

HEALTH TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT AND EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS BULLETIN

Welcome Message



**From
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- Deputy Chief Executive
- Director of Health Technology Assessment

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Welcome to our fourth and final bulletin of 2024, covering activities from October through December in the area of health technology assessment (HTA) and evidence synthesis. Our aim is to provide a brief overview of our most recent reports, and to highlight conferences and events we have attended. All of our publications are available to read in full on our website, www.hiqa.ie.

The first three quarters of 2024 were very busy for us, and the fourth quarter has been no exception. If you would like to look back at our previous bulletins for the year, you can find the first edition [here](#), the second edition [here](#), and the third edition [here](#).

In addition to sharing our expertise at a number of international conferences in recent months, we published several key documents: advice on enhanced inactivated influenza vaccines for people aged 65+; a summary of publicly-funded services for fertility preservation for medical reasons in selected countries; updated draft national guidelines for conducting economic evaluation and budget impact analysis in HTAs; and draft guidelines for the justification of medical radiological procedures on asymptomatic individuals. You can read more about these in the following pages.

For the year ahead, we will continue our work in topics such as HTAs of an alternative telephone pathway for acute, non-urgent medical care needs in the pre-hospital setting; of screening for abdominal aortic aneurysm in men; and of extending BowelScreen to those aged 50 to 54 years.

In the meantime, we are looking forward to implementation of the EU Regulation of health technology assessment (HTAR) on 12 January. We are representing Ireland on the HTAR Coordination Group and its subgroups which will oversee implementation and on the EC HTA Committee which is overseeing the development of the Implementing Acts for the Regulation.

As always, we appreciate your feedback, and welcome suggestions for future editions. Reach out to us at htanews@hiqa.ie — and please share this bulletin with anyone you think may be interested.



**Health
Information
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Authority**

An tÚdarás Um Fhaisnéis
agus Cáilíocht Sláinte

REPORTS

>>> Enhanced inactivated influenza vaccines for over 65s

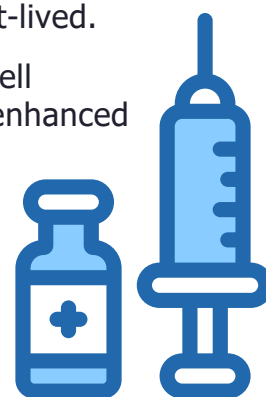
In October, we provided advice to the Minister for Health and Health Service Executive (HSE) regarding a potential switch from a standard to an enhanced influenza (flu) vaccine for people aged 65+ as part of the HSE Seasonal Influenza Vaccination Programme.

Our HTA found evidence that two types of enhanced flu vaccines (adjuvanted and high-dose flu vaccines) may be more effective than standard flu vaccines in preventing cases of flu or flu-related hospitalisation in this age group.

We also found that some of the enhanced vaccines are associated with a higher risk of certain side effects (such as headache, pain at the injection site, or fever) compared with standard flu vaccines, but these reactions are usually mild and short-lived.

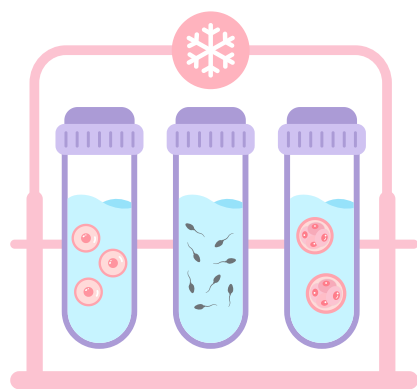
Overall, our assessment noted that flu vaccines are generally safe and well tolerated, and that serious side effects are rare with both standard and enhanced flu vaccines.

Our assessment included a public consultation held from 30 May to 11 July this year, during which input was sought from the public on a preliminary draft report. The full final report, a plain language summary, the statement of outcomes from the public consultation, and an infographic can be found [here](#).



Summary of publicly-funded fertility preservation services <<<

Also in October, we published a summary of publicly-funded services for fertility preservation for medical reasons in selected countries. Our review found that:



- freezing of sperm and eggs is publicly funded in all 10 selected countries, and freezing of embryos is publicly funded in seven of the selected countries
- people undergoing cancer treatment are offered fertility preservation in all of the selected countries
- publicly-funded freezing of sperm and eggs is typically offered to adults and adolescents who are post puberty
- freezing of ovarian tissue and testicular tissue is less often publicly funded, and may be offered to particular groups of people.

This report, which can be found [here](#), was requested by the Department of Health to support the development of a national fertility preservation policy for Ireland.

REPORTS

>>> Updated national guidelines for economic evaluation and budget impact analysis in HTAs

In October, we launched a public consultation on updated draft guidelines for conducting economic evaluation and budget impact analysis in HTAs that ran until 2 December.

In Ireland, HTAs are used to help decide which health technologies (such as drugs, medical tests, medical devices, surgeries, healthcare reorganisation) should be funded and used in the public health and social care system. We update the national HTA guidelines to ensure they incorporate the most up-to-date and relevant scientific information, based on research and experience both nationally and internationally.

An economic evaluation compares the costs and benefits of different choices to see which one is the best use of resources, whereas a budget impact analysis helps decision-makers understand how much a new technology will cost and how it will affect the overall budget.

We are now updating the guidelines, which will be published on our website, together with a statement of outcomes document reflecting feedback received during the consultation.

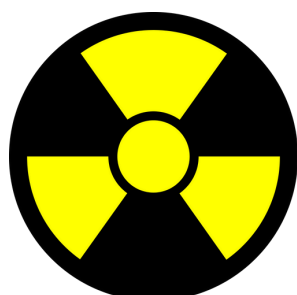


Draft guidelines for the justification of medical radiological procedures on asymptomatic individuals



In November, we launched a public consultation on draft guidelines for the justification of medical radiological procedures on asymptomatic individuals that runs until 18 December.

Under Irish law, HIQA has been designated as the competent authority for medical exposure to ionising radiation. As such, we must develop guidelines for justifying procedures that involve medical exposure to ionising radiation in people who have no known disease or symptoms and where they are not part of a health screening programme.



These guidelines apply to any person or organisation conducting medical radiological procedures. This includes individual professionals involved in the provision of medical radiological procedures in dental and medical settings.

Following the consultation, the guidelines will be updated as necessary and published on our website, together with a statement of outcomes document reflecting feedback received during the consultation.



CONFERENCES & EVENTS

Heads of HTA Agencies Group

On 24 October, our Director of HTA, Dr Máirín Ryan, along with our Deputy Director of HTA, Dr Kieran Walsh, attended the 8th face-to-face meeting of the Heads of HTA Agencies Group (HAG) in Rome.

The Heads of HTA Agencies Group is a forum to raise, highlight and discuss matters of strategic importance that are of relevance for HTA bodies across Europe.

The meeting, with more than 70 participants from 29 member agencies, was organised and hosted by the Italian National Agency for Regional Healthcare Services, the Italian Medicines Agency and the Italian Ministry of Health.

HAG members discussed the national implementation of the EU HTA Regulations and ongoing partnerships across the region. HIQA was recently appointed to the Secretariat for the HAG. Dr Walsh is representing HIQA in supporting the work of the Group.



17th European Public Health Conference



We were well represented from 13-15 November at the 17th European Public Health Conference in Lisbon. The annual scientific conference addresses public health issues across Europe.

We presented on a wide range of topics that included rare disease strategies; long COVID; abdominal aortic aneurysm screening in men; respiratory syncytial virus (RSV); lessons learned from our work in public health policy research; and stockpiling for public health emergencies.

We look forward to sharing some of our ongoing and newly undertaken work in November next year at the 18th European Public Health Conference, taking place in Helsinki.



CONFERENCES & EVENTS

Future of PharmacIE careers event

On 1 November our Deputy Director Kieran Walsh and pharmacy intern Olga Andriyashchenko were at the Future of PharmacIE annual careers event organised by APPEL (Pharmacy Experiential Learning) for undergraduate pharmacy students from all three Schools of Pharmacy in Ireland (University College Cork, Royal College of Surgeons Ireland, Trinity College Dublin).

The event was an occasion for pharmacy students to network with organisations and professionals from a variety of practice settings, both patient facing and non-patient facing. It also featured speakers presenting on future career opportunities in pharmacy.



HSE Open Access Research Awards

The poster is for the '2024 HSE Library Open Access Research Awards'. It features the HSE Library logo (Leabharlann FSS) and the Lenus logo (The Irish Health Repository). The award is for the 'Community and Social Care Award' given to 'Kieran Walsh and Helen O'Donnell' for their paper 'Duration of protective immunity following COVID-19 vaccination of individuals with underlying health conditions: A rapid review'. The event is on Thursday, 5th December 2024. There is a 'Celebrating 10 YEARS' badge and an 'OPEN ACCESS' logo.

Congratulations to members of our HTA Directorate who were awarded in the Community and Social Care category at the 2024 annual HSE Open Access Research Awards on 5 December for their paper titled 'Duration of protective immunity following COVID-19 vaccination of individuals with underlying health conditions: A rapid review'.

The review looked at how long people with underlying health conditions are protected after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine. This work was undertaken to inform decisions on how often COVID-19 vaccine boosters should be offered.

You can read the paper [here](#).



CONFERENCES & EVENTS

ISPOR 2024

From 17-20 November we highlighted some of our HTA work at the ISPOR Real-World Evidence Summit and the ISPOR Europe 2024 conference in Barcelona, which focused on the importance of scientific evidence in understanding and improving the health and wellbeing of people across the globe.

Our Director of HTA and Deputy CEO, Dr Máirín Ryan, co-chaired the HTA Roundtable event — a key platform to advance scientific methods, facilitate information-sharing on the current state of HTA, and connect stakeholders.

Our HTA Analyst, Orla Jenkins, presented a poster on a scoping review of international practice on the impact on health service delivery of providing an alternative telephone pathway for acute, non-urgent medical care needs.

Susan Ahern, our Senior Health Economist, presented a poster on an economic evaluation of herpes zoster (shingles) vaccination for adults in Ireland. Susan also presented a poster on developing automated decision rules based on vaccine cost to identify optimal vaccination strategies.

Our partner Sharon McLoughlin, Research Assistant at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), presented a poster on a comparison of international rapid HTAs.

Our Chief Scientist, Dr Conor Teljeur, was a panel member at the ISPOR Real-World Evidence (RWE) Summit session titled 'Overcoming Obstacles: Charting the Path Ahead', which examined the potential use of RWE in health technology assessment decision-making.

Congratulations to Conor — seen here on the right — on being awarded 'Best General Poster Research Presentation' for his poster titled 'A new approach to one-way sensitivity analysis and the tornado plot'.

