

Biggest flu programme in history to roll out for winter 2021

- Millions more people could benefit from a free flu vaccine this year, as the Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid announces the most comprehensive flu vaccination programme in UK history today
- School programme expanded to provide flu vaccine to all secondary school pupils up to Year 11
- Expanded programme follows record 19 million seasonal flu jabs administered in winter 2020

From September 2021, providers will offer the flu vaccine to over 35 million people during the upcoming winter season, including all secondary school students up to Year 11 for the first time. This builds on the success of last year's expanded flu programme, which saw a record number of people get their jab.

Last year, 4 in 5 (80.9%) people aged 65 and over in England received their flu vaccine – exceeding the World Health Organization uptake ambition of 75%.

Working with the NHS, the government is preparing to deliver the expanded flu programme alongside any booster programme for COVID-19 vaccines as part of wider autumn and winter planning, which centres around protecting as many lives as possible.

During the 2021/22 season, which starts in September, the flu jab will be available to:

- all children aged two and three on 31 August 2021
- all children in primary school and all children in school Years 7 to 11 in secondary school
- those aged six months to under 50 years in clinical risk groups
- pregnant women
- those aged 50 years and over
- unpaid carers

- close contacts of immunocompromised individuals
- frontline health and adult social care staff

Health and Social Care Secretary, Sajid Javid, said:

Flu can be a serious illness and we want to build a wall of protection by immunising a record number of people.

With the nation getting closer to normal life, we must learn to live with COVID-19 alongside other viruses and we're offering the free flu jab to millions more people to help keep them safe this winter.

The phenomenal scale of the COVID-19 vaccination programme is a clear demonstration of the positive impact vaccination can make and I encourage all those eligible to get their flu jab when called forward.

The enlarged flu drive will build on last year's expanded flu programme, where flu vaccinations opened up to 50 to 64-year-olds and year 7 pupils for the first time, with the aim of offering protection to as many eligible people as possible.

For frontline healthcare workers and two and three-year olds, the highest ever recorded levels of flu vaccine uptake were also achieved last year. This year, all frontline health and social care workers will be offered the flu vaccination again to ensure they, and the people they care for, are protected.

Eligible groups are urged to get their free vaccine every year and to protect themselves and the most vulnerable people in society ahead of the winter.

As a result of non-pharmaceutical interventions in place for COVID-19 – such as mask-wearing, physical and social distancing, and restricted international travel – flu levels were lower than expected across the world in 2020/21. It is possible there will be higher levels of flu this winter, with more of the population susceptible given the low levels last season. The flu vaccine offers the best available protection against the virus and the public can reduce the spread of flu and other winter bugs by regularly washing hands, throwing away used tissues and practising good hygiene.

Alongside this flu drive, the government is preparing for a booster programme of COVID-19 vaccines and the Joint Committee on Vaccination (JCVI) and Immunisation has published interim advice on who would be prioritised for a possible third vaccine from September 2021. The booster programme – which

would be designed to ensure millions of people most vulnerable to COVID-19 continue to have the protection they need ahead of the winter and against new variants – will be informed by the JCVI's final advice expected later this summer based on the very latest scientific data.

The Department of Health and Social Care, NHS England and Improvement, and Public Health England have today issued the 2021/22 annual flu letter to providers, setting out plans for this year's expanded programme. This blueprint will ensure GP practices, pharmacies and school-based providers are mobilised to begin administering flu vaccines from September.

Dr Yvonne Doyle, Medical Director at Public Health England, said:

The flu vaccine is safe, effective and protects millions of people each year from what can be a devastating illness.

Last winter, flu activity was extremely low, but this is no reason for complacency as it means less people have built up a defence against the virus. Combined with the likelihood that COVID-19 will still be circulating, this makes the coming flu season highly unpredictable.

We will be preparing for a challenging winter by expanding our world-leading flu vaccination programme to over 35 million people, saving more lives and limiting the impact on the NHS and social care.

Dr Nikita Kanani, NHS medical director for primary care, said:

NHS staff across England vaccinated record numbers of people against flu last year – a potentially fatal illness – and they continue to pull out all the stops to deliver the biggest and most successful NHS Covid-19 vaccination programme in health history, protecting their patients and communities.

Getting your free flu vaccine if you are eligible as well as keeping up good habits like regularly washing your hands could help save your life, so please do come forward when you are invited to give you and your loved ones vital protection this winter.

The childhood flu programme aims to protect children and contain the spread of the virus to babies and vulnerable adults they may be in contact with. The nasal spray vaccine is offered to 2 and 3-year-olds and children in primary school and Year 7 and, for the first time this year, secondary school aged

children up to Year 11.