

New vaccine marketing campaign urges millions to boost their immunity this winter

A new country-wide marketing campaign urging millions of eligible people to get their flu and COVID-19 booster vaccines to top up their immunity will launch on Monday (24 October), as almost 10 million people in England have already received their boosters.

Adverts will air across television, radio, social and digital media, stressing the importance of people getting both vaccines to increase their protection this winter.

Targeted communications for individuals with long term health conditions, pregnant women and ethnic minority communities, with a particular focus on those with low vaccine confidence, will also appear, and will include examples of where vaccine uptake rates have been low in the past.

More than 10 million people are expected to have received their COVID-19 autumn booster in England by Monday, with 49.5% of those 65 and over getting their flu jab, helping protect against serious illness throughout the winter.

Latest COVID-19 data has shown continued high rates of cases and hospitalisations in recent weeks.

Cases of flu have climbed quickly in the past week, indicating that the season has started earlier than normal. This is leading to increased pressure on emergency departments, with rates of hospitalisations and ICU admissions rising fastest in children under 5.

Deputy Prime Minister and Health and Social Care Secretary, Thérèse Coffey received her autumn booster this week and urges those eligible to take up the offer as soon as possible, saying:

Our COVID autumn booster and flu vaccination programmes are in full swing. Vaccines are our best line of defence against both viruses and will help keep people out of hospital this winter.

While we have made great progress with almost 10 million people already boosted, including me, we are actively encouraging, through our new marketing campaign, everybody eligible to come forward for both jabs as soon as possible.

Vaccination for flu is currently behind last season for pre-schoolers (12.1% in all 2 year olds and 12.8% in all 3 year olds), pregnant women (12.4%) and under 65s in a clinical risk group (18.2%).

Vaccines are the best defence against both viruses and will help reduce the amount of people requiring hospital treatment, reducing pressure on the NHS.

Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England, Dr Thomas Waite said:

The restrictions we had in place to curb the spread of COVID and protect the NHS last year also prevented the flu virus from spreading as we would normally expect to see, so levels of immunity in the population are likely quite low.

Flu has started circulating at low levels, mainly in children and younger people at the moment. As winter approaches, we can expect flu and COVID cases to rise in all age groups. Getting vaccinated against both viruses is the most important thing you can do to reduce your chances of getting seriously ill. If eligible please come forward for your jabs as soon as you can – it is important to be protected before any winter surges begin.

Dr Mary Ramsay, Director of Immunisations at UK Health Security Agency, said:

“The latest data follows the pattern we predicted, and a difficult winter is expected.

This year we want people to think about COVID-19 and flu as equally important – and both vaccines will provide a ‘boost’ this winter. COVID-19 vaccine protection decreases over time and topping up immunity will help to provide better protection against new variants.

So far, we have seen millions of people getting their vaccines, particularly older age groups who remain at risk of severe illness and deaths from both diseases. Having both vaccines will help to protect you and to protect the health service so we can continue to treat patients with other conditions.

I urge everyone who is eligible to book your vaccine as soon as you can and not to delay – you could be in contact with flu or COVID-19 tomorrow.

NHS director for vaccinations and screening, Steve Russell said:

Thanks to the efforts of staff, the NHS autumn booster programme has vaccinated twice as many people as it had at this stage last year with almost 10 million people getting their COVID-19 boosters already.

We are seeing evidence of increasing levels of COVID and flu infections in the community and care homes, and so ahead of what

will be a very challenging winter, it is vital that everyone eligible gets protected; it has never been easier to get your vaccines, so book in without delay.

Building on the success of the 2021 to 2022 COVID-19 vaccination campaign, this year's campaign will stress that the protection provided by vaccines wanes over time, so everyone eligible should boost their immunity by getting both vaccines ahead of a difficult winter.

The adverts use blue (flu) and yellow (COVID-19) halos to represent the protection both vaccines provide. They will run on TV, video on demand, radio, social and digital channels. Highly targeted, eye-catching information on digital channels will help to reiterate the importance of boosting your immunity ahead of a difficult winter by booking jabs early.

The NHS Winter Vaccines chatbot will return, helping to guide those who are searching online for the right information. This instant online conversation tool was first developed to support last winter's campaign and answers frequently asked questions with trusted NHS information in a single place.

Multicultural community activity will see teams of campaign ambassadors engage with a range of different ethnic groups who tend to be more vaccine hesitant. This will take place across the country in high footfall places of worship and nearby community settings. Dedicated radio adverts and unique social media material will reinforce key messages.

Around 33 million people are eligible for the flu vaccine and 26 million people are eligible for the COVID-19 booster.