

[Press release: Vaccine for older adults gives significant protection against flu](#)

The [annual flu report](#) published by Public Health England reports that Influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 was the main strain circulating this season although Influenza A(H3N2) also circulated later on. Low to moderate levels of flu activity were seen in the community although impact on secondary care in terms of hospitalisations and ICU admissions was high.

The report shows that the flu vaccine offered to those eligible for immunisation this season reduced the likelihood of visiting the GP because of flu by approximately 44%.

Flu is known to particularly affect older people as they tend to have weaker immune systems. The adjuvanted vaccine, which was given to the majority of adults aged 65 and over for the first time this season, was estimated to have provided approximately 60% protection against the flu strains circulating this winter.

More children also took up the offer of the flu vaccine this winter than ever before, with around 3 million being vaccinated. As younger children have poorer hand and respiratory hygiene than adults, they tend to spread flu more easily, so vaccinating children, protects not only them, but also other vulnerable groups around them. Next season, all children up to the age of 10 years will be offered the nasal spray vaccine which means that all children in primary school will be eligible across the whole of the UK.

Dr Richard Pebody, Head of Flu at Public Health England, said:

We're pleased that the adjuvanted vaccine, which was offered to older adults for the first time this year in England provided encouraging protection against the main circulating strains this winter. The flu vaccine programme demonstrates the value of vaccination throughout the life course.

We're pleased that more parents have been taking up the offer of vaccination for their children – and encourage anyone who is eligible to do so every winter. It's the best defence we have against this unpredictable virus.

Seema Kennedy, Public Health Minister said:

It's great to see that most 65 and overs in this country received the flu jab this year and those who did so were at a reduced risk of getting flu and less likely to have to see their GP as a result.

It's also really promising to see that this year around 3 million children were vaccinated – and we're expanding and improving the vaccine programme so that from next year it will be available to all children in primary school.

This data continues to prove that vaccines work – and I urge everyone to continue to take advantage of the world leading programme of vaccines we have in this country.

This season, people aged 18 to 64 in an at-risk group were offered the 'quadrivalent' vaccine in injected form (protecting against 4 strains of flu). A new 'adjuvanted' vaccine was also available for anyone aged 65 and over.

Data on the effectiveness of this season's vaccines against Influenza B strains are unavailable, as these strains have not circulated widely this season.

Reported end of season flu vaccine effectiveness against all strains was:

- 44.3% (95% CI 26.8, 57.7) across all ages
- 48.6% (95% CI -4.4, 74.7) for 2-17 year olds (LAIV only)
- 44.2% (95% CI 21.3, 60.5) for 18-64 year olds
- 49.9% (95% CI -13.7, 77.9) for those aged 65 and over (all vaccine)
- 62% (95% CI 3.4, 85.0) for those aged 65 and over (aTIV only)

People who are eligible for the flu vaccine this year included:

- adults aged 65 and over
- adults aged 18 to 64, with a long-term health condition
- children aged 2 to 3 via their GP practice
- school children in years reception, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
- pregnant women
- health and social care workers
- carers
- morbidly obese people

Adults with chronic conditions need the flu vaccine because people with respiratory diseases like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or asthma are estimated to be 7 times more likely to die if they catch flu, and people with cardiovascular problems like chronic heart disease or angina, or have had a stroke, are 11 times more likely to die compared to those without underlying health problems. The risk is far worse for those with chronic liver disease, who may be up to 48 times more likely to die if they get flu.

The World Health Organization (WHO) makes recommendations for the composition of the northern hemisphere flu vaccine every February, and this is published 6 months in advance to allow for vaccine production times. The adjuvanted trivalent influenza (aTIV) vaccine which PHE and the NHS recommended this year for people aged 65 and over, was licenced for use in this age group in September 2017. It has previously been used in other countries.