



Department
of Health



Public Health
England



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Dear Colleague,

Vaccination of health and social care workers against flu, 2013/14

We write to urge your active support to increase flu vaccine uptake among frontline health and social care workers, in whom vaccine uptake over the last few years remains disappointingly low (45.6% in 2012/2013). Coverage in Trusts ranges from 8% to over 85%. Given this huge variation in coverage, there is considerable scope for improvement.

We want your help to promote the following key points to all your frontline staff across all providers of acute, community and social care services –

- As part of your duty of care to your patients or residents you should do everything in your power to protect them against infection. This includes getting vaccinated against flu.
- The impact of flu on frail and vulnerable patients, in communities, care homes and in hospitals, can be fatal.
- Getting vaccinated against flu can help protect you and your family.
- Even if you are asymptomatic you can still pass on flu to patients.
- Having the flu vaccination can be a powerful message to colleagues and patients.

As you will be aware, the Secretary of State announced this month that any NHS trust eligible for a share of £250m A&E funding for next year will need to ensure that at least 75% of its own staff have been vaccinated against flu this year. Trusts will not be eligible to receive a portion of the money in future years if they do not vaccinate 75% of their staff this year, except in exceptional circumstances where they can prove to the TDA, Monitor and NHS England that they have robust plans in place to ensure they meet this ambitious target the following year. More information on the responsibilities for both the NHS and social care bodies can be found in Annex A.

We would like to thank you in advance for the priority that you will give to this work in order to meet the Secretary of State's ambition.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Cosford
Director for Health Protection & Medical Director
Public Health England

Jane Cummings
Chief Nursing Officer
NHS England

Sir Bruce Keogh
Medical Director
NHS England

Viv Bennett
Director of Nursing
Public Health England & Department
of Health

To: NHS England Area Directors
Clinical Leaders of Clinical Commissioning Groups
Chief Executives of NHS Trusts
Chief Executives of NHS Foundation Trusts
General Practitioners
Community Pharmacists
Directors of Public Health
Local Authority Chief Executives
Public Health England Centre Directors

Cc: Screening and Immunisation Leads
Medical Directors of NHS Trusts
Directors of Nursing
Chief Pharmacists of NHS Trusts
Directors of Infection and Prevention Control
Director of Operations in NHS Trusts
HR Directors in NHS Trusts
Directors of Adult Social Services

Annex A: Health and social care worker flu vaccination programme

Immunisation against infectious disease (the Green Book) states that immunisation is provided to healthcare and social care workers in direct contact with patients/clients to protect them and to reduce the transmission of influenza within health and social care premises, to contribute to the protection of individuals who may have a suboptimal response to their own immunisations, and to avoid disruption to services that provide their care. Decisions on offering immunisation should be made on the basis of a local risk assessment as described in the Green Book. Employers should make vaccines available free of charge to employees if a risk assessment indicates that they are needed. For the Green Book see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england/series/immunisation-against-infectious-disease-the-green-book>

The updated *Code of practice on the prevention and control of infections and related guidance* reminds both NHS and social care bodies of their responsibilities. These are to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that health and social care workers are free of, and are protected from exposure to infections that can be caught at work. All staff should be suitably educated in the prevention and control of infections. The Code includes ensuring that occupational health policies and procedures in relation to the prevention and management of communicable diseases in healthcare workers, including immunisation, are in place. The Code can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-health-and-social-care-act-2008-code-of-practice-on-the-prevention-and-control-of-infections-and-related-guidance>)

As in previous years, responsibility for funding the seasonal flu vaccine and its administration to staff (other than those that are in a clinical risk group) lies with employers.

The flu vaccination given to healthcare staff directly involved in patient care acts as an adjunct to good infection prevention and control procedures. As well as reducing the risk to the patient/client of infection, the reduction of flu infection among staff, and reduced staff absenteeism, have also been documented.

The General Medical Council's 2013 good medical practice guidance for doctors includes the following statement under bullet 29: "You should be immunised against common serious communicable diseases (unless otherwise contraindicated)".

To improve vaccine coverage, research suggests that a multi-faceted approach will be most effective, within the context of a comprehensive infection control programme that is designed to protect patients and staffⁱⁱ. This should include:

- easy access to flu vaccination during staff working hours with protected time and on-site provision
- senior clinical flu vaccination champions
- clinicians vaccinating colleagues
- education and training
- visible Board and staff engagement with the local campaign.

As in previous years, NHS Employers are running the excellent flu fighter programme which supports flu leads across the NHS with their local healthcare worker flu vaccination campaigns. NHS Employers have produced specific campaign materials and a range of case studies, highlighting best practice from local flu campaigns across the NHS. These can be found at the flu fighter website:

<http://www.nhsemployers.org/HealthyWorkplaces/StaffFluVaccination/Pages/seasonal-flu-campaign.aspx> and
<http://www.nhsemployers.org/HealthyWorkplaces/StaffFluVaccination/Pages/Planning-your-campaign.aspx#7>

Health and social care workers are ideally positioned to inform patients in the clinical risk groups of the flu vaccination programme and are a key, trusted source of advice and information. It is therefore essential that they are up to date with the facts about flu and the flu vaccination programme and are able to respond to any concerns their patients and clients may have. Being able to say to patients that they take the threat of flu seriously and have been vaccinated, can be a very powerful message.

Please ensure that your staff are fully aware of the benefits of flu vaccination for their patients. To assist, you can share this [video link](#) and encourage your staff to spend a few minutes listening to Louise, a nurse who really knows the value of health and social care workers getting vaccinated against seasonal flu. www.publichealthwales.org/louises-story

Last winter's data on flu vaccine coverage in different groups of health care workers and patients in at-risk groups are available on the Public Health England's website. Please check your area's uptake rates and take action to improve them:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-healthcare-workers-winter-2012-to-2013>.

Two letters about seasonal flu immunisation have recently been issued on behalf of the Department of Health, NHS England, and Public Health England. The first gives details about the existing flu immunisation programme and the second is about the extension of the programme to children. These letters can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flu-immunisation-programme-2013-to-2014>
and
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-flu-immunisation-programme-2013-to-2014>

We have also issued the updated seasonal Flu plan which can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/planning-for-the-demands-of-flu-this-winter>

ⁱ www.gmc-uk.org/publications/index.asp

ⁱⁱ Edelstein M, and Pebody R. Can we achieve high uptakes of influenza vaccination of healthcare workers in hospitals? A cross-sectional survey of acute NHS trusts in England. *Epidemiol Infect.* 2013 May 15:1-10