

Flu vaccine uptake among over 65s highest on record

NHS England and NHS Improvement, Public Health England (PHE) and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care are thanking NHS staff for their incredible work in achieving some of the highest ever vaccination rates for flu.

Despite the complexities of rolling out the largest national NHS flu immunisation programme during a COVID-19 winter, NHS staff have vaccinated a record 80.3% of those aged 65 years and over in England against flu so far this year.

This is the highest uptake ever achieved for this group and is just under 10% higher than this time last year, exceeding the World Health Organization uptake ambition of 75%.

Uptake in 2 and 3 year old children is also the highest ever recorded, at 54.0% and 56.5% respectively.

Flu vaccine uptake rates are higher than the same time last season for all other eligible groups. This includes an uptake rate of 51.5% in clinical at-risk groups (aged under 65 years), which is the highest achieved in the last seven seasons.

These figures are a reflection of the hard work of the wide range of NHS and public health professionals involved in planning and delivering our national immunisation programme.

Dr Vanessa Saliba, Head of Flu at PHE, said:

The flu vaccine saves lives. It is therefore very encouraging to see record-high uptake rates this season, especially among the groups most vulnerable to flu, who are also most at-risk from COVID-19.

There is still time to get vaccinated against flu and we urge anyone who is eligible to take up the offer to help protect yourself, your family and the NHS.

Public Health Minister, Jo Churchill said:

It is fantastic to see that despite the unique challenges of this winter, more over 65s than ever before have had their flu vaccination and that there is such high uptake across the eligible groups.

Every year health and care staff do an incredible job rolling out the flu vaccine, and this year the COVID-19 vaccine too, to protect us all.

Dr Nikki Kanani, NHS national medical director for primary care, said:

The NHS has done an outstanding job in vaccinating a record number of people with flu and I congratulate staff for all of their fantastic efforts in achieving this as they continue to go above and beyond in these challenging times.

As we embark on the biggest vaccination programme in our history, now more than ever we are aware of the vital importance of vaccines, and so I strongly encourage everyone in the eligible groups to take up the offer of both the flu and the COVID-19 vaccine to protect themselves and their families and to save lives.

On 1 December 2020, all 50 to 64 year olds became eligible for the flu vaccine and 26.1% of those in this age group (but not in a clinical risk group) have taken up the offer so far.

The NHS in England achieves some of the highest flu vaccine uptake rates in Europe for healthcare workers, with an uptake of 74.3% by the end of the season in 2019 to 2020. By the end of November 2020, 70.5% of frontline healthcare workers had already been vaccinated, compared to 61.5% at the same period last year.

This means more than 120,000 additional healthcare workers had been vaccinated than the same time last year.

It is estimated that over 2,521,000 children were vaccinated through the school-aged programme between 1 September and 30 November 2020 (47.5%), which is 480,000 more children than at the same time last season. Monthly data showed that uptake was between 2.9 and 5.9% higher for all year groups compared to the same time last season.

The flu vaccine is safe and the best defence against flu, and one of the most effective ways to reduce pressure on the health and social care system each winter.

With COVID-19 also circulating this flu season, it remains important that those in eligible groups take up the offer of a free flu vaccine. This will also relieve pressure on the NHS and social care system when they are dealing with high numbers of COVID-19.

COVID-19 critical worker status

News story

Clarification on when a security operative is considered to be a “critical worker”.



Security Industry Authority

On Monday 4 January 2021, the Prime Minister announced that the Government will be introducing new national COVID-19 measures in England to protect the NHS and save lives.

The SIA has spoken with the Home Office to obtain information and guidance for individuals and security businesses/employers in the sector to enable them to consider working requirements during the on-going period.

A security operative is considered a critical worker if they are deployed in the following:

- critical security provision in hospitals, social care, the courts, government estate buildings, as well as key supermarkets/food supply chain, the transport network and critical national infrastructure and utilities
- roles essential to supporting law and order, or which have the potential to limit any further likely pressures on the Police or national emergency services – this could include the guarding of empty or closed commercial property judged at risk, closed retail sites or sensitive office premises, or the monitoring of similar through CCTV or other remote means, and the provision of alarm response centres including mobile units

If you are providing essential security to a service which itself remains critical and functioning, which attracts critical worker status, then you are likely to be covered. If in doubt, check with whoever contracts for your services.

To further assist in determining locally which private security roles are critical, decisions will need to be taken on a case-by-case basis by those contracting security provision and security businesses/employers. Any access

to school places is role dependent and will be decided on by the relevant local authority.

These are challenging and unprecedented times. The questions arising are not easy and no-one else can answer them for you. You will need to apply judgement, with the aim of following the Government's guidance and always minimising social contact where possible.

For further information please refer to the [Government's guidance published on GOV.UK](#).

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Civil news: amendments to legal aid eligibility criteria

News story

Compensation provided to claimants of specific compensation schemes will now be disregarded when assessing civil legal aid eligibility.



Legal aid eligibility criteria has changed and will now allow more people to access justice in civil cases of law.

The Legal Aid Agency (LAA) has implemented the changes made to the regulations to ensure that claimants of specific compensation schemes are not disadvantaged in applying for legal aid.

LAA Chief Executive, Jane Harbottle said:

I welcome this change as it will ensure that many more people are able to access the justice they need.

The Legal Aid Agency has worked to implement these important changes as quickly as possible and I would like to acknowledge this work to support families experiencing difficult circumstances.

There will now be a mandatory disregard for these 6 schemes, when applying for civil legal aid:

- Relevant Infected Blood Support Schemes covering [England](#), [Wales](#), [Northern Ireland](#) and [Scotland](#) (and earlier support schemes)
- Payments under the Vaccine Damage payment Act
- Compensation for person diagnosed with variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD)

In addition, there will be a discretionary approach applied to these 4 schemes:

As a result of receiving a compensation payment from these compensation schemes or any connected payment (e.g. to a relative) some individuals applying for legal aid would have failed the financial eligibility criteria if the change to the means test had not been made, due to such payments being considered as income or capital.

Mortgage cap removal

The legislation also removes the existing cap on the amount of mortgage debt that can be deducted from a property's value, so that all mortgage debt will be deducted. This means that more individuals will pass the financial eligibility criteria for civil legal aid. This change will come into effect from 28 January 2021.

Further information

[Disregard of payments from Infected Blood Support Schemes \(and other specified compensation payments\) guidance](#) – full information for legal aid providers

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[Access Consortium regulators pledge support to tackle COVID-19](#)

News story

The Access Consortium regulatory authorities have pledged our collective

support in countering the COVID-19 global pandemic.



To address this worldwide public health crisis, Access Consortium members are collaborating to advance the regulatory science needed to support the rapid development of diagnostic tests, as well as vaccines and treatments against COVID-19. Members are committed to sharing vital information as we all investigate and evaluate medical products for quality, safety and efficacy, and strive to ensure that the benefits of any new medical product outweigh its risks.

During these unprecedented times, the Consortium is building on its proven ability to benefit from work-sharing that has recently led to the approval of numerous medicines. Consortium members remain committed to review and collaborate on COVID-19 vaccine candidates and treatment options, with the goal of expediting their review and availability on the market. Through this partnership, Access will reduce regulatory duplication and increase each agency's capacity to ensure that, globally, there is access to high-quality, safe and effective solutions to address the COVID-19 emergency.

We remain committed to work together to find innovative solutions to counter COVID-19, the largest, most severe and most complex international disease outbreak in a generation.

Notes

- The Access Consortium was formed in 2007 by 'like-minded' regulatory authorities to promote greater regulatory collaboration and alignment of regulatory requirements.
- The Consortium was initially formed by the regulatory authorities from Australia (Therapeutic Goods Administration), Canada (Health Canada), Singapore (Health Sciences Authority), and Switzerland (Swissmedic). More recently, the United Kingdom's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency joined the Consortium.
- Its goal is to maximise international cooperation, reduce duplication, and increase each agency's capacity to ensure consumers have timely access to high quality, safe and effective therapeutic products.

London office closed

News story

Customer filing services suspended until further notice.



Following the introduction of new restrictions, as part of the national lockdown in England, the IPO's London office has been closed to all but critical workers with immediate effect.

This means that customers are unable to gain access to file in person. It also means that the London post room is not operating so no paperwork will be processed after today (Thursday 7 January).

If customers need to submit papers by post then Concept House, our Newport office, remains open.

The London office will remain closed at least until 18 February when current restrictions will be reviewed.

If you have any further questions please contact our Information Centre on 0300 300 2000 or at information@ipo.gov.uk.