

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.”

[Heléna Herklots appointed Wales' next Older People's Commissioner](#)

Heléna is currently Chief Executive of Carers UK, the national membership charity for the UK's 6.5 million carers. She has had over 30 years' experience of supporting and working with older people. She was awarded a CBE in the 2017 New Year's Honours list for her work with carers.

Created by the Welsh Government in 2008, the Older People's Commissioner for Wales is the independent voice and champion for older people aged 60 and over across Wales. The Commissioner's work is driven by what older people say matters most to them, and ensures their voices are at the heart of all the commissioner does.

The Commissioner:

- promotes awareness of the rights and interests of older people in Wales;
- challenges discrimination against older people in Wales;
- encourages best practice in the treatment of older people in Wales;
- reviews the law affecting the interests of older people in Wales.

The Commissioner has a wide range of legal powers to help deliver the change older people want and need to see.

The Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care, Huw Irranca-Davies said:

“I'm very pleased to announce the appointment of Heléna Herklots as Wales' next Commissioner for Older People.

“The Commissioner is the voice and champion for older people across Wales, listening to their views and concerns and acting in their best interests. I look forward to working with Heléna in her new role.”

The appointment has been made by the First Minister of Wales, following a full public appointments process, which involved representatives of older people as well as a group of cross-party Assembly Members.

Heléna replaces the current Commissioner, Sarah Rochira.

Heléna Herklots said:

“It is a great honour to be appointed the Older People’s Commissioner for Wales. I am looking forward to working with older people across Wales in this vital role to protect and champion older people’s rights.”

Heléna’s appointment is for an initial four year term, with the new Commissioner starting in the role in August. The Commissioner’s role is remunerated at £90,000 per annum.

Free drinking water along Wales Coast path to tackle plastic pollution

Addressing an Environmental Summit at the Volvo Ocean Race today, Environment Minister Hannah Blythyn will name the 870 mile Wales Coast Path as the first location for the roll out of a Refill scheme for Wales as part of the Welsh Government’s ambition to become the world’s first refill nation.

As the first delivery phase of a Refill Nation, the Minister will commit to delivering Refill into communities along the Wales Coast Path within the next year. The Welsh Government will work with towns, villages and food and drink businesses to sign up to become refill points.

Those signed up to this drive to decrease use of single use plastics in Wales will be visible to walkers through window stickers and be listed in a bi-lingual refill app.

The app will provide the public with a list of locations where free drinking water is available making it easier for people to refill their water bottles without needing to purchase further single use beverages.

In a further bid to improve the management of plastic waste, the Minister

also said that the £6.5 million Circular Economy Capital Investment Fund would be prioritised on the recycling of plastics.

The fund will help Welsh businesses manufacturing plastic products to increase the recycled content of their products, keeping resources in circulation locally instead of being exported for recycling elsewhere, used as a fuel or ending up in landfill.

Hannah Blythyn said:

“I’m delighted to announce today that the Wales Coast Path will be the first location in our drive to make Wales the world’s first refill nation.

“Wales is the first country in the world to have a dedicated footpath that stretches the entire coastline and we as a Government as very much looking forward to working with the communities along these 870 glorious miles to curb the use of single use plastic. This is just the first step in our ambition to become the world’s first ‘Refill nation’.

“More refill points along our coast will help reduce the number of plastic bottles ending up in the sea, which can have a devastating effect on our marine environment.

“2018 is Wales’ Year of the Sea and with the Volvo Ocean Race here in Cardiff, it’s great to be able to make this announcement at the Environment Summit, which is an important step towards eliminating plastic from our seas.”

Anne-Cecile Turner, Volvo Ocean Race Sustainability Programme Leader, said:

“By committing to reduce plastic waste through the coast path refill scheme, Wales has, yet again, shown true global leadership in the continuing fight to address the impacts plastic pollution is having on our seas and the vast range of biodiversity they support.

“Collectively, we have a unique opportunity to preserve our Blue Planet. The Ocean Summit plays a vital role in helping to solve this crisis and announcements, such as the Welsh Government’s, only help to amplify that message and the need for urgent action.”

Clare Pillman, Chief Executive of Natural Resources Wales, who manage the Wales Coast Path on behalf of the Welsh Government, said:

“I am delighted that the iconic Wales Coast Path is to play a leading role in Wales’ refill ambitions. NRW is committed to supporting this initiative in order to help protect our fantastic

marine environment.

“Taking steps to eliminate avoidable waste will ensure that we manage our limited resources in a better way, which is good for the people, economy and environment of Wales.”

[New ovarian cancer drug approved for use in Wales](#)

Following the recommendation from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and an agreement between the manufacturer Tesaro and NHS Wales, Welsh patients with ovarian cancer will be able to benefit from the treatment.

Since the introduction of the Welsh Government’s £80 million New Treatment Fund new medicines such as niraparib (Zejula®) are available much more quickly, with the average time for new medicines to be become available after a NICE recommendation down to 10 days, well ahead of the 60-day target.

Health Secretary, Vaughan Gething, said:

“I am delighted that niraparib (Zejula®) will now be available to treat ovarian cancer patients in Wales, following the recommendation by NICE and negotiations with the manufacturer.

“This is another example of a new medicine becoming available to patients in Wales much more quickly, thanks to our £80m investment in the New Treatment Fund. Since its introduction more than 100 new medicines have been made available on the NHS Wales much more quickly than before.”

[£5 billion investment to transform rail services across Wales](#)

Following a rigorous procurement process under the Utilities Contracts Regulations 2016, First Minister Carwyn Jones today (4 June) announced the Welsh Government has contracted KeolisAmey to operate and develop the Wales

and Borders rail service and South Wales Metro working in partnership with Transport for Wales.

The 15-year contract will run from 4 June, 2018 until 16 October, 2033, with KeolisAmey taking over the Wales and Borders rail service from Arriva Trains Wales on 14th October, 2018.

A joint venture partnership of international public transport operator Keolis with infrastructure asset management specialist Amey, KeolisAmey will work in partnership with Transport for Wales, running all services under the Transport for Wales brand.

Transport for Wales is the not-for-profit company driving forward the Welsh Government's vision of a high-quality, safe, integrated, affordable and accessible transport network in Wales.

The First Minister, with Transport Secretary Ken Skates, announced the new contract at a special event at the Railway Training Centre at Coleg y Cymoedd, Nantgarw, accompanied by Keolis President Jean-Pierre Farandou and Amey Chief Executive Officer Andy Milner.

The First Minister said:

"This is an important moment for transport in Wales and begins a new chapter for rail services in this country.

"The way we shaped this procurement was different. We put passengers' priorities at the centre of our thinking and threw out a challenge to all of the bidders to address the concerns they had about seat capacity, journey times and service frequency. People said they wanted affordable fares and newer, cleaner trains and we have worked hard to ensure this is reflected in what we are launching today.

"This is a chance not simply to build a modern, forward looking transport system, but to use it as an important tool to shape the life of the nation around us. This is a landmark moment in the future development of Wales."

The announcement comes as rail powers are devolved to the Welsh Government. This follows detailed discussions between the Department for Transport and the Welsh Government.

The agreement takes into account the fact that many of the rail services operate on both sides of the border between England and Wales and includes safeguards to protect all passengers using these routes.

Major benefits of the new Wales and Borders rail contract include:

- An additional 600 staff will be recruited to deliver the service in a range of roles and 450 new apprenticeships (30 every year) will also be

created over the life of the contract.

- £1.9 billion will be invested in improving passengers' travel experience, including an £800 million investment in trains, boosting overall service capacity by 65 per cent.
- All trains will be replaced by 2023 when 95 per cent of journeys will be on brand new trains, half of which will be assembled in Wales.
- £194 million will be invested to modernise all 247 stations and build four new stations: Gabalfa, Crwys Road, Loudoun Square and the Flourish.
- Stations will be powered 100 per cent by renewable energy, at least 50 per cent of which will be sourced in Wales. This is just one of the ways that the new service will contribute to achieving the policy goals of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.
- Investment in active travel initiatives will include the installation of new cycle lockers and a target to achieve Secure Station accreditation for all stations.
- Passengers will start to see improvements in service levels from December 2018, with increased capacity on the valleys lines and new services between Chester and Liverpool.
- By the end of 2023, passengers will be able to take advantage of an additional 285 services each weekday across Wales (a 29 per cent increase). This will include improvements to the Ebbw Vale and Wrexham – Bidston lines as well as the Cambrian and Heart of Wales lines.
- Sunday services will be boosted by 61 per cent with an additional 294 services across Wales, creating a true seven-day-a-week service.
- Smart ticketing will ensure that fares are more flexible and cheaper off-peak fares will be introduced including fare reductions in North Wales and at approximately 50 per cent of stations in the valleys.
- New technology will also help to reduce disruption and improve services.
- In response to customer demand, more frequent trains, reduced journey times and more flexible fares will make travelling easier and more cost effective.
- Greater capacity and improved services will also help to maximise the economic development opportunities provided by the new service, enabling people to take advantage of more and better employment opportunities.

Welcoming the benefits for transport and economy in Wales, Ken Skates, Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure said:

“This is the first time a rail service has been procured and awarded in Wales, for Wales. It follows over four years of intense work to develop a bespoke, innovative approach and responds to the lessons learned from rail franchising and infrastructure delivery across the UK in recent years.

“Too often in our history, we’ve talked about the ownership models for rail, without also thinking through clearly enough what we wanted to do with the network itself. We now have a once in a generation opportunity here to correct this.

“I will be using the new cross-government delivery board I have set

up through the new Economic Action Plan to work with Transport for Wales, ministerial colleagues across government and partners such as the Development Bank of Wales and the Valleys Taskforce to ensure we maximise the economic development opportunity we have in front of us.”

James Price, Chief Executive of Transport for Wales said:

“This is the beginning of an exciting journey of transformation that will dramatically improve rail services throughout Wales and its borders and we’ve put our customers’ needs at the heart of this transformation.

“This is more than a significant investment in rail services, it’s also an investment in the future prosperity of Wales. The people and communities of Wales will be better connected by new and improved rail services, opening up a wealth of employment, leisure and other opportunities.”

UK Rail Minister Jo Johnson said:

“This is a historic day for passengers because it puts more control of regional train services into local hands and benefits rail users on both sides of the border.

“We have worked closely with the Welsh Government to secure the best deal and the new franchise will bring extra services and record investment. We are also investing £125 million to establish a new metro service connecting towns and villages across South Wales.”

Alistair Gordon, Chief Executive of Keolis UK, said:

“We are excited about the transformation we’re going to deliver here in Wales, working alongside Amey once again and in partnership with Transport for Wales.

“For too long the railways in Wales have suffered from under investment and, while the changes we need to make will take time, we are creating a platform for future economic growth and prosperity that will benefit all of Wales now and for generations to come.

“In five years’ time, the railway will be unrecognisable from what it is today thanks to the vision of the Welsh Government. We can’t wait to get started.”

Andy Milner, Amey's Chief Executive, said:

"Building on our successful partnership with Keolis, which already sees us deliver two high performing services – the Greater Manchester Metrolink and London's Docklands Light Railway – we are excited to be taking on the Wales and Borders contract.

"This is a great opportunity for us to use our joint capabilities to deliver a first-rate service for Wales and its communities. As well as creating new jobs and apprenticeship opportunities, we will be focused on upgrading the existing infrastructure and introducing new trains to significantly improve the passenger experience.

"We are looking forward to working with Transport for Wales in a partnership which will see the full replacement of all trains, and major upgrades.

"We are also looking forward to working with the very proud and dedicated men and women running the railway in Wales today, who will join us on this exciting journey."