

# New film launched urging public to get flu and COVID-19 vaccines

- New campaign supported by charities and healthcare organisations encourages those eligible to get vital protection with a free flu vaccine and COVID-19 booster vaccine ahead of winter
- Comes after the government has launched the biggest flu programme in history for 2021/22 and COVID-19 booster campaign is well under way to protect as many lives as possible
- New research suggests adults are underestimating the combined threat of COVID-19 and flu this winter

Those eligible for the free flu vaccine and COVID-19 booster jab are being urged to book their appointments as soon as possible in a new film campaign launched today [Friday 8 October] aiming to help people give themselves and their loved ones the best possible protection this winter.

The new film sees media medics Dr Amir Khan, Dr Dawn Harper and Dr Karan Ranj explain why it is more important than ever for people to get their winter vaccines as soon as possible this autumn, as both viruses have the potential to cause serious illness and hospitalisation.

The campaign is launched as new research released today suggests that adults in England are severely underestimating the combined threat of COVID-19 and flu this winter.

There could be a significant flu surge this winter coinciding with continuing or rising COVID-19 cases. This is due to colder weather which favours transmission, darker nights which mean increased social contact indoors where it is less well ventilated, and expected lower immunity to flu due to lower levels in circulation last winter.

A recent survey seeking views from 3,000 participants found that nearly one third (32%) were unaware that flu and COVID-19 can circulate at the same time, over a quarter (26%) did not know that flu can be fatal and over half (55%) underestimated the number of people who die from flu in an average year in England (which is approximately 11,000).

Even those deemed high risk for covid-19 had low awareness of the possible dangers. Nearly a quarter of those over 50 (24%) and 29% of those with long term health conditions, (who are a priority group for the COVID-19 booster and an eligible group for the flu vaccine), were unaware that flu and COVID-19 could circulate at the same time. Over a third (37%) of pregnant women, who are an eligible group for a free flu vaccine, were also unaware

that you can still catch flu if you've had the COVID-19 vaccine.

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

This year we are rolling out the largest flu vaccine programme in our history, alongside the new COVID-19 booster vaccine rollout; both are important to provide vital protection not only to yourself, but also your loved ones while also helping to ease pressure on the NHS.

The COVID-19 vaccine programme is a fantastic example of how successful vaccination programmes can be – with around 130,000 lives saved. It is vital we continue that incredible progress with all those eligible ensuring they get both their flu and COVID-19 booster injections as soon as they are invited.

The research showed some misunderstanding of flu in particular, with around one in ten (9%) saying they thought the COVID-19 vaccination would protect them against flu. More than one in ten (13%) also believed with the statement that flu is 'a disease of the past', with a further one in five (20%) who did not know or were unsure that flu is spread by coughs, sneezes and can live on hands and surfaces – similar to COVID-19.

Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Professor Jonathan Van-Tam, said:

Not many people got flu last year because of COVID-19 restrictions, so there isn't as much natural immunity in our communities as usual. We will see flu circulate this winter; it might be higher than usual and that makes it a significant public health concern.

COVID-19 will still be circulating and with more people mixing indoors, sadly some increases are possible. For the first time we will have COVID-19 and flu co-circulating. We need to take this seriously and defend ourselves and the NHS by getting the annual flu jab and the COVID-19 booster when called.

Both these viruses are serious: they can both spread easily, cause hospitalisation and they can both be fatal. It is really important that people get their vaccines as soon as they can.

Dr Jenny Harries, Chief Executive of the UK Health Security Agency, said:

We are facing a challenging winter but we can all help ourselves and those around us by taking up the COVID-19 booster and flu vaccine, if eligible.

Getting vaccinated against both viruses will not only help to protect us and our loved ones, but will also help protect the NHS

from potential strain this winter.

Now that people are able to socialise more with far fewer restrictions in place compared to last year, vaccines provide vital protection for the public, by protecting individuals and those around them.

Up to an estimated 131,300 lives have been saved by the COVID-19 vaccine so far – and up to 24.3 million infections prevented. The flu vaccine and COVID-19 booster vaccines offer the best protection from these life-threatening viruses.

Despite low awareness of the threat of both flu and COVID-19 this winter, the survey findings revealed vaccine confidence levels were still high with over 8 in 10 (83%) of those double-vaccinated saying they would get the COVID-19 booster vaccine if offered and two in three (66%) of all adults in England saying they would get the flu jab.

After restrictions put in place to protect the public from COVID-19 last Christmas, the main incentives people listed in the new survey included the desire to be with family at Christmas this year, with two in five (41%) citing this as a reason to get the COVID-19 booster vaccine and nearly a quarter (24%) for flu.

NHS deputy vaccination programme lead Dr Nikki Kanani said:

The NHS COVID-19 vaccine programme, the largest and most successful in NHS history, has protected millions of people and saved around 130,000 lives.

Flu and COVID-19 both cost lives and the increased threat from the two deadly viruses this winter makes it even more important for people to continue sticking to good habits like washing their hands regularly.

It's important anyone eligible comes forward for a flu vaccine as soon as possible and books in their booster when they are invited – the vaccines are safe, effective and the best thing you can do to protect yourself and your loved ones this winter.

Dr Amir Khan, NHS doctor and regular on ITV's This Morning, said:

We are well aware of the threat posed by COVID-19 by now, but we can't forget about flu which can also be deadly. Both viruses have the potential to cause serious illness and hospitalisation this winter.

Luckily, we know the best form of protection is to get vaccinated against both viruses and they are free to those eligible.

Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director at Age UK said:

This year it's more important than ever to take up the offer of a flu jab and COVID-19 booster. Both illnesses are fully capable of taking a terrible toll on an older person but being vaccinated will help keep you, and those around you, safe and well through the winter months to come.

We're so lucky to live at a time and in a country that makes these potentially lifesaving protections available, please don't spurn the opportunity to benefit from them when it arrives.

Those eligible for a COVID-19 booster vaccine should book as soon as they are invited, with around 30 million people eligible for a COVID-19 booster vaccine.

Those eligible for a free flu vaccine should come forward to get it as soon as possible. Last year, the free flu vaccine was offered to 30 million people, this year the programme is being expanded again to the largest in history offering it to over 35 million people who are eligible.

To check your eligibility for the flu vaccine and COVID-19 booster vaccine or to find a service visit [here](#)

Eligible people can book an appointment for their flu jab at either their GP practice or their local pharmacy. Those who are pregnant can ask for their free flu jab at their local maternity service.

The campaign is also supported by a coalition of leading charities and healthcare professional bodies, including The Royal College of General Practitioners, The Royal College of Midwives, Asthma UK, The British Lung Foundation and Royal Pharmaceutical Society.

Notes to editors

- The campaign video can be found [here](#)
- NHS is urging people who are eligible for the free flu vaccine to book their appointment as soon as possible this autumn before flu starts to circulate.
- For the COVID-19 booster, people will be invited when it's their turn, and do not have to do anything in the meantime.
- The public can find out if they are eligible for a free flu or COVID-19 booster vaccine [here](#)

- Survey commissioned by Cabinet Office, Opinium conducted an online survey with a nationally representative sample of 3,000 adults in England which ran from 10th to 14th September (2021).
- 20% were unaware that flu is spread by germs from coughs and sneezes and can live on hands and surfaces for 24 hours – 12% said they didn't know, 8% said it was false and 80% said it was true
- 13% said flu is a disease of the past and doesn't pose as much of a threat today – 8% said they didn't know and 79% said it was false
- 9% said the vaccination against COVID-19 will protect you from flu – 12% said they didn't know and 81% said it was false
- 14% said flu won't be as prevalent this autumn / winter due to past lockdowns – 65% False, Don't know 21%
- 13% said flu is no longer a fatal respiratory disease – 13% said they didn't know and 75% said it was false
- 83% said they were likely to have a booster vaccine for COVID-19 if offered – 5% unlikely and 9% neither likely nor unlikely, 3% didn't know
- 66% said they were likely to have a flu vaccine – 17% unlikely and 13% neither likely nor unlikely, 4% didn't know

Over 50s (eligible group for both flu and COVID-19 booster)

- 37% unaware that flu could pose a personal threat to their health this autumn and winter
- 11% unaware that the COVID-19 vaccine does not protect them against flu
- 24% unaware that COVID-19 and flu can circulate at the same time

Those with long term health conditions (eligible group for both flu and COVID-19 booster)

\* 29% unaware that COVID-19 and flu can circulate at the same time

Pregnant women (eligible group for flu vaccines)

- 26% thought it wouldn't be as prevalent this autumn and winter (18% said

they didn't know)

- 34% were unaware that it could pose a threat to their health
- 37% were unaware that the vaccination against COVID-19 did not protect them against flu

#### Additional data

- Modelling suggests this winter influenza and RSV hospital admissions and deaths could be two times that of a 'normal' year and could coincide with an increase of COVID-19 infections, and their associated long-term consequences (Academy of Medical Sciences, July 2021)
- The number of people reporting a fever or cough has also risen for the past six consecutive weeks coinciding with circulating rhinovirus and RSV, according to the weekly Flu and COVID-19 Surveillance Report.
- An estimated 131,300 lives have been saved by the COVID-19 vaccine so far – and up to nearly 24.3 million infections prevented according to the Weekly Covid-19 Surveillance report, Week 39