

Advertising blitz to urge public to get flu and COVID-19 vaccines

- Boots, LloydsPharmacy and Asda come together to support largest ever winter vaccine drive
- This year will see the country's biggest flu programme in history with 35 million people eligible for a free vaccine

A nationwide advertising campaign launches today (Friday 22 October) as part of the government's call to the public to get their COVID-19 booster and flu jabs, to protect themselves and their loved ones this winter.

The multimedia campaign will run on outdoor billboards, broadcast and community radio and TV to support the national vaccine drive.

The colder weather traditionally leads to increased transmission of viruses. Experts have warned that this year there could be a significant flu surge coinciding with continuing or rising COVID-19 cases. Immunity to flu is expected to be lower due to lower levels of the virus in circulation last winter.

Vaccines give high levels of protection but immunity reduces over time, so it is vital vulnerable people come forward to get their COVID-19 booster vaccine to top-up their defences and protect themselves this winter. For those not eligible for a booster, the protection from two doses is sufficient.

Vaccines provide the best possible protection against infection and serious disease. The government is pushing the biggest ever winter vaccine campaign for COVID-19 and flu, so people can protect themselves and their loved ones this winter and play their role in reducing pressure on the NHS.

The campaign television advert hits screens today and asks people to "get vaccinated, get boosted, get protected." It features Michelle, an NHS nurse, explaining the benefits of the flu jab and COVID-19 booster vaccine. The new television advert will be seen in primetime spots alongside Emmerdale and Coronation Street as well as daytime shows such as This Morning and Loose Women.

Targeted digital channels will also carry the campaign adverts including social media platforms, digital radio and online video such as YouTube.

People will be invited for the COVID-19 booster jab when it's their turn – if they have not been contacted within a week of reaching 6 months since their second jab they can call 119 or book online. Those who are eligible for a free flu vaccine can book an appointment through their GP surgery or local pharmacy.

The offer of a first and second COVID-19 vaccine remains open to anyone who is eligible. Vaccines are available for those aged 12-15 to offer the best possible protection this winter in schools, and they will also be available in vaccine centres from this weekend.

This week the country's leading pharmacies have joined forces to encourage people to come forward and get their free flu vaccine and COVID-19 booster jab when eligible. Alongside independent pharmacists, Boots, LloydsPharmacy and Asda – who together have over 4,000 pharmacies across the UK – have backed the call for people to get vaccinated for the best possible protection this winter.

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Sajid Javid, said:

Our vaccine programme is building a wall of defence across the country and our booster rollout is now well underway with more than 4 million jabs in arms.

As we go into winter, it is vital that eligible people get their booster jab and their flu jab to protect themselves, their loved ones and the NHS.

This is a national mission and I'm hugely grateful to the public, volunteers and NHS workers rolling out jabs. It is fantastic to see some of our biggest high street pharmacies give their backing to the winter vaccination programme.

Vaccine confidence is high with data from the Office for National Statistics showing nearly all (94%) of those aged 50 to 69 say they would be likely to get their COVID-19 booster if offered, with the figure rising to 98% for those over 70. Similarly, over three quarters (77%) of those 50-69 would be likely to get the flu vaccine and nearly all (94%) of those over 70.

Dr Raj Patel, GP and Deputy National Medical Director of Primary Care for NHS England, said:

Flu is a huge killer and last year GPs and pharmacists jabbed record numbers of people and as we head into what could be one of the most challenging winters yet for the NHS, it has never been more important to get your flu and covid booster jab.

Flu has a serious impact on the health of thousands of people every winter and it has never been easier to ensure you are protected, so I would urge everyone to book an appointment directly with your GP or pharmacist as soon as possible.

Mary Ramsay, Head of Immunisation, UK Health Security Agency said:

This is the first winter when COVID-19 and seasonal flu are expected to be circulating together, putting more lives at risk. Vaccinations are important to protect against both diseases.

Please book an appointment if you are eligible for the flu vaccine, or get your COVID-19 booster as soon as you are invited – which is due 6 months after a second dose.

Michelle, Nurse who features in the advert said:

As a frontline worker for the NHS, I've seen first-hand the devastating impact both Covid and flu can have in winter. Vaccines offer the best protection and I hope this campaign drives home to the importance of coming forward for your vaccine.

GP and TV doctor, Dr Dawn Harper said:

It's really important that if you are eligible to take up the offer for the different vaccinations – this is both the flu vaccine and COVID-19 booster – you do so.

Thousands of people die from the flu each year and this year we're expecting high levels to circulate as we head into winter. With the added threat of further COVID-19 and our immunity wavering, it's so vital that people get protected against both these deadly viruses.

This is a huge drive and we need everyone do their part by protecting themselves, and those around them. You can get your COVID-19 booster and flu vaccinations at vaccination centres, GPs or community pharmacists so please, make sure to book your appointment as soon as you're invited.

Dr Leyla Hannbeck, Chief Executive Association of Independent Multiple Pharmacies, said:

Community pharmacies are already on track to smash last year's flu vaccination record this season which showcases that patients are keen to get protection against the flu.

Pharmacies, bravely remained open throughout the pandemic despite the risks and are increasingly seen as first port of call for members of the community to meet their basic healthcare needs.

They provide accessibility and convenience for patients to get their flu vaccination. As we are approaching winter and with the potential higher cases of Covid, it is essential that all eligible patients get vaccinated.

Marc Donovan, Chief Pharmacist at Boots, said:

Boots offers free NHS and private flu jabs and are seeing high demand this year. We have already taken over one million flu jab bookings to date but there are still plenty of appointments available at our pharmacies across the UK.

Boots is also supporting the NHS to deliver COVID-19 booster jabs this winter at select pharmacies, offering a free flu jab at the same time to all eligible patients. Having both vaccines offers optimum protection from getting seriously unwell from these viruses in the coming months.

Victoria Steele, Superintendent Pharmacist at LloydsPharmacy, said:

It is very likely that we'll see much greater levels of transmission of the influenza virus this winter. Immunity and protection are increasingly at the forefront of our minds, and we have seen this through the high volume of flu bookings at LloydsPharmacy this year and through increased sales of winter medicines, as many start to take precautions as we head into cold and flu season.

It is important that we all do what we can to protect ourselves and loved ones this winter by getting both the flu vaccine and the COVID booster vaccine, for those who are eligible. I'd encourage people to book as soon as possible, as it does take time for the body to develop its antibodies after any vaccine. You can book your appointment for a flu vaccine online or by visiting your local LloydsPharmacy.