC measures).

Immunisation priorities are as follows;

1. Every adult and eligible child should be offered COVID-19 vaccine if not already fully vaccinated (including booster).
2. Every child should be vaccinated according to the Irish immunisation schedule <https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/immunisation/pubinfo/pcischedule/immschedule/>
 - a. If there is no accurate immunisation history, they should be treated as unimmunised
 - b. If there is an accurate history or evidence of immunisation the child should be offered any necessary catch-up immunisations to transfer them to the Irish immunisation schedule as per guidance <https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/immunisation/hcpinfo/hcppci/tips-catch-up-feb-2022.pdf>
3. All pregnant women should be offered all appropriate immunisations including pertussis, influenza and COVID-19. <https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/immunisation/pubinfo/pregvaccs/>
4. All school aged children should be offered appropriate immunisation as per the Irish schedule. <https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/immunisation/pubinfo/schoolprog/>
 - a. If there is no accurate immunisation history, they should be treated as unimmunised
 - b. If there is an accurate history or evidence of immunisation the school-aged child should be offered any necessary catch-up immunisations to transfer them to the Irish immunisation schedule as per guidance

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/immunisation/hcpinfo/hcpci/tips-catch-up-feb-2022.pdf>

5. All those on the NIAC recommended risk groups should be offered Influenza vaccine
<https://www2.hse.ie/screening-and-vaccinations/flu-vaccine/getting/#who-can-get-a-free-flu-vaccine>
6. All adults should be offered appropriate immunisation as per the Irish schedule
<https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/immunisation/pubinfo/adult/>
 - a. If there is no accurate immunisation history, they should be treated as unimmunised
 - b. If there is an accurate history or evidence of immunisation the adult should be offered any necessary catch-up immunisations to transfer them to the Irish immunisation schedule as per guidance
<https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/immunisation/hcpinfo/hcpci/tips-catch-up-feb-2022.pdf>
 - c. All adults should be offered Hepatitis B vaccination if found to be eligible after screening bloods, as per NIAC guidelines.
<https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/immunisation/pubinfo/pcischedule/vpds/hepb/>

4. Health Assessment for Blood-Borne viruses and TB

Guidance on health assessment for blood-borne viruses and TB will be provided in the coming days.

Public Health will provide regular advisory updates.

For further information and resources:

- For information from the HSE on healthcare services for Ukrainian nationals in Ireland visit <https://www2.hse.ie/services/healthcare-in-ireland/ukrainian-refugees.html>
This information is available in English, Ukrainian and Russian.
- Translated COVID-19 resources: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/covid-19-resources-and-translations/translated-covid19-information/>
- Immunisation information to support people from Ukraine is available from the HSE National Immunisation Office:
<https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/immunisation/hcpinfo/ukraine/>
- Additional Public Health Resources will be available here: <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/specificpopulations/migrants/ukrainianrefugees/>