

Guidance for sharing vaccine stocks between GP practices during COVID-19 pandemic

NHS England and NHS improvement have issued guidance that states:

While there are no central supply issues of vaccine stock, it may be necessary for CCGs and/or Primary Care Networks to facilitate the transfer of locally held vaccine stock from one provider to another to ensure the continued delivery of immunisation programmes. To support this, the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has now confirmed that it would not prevent the transfer of locally held vaccine stock from the NHS routine Immunisation services during COVID-19, provided that:

- The CCG, PCN or General Practice believes the transfer of vaccine(s) is necessary to support the continued delivery of routine immunisations in primary care during the COVID-19 response and will ensure the effective use of available resource;
- The CCG, PCN or General Practice that is holding the vaccine stock has assurance that the vaccine has been stored in the correct temperature-controlled conditions;
- confirmed daily record keeping of temperature monitoring is available;
- The CCG, PCN or General Practice that requires locally held vaccine supply can verify the assurances given; and
- the vaccine(s) can be transported appropriately under the right cold chain conditions.

Importance of the cold chain

The 'cold chain' is a term used to describe the cold temperature conditions in which certain products need to be kept during storage and distribution. Maintaining the cold chain ensures that vaccines are transported and stored according to the manufacturer's recommended temperature range of +2°C to +8°C until the point of administration.

The receiving practice should assure themselves that the vaccine has been correctly stored before accepting to take stock from the practice willing to share vaccine stock.

Vaccine effectiveness cannot be guaranteed unless the vaccine has been stored correctly. Vaccines should be stored in the original packaging, retaining batch numbers and expiry dates and according to the manufacturer's summary of product characteristics (SPC) – usually at +2°C to +8°C and protected from light. Prolonged exposure to ultraviolet light will cause loss of potency. Within the refrigerator, sufficient space around the vaccine packages should be left for air to circulate. Vaccines should be kept away from the side and back walls of the refrigerator; otherwise the vaccines may freeze rendering them inactive and unusable.

Temperatures in the refrigerator must be monitored and recorded at least once each working day, and documented on a chart for recording temperatures. It is recommended to use the 'four Rs' when monitoring fridge temperatures:

- **Read:** daily reading of the thermometer's maximum, minimum and current temperatures at the same time every day during the working week
- **Record:** recording temperatures in a standard fashion and on a standard form, including signing each entry on the recording sheet
- **Reset:** resetting the thermometer after each reading. The thermometers should also be reset when temperatures have stabilized after periods of high activity
- **React:** the person making the recording should take action if the temperature falls outside +2°C to +8°C and document this action.

The receiving practice can check the above by asking to see the temperature recording log for the vaccines at the supplying practice. It would also be recommended to ask to see a video of the vaccines in storage at the supplying practice before agreeing to take stock.

Transporting vaccines

Domestic cool boxes should not be used to store, distribute or transport vaccines. Validated cool boxes and cool packs from a recognised medical supply company should be used in conjunction with validated maximum– minimum thermometers. Cool packs should be stored in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions, usually at +2°C to +8°C (not a freezer compartment) to ensure they maintain the cold chain at the right temperature. In general, ice packs and frozen cool packs should not be used as there is a danger of these freezing some vaccine doses during transit. The exception to this is when the cool box manufacturer’s instructions specifically state that ice packs should be used. Individual manufacturer’s instructions should be strictly adhered to.

A validated cool box provides ongoing assurance that the vaccines will be maintained within the cold chain temperature range during transport. With time and use, cool boxes may no longer be able to maintain this temperature range for extended periods so monitoring is always required. The cool box manufacturer should also provide sufficient evidence for assurance that a stable temperature within the range of the cold chain can be maintained for several hours.

Vaccines must be kept in the original packaging, wrapped in bubble wrap (or similar insulation material) and placed into a cool box with cool packs as per the manufacturer’s instructions. This will prevent direct contact between the vaccine and the cool packs and will protect the vaccine from any damage.

On receipt of the vaccines the practice should aim to use these vaccines before any others which have been received by the usual supply chain route

Checklist for Receiving Practice

Vaccines in original container and in date	
Vaccine storage can be guaranteed as per manufacturer’s instructions	
Temperature log can be viewed for the period the vaccine(s) have been in possession of the supplying practice	
Supplying/ receiving practice have suitable cool box and cool packs to transport vaccines	
Receiving practice are satisfied that vaccine cold chain maintained during transport from supplying practice	

Practices within a PCN or CCG who are sharing vaccines could do so under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that allowed the Practice Nurse of each participating surgery to administer vaccines on behalf of another surgery to it’s patients. An example of a MOU that could be used with the participating surgeries inserted on the MOU document can be found at the following [LINK](#).