



## Porcine content in vaccines: faith communities and people with dietary restrictions

Some readers may have seen an article about this subject that has recently been uploaded on the GOV.UK website – see [web link 1](#).

Many medicines that are used all over the world contain traces of bovine and porcine gelatine and vaccines are no exception. These medicines are often, like vaccines, very important in the maintenance of our health and wellbeing and have been developed to protect us against potentially serious illnesses such as flu. Gelatine is an essential ingredient in the manufacture of many medicines and some vaccines. Manufacturers have developed their products to be as safe and effective as possible and this may need the use of materials like gelatine.

In summary, the Kashrus and Medicines Information Service has said that

*'according to Jewish laws, there is no problem with porcine or other animal derived ingredients in non-oral products. This includes vaccines, including those administered via the nose, injections, suppositories, creams and ointments.'*

In 2001, the World Health Organization (WHO) consulted with over 100 Muslim scholars and confirmed that the gelatine used is considered halal and there is no religious reason not to receive vaccination. A summary report on the findings of more than 100 Islamic legal scholars who met in 1995 to clarify Islamic purity laws states the following:

*'Transformation which means the conversion of a substance into another substance, different in characteristics, changes substances that are judicially impure . . . into pure substances, and changes substances that are prohibited into lawful and permissible substances.'*

While the global Muslim community is largely content, it has been drawn to our attention that in the UK there are some groups within the Muslim community for whom such products may still be considered not permissible. This would prevent the individual accepting many pharmaceutical products unless there is no suitable better alternative and/or the product is considered life-saving.

This consideration would apply to the new Fluenz nasal flu vaccine that is being offered to all two- and three-year-old children countrywide and in some 'pilot' areas of the country to four- to ten-year-olds. Although most inactivated injectable flu vaccines do not contain gelatine, the universal programme was recommended by JCVI on the basis of using Fluenz to achieve a profound effect on transmission of influenza in the community. This is because Fluenz offers better protection in children than inactivated vaccine, particularly after a single dose, and is

easier to deliver as it is a non-injectable nasal spray. Because of this, PHE is recommending that the inactivated vaccine should only be offered as an alternative for those with medical contraindications and in risk groups.

Some people who voluntarily restrict their diet eg vegetarians and vegans may also have concerns about the use of Fluenz. The Vegetarian Society states on its website:

*'Gelatine (most often spelled 'gelatin' when it is used in pharmaceuticals) is an issue for vegetarians when taking prescription or over the counter drugs. Gelatin is used in drug capsule manufacture but can also be present in solid tablets and even in liquid preparations. Although gelatin may appear to be easily replaced with a vegetarian substitute this is not always the case; gelatin can play a vital role in how the medication works in your body.'*

See [web link 2](#)

For children in risk groups with medical contraindications, inactivated vaccine is a suitable alternative to provide individual protection (two doses will be required for those aged under nine years who have not had a dose previously).

## Vaccine supply

### Shingles vaccination for those aged 70 and 79

Issue 205 of *Vaccine Update* (September 2013) set out details of the new shingles immunisation programme, that started on 1 September 2013. Initially, the vaccination is being provided to men and women aged 70 or 79 on that date.

Based on assurances of continuity of supply from the manufacturer (Sanofi Pasteur MSD), national distribution of Zostavax vaccine began on 1 August 2013. However, due to an ongoing temporary delay in the supply of the vaccine into the UK, PHE has introduced a cap on customer orders in England. This is currently set at 25 doses per order per week. Please do not try to place multiple orders to circumvent this control as this could impact on the vaccine deliveries that you receive. Orders will be monitored.

This situation will remain fluid and the order cap will be kept under review in line with confirmed supply coming into the UK.

Vaccine must only be ordered for the 70-year-old and 79-year-old cohorts this year. Please do not stockpile the vaccine as it is expensive and it is important to minimise wastage. Where possible, we recommend the vaccine be administered alongside the flu vaccine. If this is not possible because of supply, or has not been planned, then please note that the vaccine can be administered to the two eligible cohorts at any time between 1 September 2013 and 31 August 2014.

Customers should refer to the ImmForm website at [web link 3](#) for the latest information on vaccine availability, or contact [vaccinesupply@phe.gov.uk](mailto:vaccinesupply@phe.gov.uk)

## Web links

**Web link 1** <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/vaccines-and-gelatine-phe-response>

**Web link 2** <https://www.vegsoc.org/FAQs>

**Web link 3** <https://www.immform.dh.gov.uk/SignIn.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2f>

**Vaccine update subscriptions:** <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKHPA/subscribers/new?preferences=true>