



13th December 2021

Mr Stephen Donnelly TD
Minister for Health
Department of Health
Block 1, Miesian Plaza
50-58 Lower Baggot Street
Dublin 2

Via email to Private Secretary to the Minister for Health

Dear Minister,

As you will be aware the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) have previously advised that a booster dose of Comirnaty© or a half dose of Spikevax© be given at a minimum five-month interval following completion of the primary vaccination schedule with any authorised COVID-19 vaccine. As part of their advice on December 7th in relation to primary vaccination of 5-11 year olds, NIAC indicated they were examining evidence regarding the interval between primary vaccine series and booster doses. I am writing to advise you that today I have received recommendations from Committee in that regard (see attached correspondence).

Given the existing high burden of SARS-CoV-2 infection in the community and in light of the threat posed by the Omicron variant, **NIAC have recommended that the interval between the primary vaccine series and booster dose should be reduced to three months.** Decreasing the time to optimal protection in the current epidemiological situation should serve to reduce serve disease, hospitalisation and deaths, as well as having an impact on infection rates. In making this recommendation NIAC note the preliminary data reporting lower levels of neutralising antibodies in response to Omicron as compared to other variants of concern including Delta, raising the prospect of reduced vaccine effectiveness, as well as the emerging evidence of significantly higher neutralising activity following a booster dose.

Administration of a booster dose is especially critical for those at increased risk of severe disease and **NIAC reiterate that vaccine booster doses should continue to offer in the priority order as previously recommended. In respect of those who are immunocompromised for whom a third dose had been previously recommended as part of an extended vaccine schedule, NIAC have further recommended a booster (fourth dose) of an mRNA vaccine no sooner than three months after their third dose.** In a change from previous advice **NIAC have also recommended that those individuals who have received one dose of a two-dose primary vaccine schedule and who subsequently have a confirmed SARS-CoV-2 infection, should complete their primary vaccination course four weeks after diagnosis or onset of symptoms.**

In endorsing the NIAC recommendations as set out above, I note the advice to reduce the booster interval to three months is in line with the recently published joint European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) recommendations on heterologous vaccination courses against COVID-19. Notwithstanding the current EMA recommendation for a six-month interval between primary vaccination and booster doses, they note that data currently available support safe and effective administration of a booster dose as early as 3 months from completion of the primary vaccination.

Yours sincerely

Dr Tony Holohan
Chief Medical Officer