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Press release

New flu vaccine available this winter for those aged 65 and over

A more effective flu vaccine is available this winter for those aged 65 and over, which could prevent deaths and reduce the burden on the NHS.

Published 12 September 2018

From:
Public Health England (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england/>)



Delegates at the Public Health England (PHE) conference heard that a more effective flu vaccine for those aged 65 and over this winter has the potential to prevent deaths and significantly reduce the burden on the NHS.

The vaccine, available for the first time this year in the UK for those aged 65 and over, could reduce GP consultations by 30,000, hospitalisations by over 2,000 and prevent over 700 hospital deaths from flu in England, alleviating some of the health burden that seasonal flu places on the population, workplaces and the NHS.

The newly available 'adjuvanted' vaccine is expected to significantly boost effectiveness by improving the body's immune response to the vaccine. This is important because typically, older adults' bodies do not respond as well to the flu vaccine due to their naturally weaker immune systems. Older adults are also more likely to suffer complications from flu.

The broader flu vaccination programme will also be improved by offering all eligible adults under 65, including pregnant women and those with long-term health conditions, the 'quadrivalent' vaccine in injected form.

This protects against a total of four strains of flu; two strains of flu A and two strains of flu B.

Professor Paul Cosford, Medical Director at PHE, said:

Flu is potentially a very serious illness, and we know adults over 65 are more likely to catch and have complications from flu so have the most to gain from an improved vaccine. By introducing an enhanced flu vaccine for this age group they will be better protected as well as helping to reduce the spread of flu to those around them.

Further protection will be gained by offering flu vaccine to more children this year and giving a vaccine that provides protection against 4 strains of flu to all eligible people under the age of 65. We encourage everyone who is eligible to get the flu vaccine from their general practice or pharmacy before the end of November.

The vaccination programme will also be improved by extending the nasal spray vaccine to primary school children in year 5 (650,000 extra children), meaning the vaccine will be offered to children in years reception, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. The programme will eventually roll out to all primary school children.

When this happens, evidence suggests that an additional 63,000 GP consultations could be prevented each year. Due to having typically poorer hand hygiene than adults, children tend to be 'super-spreaders' of flu, so protecting them is crucial for protecting the rest of the population.

Chief Medical Officer, Professor Dame Sally Davies said:

Getting the flu vaccine is the single best way to protect yourself against this potentially fatal illness, and this year the NHS is offering it to 24 million people across the country.

In addition to this – a newly available vaccine that is more effective will be offered to over-65s. This could prevent hundreds of deaths and save thousands of GP and hospital hours – I strongly encourage everyone in vulnerable groups to get the life-saving vaccine as we head into winter.

Professor Jane Cummings, Chief Nurse for England, said:

Faced with the worst flu season in a decade, NHS staff last winter did a remarkable job providing care for patients.

This year, the public will be better protected from flu than ever before, with at-risk groups being offered the most effective vaccine available and every member of NHS staff expected to get their jab.

The flu vaccine will be available from early October. PHE's annual flu marketing campaign will launch on 8 October (to tie in with vaccine availability) and will target at-risk audiences including pregnant women, parents of children aged 2 to 3 and adults with long-term conditions.

The campaign will be one of the first to roll out under the newly launched 'Help Us Help You' brand. 'Help Us Help You' is based on the concept of reciprocity, encouraging people to take appropriate actions (be that getting the flu vaccination or accessing the appropriate service) to better enable the NHS to help them.

Eligible adults are encouraged to get their free vaccine from their local general practice or pharmacy before the end of November to protect themselves and their families before flu reaches its seasonal peak. It is the single best way to protect against a potentially very serious illness.

As well as getting the vaccine, practising good hand hygiene by catching coughs and sneezes in a tissue, throwing it away and washing your hands after can help limit its spread – catch it, bin it, kill it.

Background

People who are eligible for the flu vaccine this year include:

- adults aged 65 and over
 - adults aged 18 to 64 with a long term health condition
 - children aged 2 to 3 at their GP practice
 - school children in years reception, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
 - pregnant women
 - health and social care workers
 - carers
 - morbidly obese people
1. Summary of data to support the choice of influenza vaccination for adults in primary care (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flu-vaccination-supporting-data-for-adult-vaccines/summary-of-data-to-support-the-choice-of-influenza-vaccination-for-adults-in-primary-care>) is available online.
 2. Adults with chronic conditions need the flu vaccine because people with respiratory diseases like COPD, emphysema or asthma are seven times more likely to die if they catch flu, and people with cardiovascular problems like chronic heart disease or angina, or have had a stroke, are 11 times more likely to die. The risk is far worse for those with chronic liver disease, who are 48 times more likely to die if they get flu. (Source: Green Book chapter 19 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/influenza-the-green-book-chapter-19>))
 3. Flu is a viral infection that is spread through coughs and sneezes. Most people recover with rest in a week, but people with chronic conditions or who are over 65 should call NHS 111. Doctors may prescribe antivirals in some cases which can help speed up recovery but is not a cure.
 4. There is no cure for flu. Getting the vaccine if you are eligible and practising good hand hygiene is the best way to prevent yourself from getting flu.

5. The flu vaccine typically becomes available in early October. The vaccine is offered through local GPs and pharmacies.
6. We cannot predict with certainty which strains will circulate in the UK this winter. The WHO makes recommendations for the composition of the northern hemisphere flu vaccine every year; and this is published six months in advance to allow for vaccine production times.
7. The adjuvanted aTIV vaccine which PHE and the NHS are recommending this year for people aged 65 and over was licenced for use in this age group in September 2017. It has previously been used in other countries.

Help Us Help You

'Help Us Help You' is an overarching brand which unifies a family of campaigns incorporating messages about flu, staying well in winter, NHS11, pharmacy and GP extended hours. The campaigns will consist of TV, radio and digital advertising supported by search and partnership activity and will be targeted to pregnant women, parents of children aged 2 to 3 and people with long-term conditions.

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