

Free flu vaccinations for Wales' care home workers

NHS healthcare staff are already offered flu vaccination by NHS employers as part of occupational health services. Sustained, year on year progress has been made in increasing uptake.

Last winter, to the end of March 2018, there were 71 reported flu outbreaks in Wales, of which 42 (60%) happened in care homes. Studies have shown that the uptake of flu immunisation in staff in care homes is low, and that they have an increased risk of catching flu.

Until now, responsibility for offering flu vaccine to social care staff has rested with individual employers. Despite having high flu vaccination rates in residents, flu can spread easily within care homes and can be passed from staff to residents when the staff member has mild or even no symptoms. This is partly because, as people age, they do not produce as good an immune response to vaccination. This makes vaccination of staff caring for frail, older people even more important.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) recommends that healthcare and social care workers receive a flu vaccination to help protect vulnerable patients and residents in their care, from the effects of flu.

Health and Social Services Secretary, Vaughan Gething said:

“As we prepare for the flu season each year, it is important that we maximise resilience within health and social care services to enable them to manage better during times of exceptional seasonal pressure.

“Vaccination of staff has been shown to be effective in reducing the spread of disease and patient mortality in care home settings. It can also help to ensure business continuity by reducing flu related staff illness and the need to provide locum cover. The social care sector has a crucial role to play in preventing hospital admissions over the winter period, particularly for older people.

“Therefore, for winter 2018-19, I have taken the decision to offer flu vaccination to staff working in adult residential care and nursing homes, at no cost to themselves or their employers, through community pharmacies on the NHS.”

This action is being taken alongside a significant expansion of the children's vaccination programme. Next winter, the programme will be extended by two additional school years to include school years 5 and 6. This means that all primary school aged children from reception class to year 6 will be

offered the flu vaccine from 2018-19.

The Health Secretary added:

“It is really important that people more at risk of developing complications from flu, such as pregnant women, those aged 65 and over, and people with long term health conditions, receive the vaccine. In 2017-18, take up of the flu vaccine in these groups, was higher than ever. That is good news, but we cannot be complacent, and our flu campaign for 2018-19 will continue to stress the real benefits of getting the flu jab.”