

Business as usual for NHS Test and Trace over Christmas

Across the country, NHS Test and Trace staff will be working hard to continue the nation's fight against coronavirus.

More than 700 testing sites are now open across the country, meaning that the average distance to travel to a test site is just 2.4 miles.

All test sites will remain open, with reduced opening hours and booking slots available only on bank holidays when demand is expected to be lower. NHS Test and Trace contact tracers will also continue to work throughout the festive period with amended opening hours, to ensure there are no delays in contacting close contacts of positive cases and breaking chains of transmissions.

PCR swab testing is available for those with coronavirus symptoms: a high temperature, a new continuous cough, or a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste. Anyone with one or more of these symptoms should book a test at nhs.uk/coronavirus or by calling 119.

Health Minister Lord Bethell said:

We continue to work night and day to ensure testing is accessible across the country. This vital work will not stop for Christmas, with minimal disruption to our services.

NHS Test and Trace can help contain the spread of coronavirus, but I urge everyone to celebrate responsibly and remember hands, face, space throughout the festive season.

Interim Executive Chair of the National Institute for Health Protection Baroness Dido Harding said:

We are committed to keeping the country safe and saving lives by identifying, containing and controlling the coronavirus.

NHS Test and Trace will remain open and ready to support the nation while they celebrate during the festive period. Whilst we know people will do their best to be careful whilst celebrating, we are there with tests available for anyone with coronavirus symptoms over this period, offering peace of mind during this special time of year.

NHS Test and Trace is one of the largest contact tracing and testing systems anywhere in the world and we are very grateful for all the staff who will be sacrificing time with their loved ones to

make sure it is there for those who need it every day of the year.

You can only get a free NHS test if at least one of the following applies:

- you have a high temperature
- you have a new, continuous cough
- you've lost your sense of smell or taste or it's changed
- you've been asked to by a local council
- you're taking part in a government pilot project

You can also get a test for someone you live with if they have symptoms.

Reduced opening hours for testing sites

Date	Local testing sites	Drive-through testing sites	Mobile testing units
24 December	8am to 8pm	8am to 5pm	10am to 4pm
25 December (Christmas Day)	9am to 3pm	9am to 3pm	10am to 4pm
28 December (Boxing Day)	9am to 3pm	9am to 3pm	10am to 3pm
31 December	8am to 8pm	8am to 5pm	10am to 4pm
1 January (New Year's Day)	9am to 3pm	9am to 3pm	10am to 4pm
4 January (bank holiday – Scotland only)	9am to 3pm	9am to 3pm	10am to 4pm

Home testing is also available and will only operate a reduced service on bank holidays. People using home test kits will be given specific guidance about how to return their kits during the festive period as some tests will need to be posted by midday on Christmas Eve, 28 December and 31 December and there will be no collections on Christmas Day and New Year's Day. This is to match the Royal Mail's collection times.

Satellite testing, primarily used for deliveries to care homes, is also available every day with a courier service used to ensure samples are collected and tested on bank holidays.

Amended opening hours for contact tracing

Date	Tier 2 / 3 tracing	119
23 December	8am to 8pm	7am to 11pm
24 December	8am to 5pm	7am to 5pm
25 December (Christmas Day)	10am to 4pm	7am to 5pm
26 December	8am to 8pm	7am to 11pm
27 December	8am to 8pm	7am to 11pm
28 December (Boxing Day)	10am to 6pm	7am to 11pm
29 December	8am to 8pm	7am to 11pm
30 December	8am to 8pm	7am to 11pm

Date	Tier 2 / 3 tracing	119
31 December	8am to 5pm	7am to 5pm
1 January (New Year's Day)	10am to 6pm	7am to 5pm
2 January	8am to 8pm	7am to 11pm
3 January	8am to 8pm	7am to 11pm

The NHS Test and Trace laboratory network will also be processing samples as normal with the same level of capacity, including on bank holidays, to ensure continuity of service.

The government is doing everything it can to keep people safe this festive season. There are different rules on meeting friends and family, depending on when you meet them. From 2 December to 23 December, you must follow the guidance for the tier in your area. From 23 December to 27 December, you may choose to form a Christmas bubble. More details can be found in the [guidance for the Christmas period](#).

Northern Ireland and the Isle of Wight will have a different timetable, which they will communicate separately.

This year there will be 3 bank holidays over the Christmas and New Year period, with a fourth in Scotland:

- 25 December
- 28 December
- 1 January
- 4 January (Scotland only)

[British Embassy Dublin hosts citizen's outreach event](#)

The summary below is current at the time of the event. For the latest information, please visit the [Living in Ireland guide](#)

Driving

If a British family member joins me next year, can they exchange their UK driving licence then?

Yes – you are only required to exchange your UK driving licence once you are resident in Ireland so they should do this after they arrive.

Will I be able to drive in the UK on my Irish licence on visits?

Yes. The UK has said we will continue to recognise Irish driving licences.

If I have a house in UK and a house in Ireland and travel back and forth every few weeks, which licence should I use?

The requirement to change to an Irish driving licence is for residents. If you are resident in the UK and visit Ireland then there is no requirement to exchange your UK driving licence. If you are resident in Ireland then you are required to exchange your UK driving licence.

I have an additional driver on my insurance who is resident in UK. Can they stay on my Irish insurance policy?

This is a question for your insurer. UK driving licences will continue to be accepted for visitors driving in Ireland.

I am coming to reside in Ireland in 6 months, will I be able to exchange my driving licence then?

You will be able to exchange your UK driving licence for an Irish one after you arrive, you only need to do this once you become resident.

I have an additional driver on my Irish insurance who is resident in UK with a UK licence. Can they stay on my Irish insurance policy after the transition period and drive my car during visits?

Your insurer will be better placed to give you a reply, though we can say that UK driving licences will continue to be accepted for visitors driving in Ireland.

Pets

I am coming to reside in Ireland in 6 months, will I be able to exchange pet passports when I arrive?

If you are travelling with a pet to Ireland and have UK pet documents, please follow [the DAFM guidance](#). We recommend that you check for updated guidance a couple of months before you intend to travel to allow time for any tests that need to be done.

What about the status of dogs or other pets moving from Ireland to the UK and back. Will they be able to pass across the land border and into Scotland as always, or will there be formalities to go through?

Pets (dogs, cats and ferrets) will be able to move around the island of Ireland exactly as they do now. You will be able to travel with your dog to

Northern Ireland and back without any checks or change. After 1 January 2021 the UK will become a third country, outside the EU's pet travel scheme. The UK has decided to continue to accept EU pet documentation. If your pet has Irish pet documents (pet passport) they will be allowed to enter GB using the same documentation as now.

However there will be changes for bringing your pet back from GB even if it has an Irish issued pet passport. The UK is currently waiting to receive a 'listing status' from the EU that will determine what those additional requirements will be. Once we have that we will publish more detail on the requirements including for travelling through Northern Ireland.

An outline of the actions that will be needed subject to listing status can be found on the [DAFM](#), [Gov.ie](#) and [Gov.uk](#) websites.

Pet owners can also contact the UK Pet Travel Helpline for any detailed questions on new requirements: (+44) 0370 241 1710 – Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 5pm (closed on bank holidays).

Travel to the rest of Europe

Is there a difference between travelling to Schengen and non-Schengen EU member states?

Many of the requirements will be the same if travelling to Schengen or non-Schengen EU member states. For example you need to have 6 months validity left on your passport, you won't be able to join the EU queue and you might be asked to demonstrate that you have enough funds for your stay. But there are some differences particularly around the 90 day in 180 day visa limit. For full details [check the visit Europe page](#) and the FCDO travel advice page for the country that you plan to visit.

I work in a number of European countries (Germany, Netherlands, France, Spain etc.) I have lived in Ireland for 21 years. Do I now need to get a work visa for every country I work in?

This is subject to the FTA negotiation.

I am permanently resident in Ireland, have a British passport, my two children have special needs and they have Irish passports. Both are under 16. Will they be separated from me when going through the airports?

In Ireland you may already have seen that the airports have simply added "and UK" to the EU lanes, so you will be able to stay together. For travel elsewhere –while it will be up for each country to implement the rules, there has been no suggestion that families travelling with children or family members requiring assistance, will be split up. Whether you all use the EU or UK passport holder lane will be at the discretion of the airport authorities.

As a British citizen who has been an Irish resident for five years, how will I be able to continue to travel and stay in other member states without a visa or time restrictions. I have owned a Spanish property for thirteen years and wish to continue to use it, as freely as currently?

Nothing will change on your ability to reside in Ireland. Now that freedom of movement has ended though, there will be changes for your travel elsewhere. You will be able to spend up to 90 days of any 180 day period in most other EU states, Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway and Switzerland without the need for a visa. That 180-day reference period is not fixed. It is a moving window, based on the approach of looking backwards at each day of the stay (be it at the moment of entry or at the day of an actual check, such as inland police control or border check upon departure).

You can make multiple entries during that 180 day period, but your period of overall stay must not exceed the overall total of 90 days within any 180 period. Periods of previous stay authorised under a residence permit or a long-stay visa are not taken into account in the calculation of the duration of visa-free stay. Residence permits and long-stay visas are subject to different rules and the above explanations and calculations do not apply to them.

Will non-EU spouses of UK nationals who have valid Stamp 4 EU family residence cards in Ireland be able to travel visa free with their UK national spouse to EU countries from 1 January 2021?

If you have a valid Irish Residence Card/Stamp 4 EUFAM, you'll be able to swap that for a new one stating that your rights derive from EU free movement under the withdrawal agreement, and will retain your right of residence here in Ireland. But From 1 January 2021, your new card, or if you have not yet obtained it, your Stamp 4 EU Fam Residence card, does not have visa exemption effect, except in the host EU Member State (in your case Ireland) so you may need a visa, and should check the visa requirements of your intended destination before you travel.

Travel to the UK

If we have visitors from outside both UK and Ireland, whether EU or non-EU, will they also be able to travel freely to Northern Ireland from us in Ireland?

After 1 January 2021 EU visitors will still be able to take holidays and short trips to all parts of the UK, including Northern Ireland without need for a visa. Longer trips will require a visa. There is no change for non-EU visitors, who will be required to abide by the same rules that they do now and may need a visa. You should check [here](#) for guidance.

Will non-EU citizens who hold valid Stamp 4 EU FAM status in Ireland due to being a spouse of a UK citizen still be able to travel to the UK visa free with the UK spouse?

You'll be able to swap your valid Irish Residence Card/EUFAM stamp for the new Irish card very easily and up until end of December 2021. Check the [INIS website](#) for details. Non-EU family members will be able to come to the UK for up to 6 months at a time on holiday for example. But they might need a visit visa – whether they do so will depend on their nationality – the fact they are visiting with a British citizen isn't relevant, as they have to come as a visitor in their own right.

Travel to the UK

If I register with a GP and dentist in Ireland do I lose my UK NHS registrations to the same in the UK?

If you are entitled to be registered with a GP/dentist in both the UK and Ireland (for example because you are a frontier worker or a student) then registering in Ireland will not impact your registration in the UK.

We heard that health services are available on the same basis as Irish citizens – but will automatic medical card entitlement for UK pensioners continue?

UK pensioners who moved to Ireland before 31 December 2020, will continue to have life-long reciprocal healthcare rights under the Withdrawal Agreement. In Ireland this includes the right to automatic medical card entitlement. Healthcare entitlements for UK pensioners who move to Ireland after 31 December 2020 are subject to the outcome of negotiations. Whatever the outcome of those negotiations, UK citizens who live in Ireland will have the right to access healthcare on terms no less favourable than apply to Irish citizens under the terms of the CTA.

Benefits

My family have lived in Ireland for 12 years – I have two daughters with special needs who claim both DLA in the UK & DA in Ireland – does this change from January?

From the circumstances set out in the question, your benefits should continue as now following the end of the transition period. You can access more [guidance on benefits here](#).

If I go shopping in Northern Ireland and bring goods back to Ireland, can I reclaim the VAT?

Under the Northern Ireland Protocol, EU VAT rules will continue to apply in Northern Ireland after the end of the transition period in respect of goods.

What implications are there for importing/buying goods (as a consumer) from UK to Ireland e.g. using Amazon? Will there be any taxes, duty or delays?

We understand that Amazon has now written to customers who use their services between the UK and Ireland detailing any changes that might be applicable. Guidance on [VAT requirements and buying goods online in Ireland can be found here](#).

Will moving personal furniture from UK to Ireland incur customs checks and/or fees/tax?

If you are transferring your residence from the UK to Ireland you can qualify for relief from import duties on goods you already own. You will need to complete a declaration. Details can be found [here](#).

Banking

I am a British citizen living in Ireland. I still have a UK bank account. Do I need to do anything?

A: We have seen some banks making changes to the services they can provide to UK bank account holders who live in the EU and there has been coverage in the newspapers. However most people living in Europe should not see any change to their banking after 31 December 2020.

Your bank or finance provider should contact you if they need to make any changes to your product or the way they provide it and most have good webpages with FAQs. If you have any concerns about whether you might be affected we recommend you contact your provider or seek independent financial advice.

Citizenship/Withdrawal Agreement rights

I'm a British citizen. Is it possible for me to get an Irish passport?

A. You can apply [online](#) for an Irish passport. In order to do so you will first need Irish citizenship – [check your eligibility](#).

Can/should I apply for dual citizenship?

You do not need to apply for “dual citizenship” – you can apply for Irish citizenship and retain your UK citizenship. The decision on whether or not to apply for Irish citizenship will depend on your unique circumstances and eligibility.

Where can British citizens obtain a card/confirmation of

exercising rights under the Withdrawal Agreement?

The Irish Department of Justice and the Immigration and Naturalisation Service will be responsible. We do not yet have full details but expect there to be an online application process for a card that shows your rights derive from the withdrawal agreement. It is important to note that your rights are secured, whether or not you apply for the card.

What are the implications/benefits/risks for moving to Ireland from UK after 31 December 2020 as opposed to already residing there?

A. The decision on whether to move is up to each individual and will ultimately depend on your unique circumstances. You might find our [Living in Ireland guide](#) a useful tool when considering your options. Whenever you arrive(d) in Ireland, your rights are protected by the CTA, which will continue in all circumstances. British citizens resident in Ireland before 31 December 2020 will additionally be covered by the Withdrawal Agreement, whereas those arriving from 1 January 2021 will not.

Non-EEA family members

I am a British citizen, living and working in Dublin since 2016. Can I bring my non-EU parents after 31 December 2020 as my dependent family member?

Arrangements are being put in place by the Irish Immigration Service for non-EEA family members and/or dependants of UK nationals who are currently resident in Ireland exercising their EU Treaty Rights under the EU Free Movement Directive. This will involve an exchange of your family member/dependent's current valid Irish Resident Permit Card/EU Fam stamp with an equivalent card stating your rights derive from EU freedom of movement under the Withdrawal Agreement.

You will have until the end of December 2021 to swap. A separate, but very similar, scheme will be in place for non-EEA family members and dependents who intend on arriving in Ireland with their UK national family member from 1 January 2021. You can find details of both schemes [here](#).

Will non-EU spouses of UK nationals who have valid Stamp 4 EU Fam Residence Cards in Ireland be able to travel visa free with their UK national spouse to EU countries from 1 January 2021.

If you've got a valid Irish Residence Card/ EUFAM stamp, you'll be able to swap that for a new card stating your rights derive from EU free movement under the withdrawal agreement, and will retain your right of residence here in Ireland. But from 1 January 2021, your new Irish document (or if you have not yet obtained it, your existing Stamp 4 EU Fam/ Residence card) does not have visa exemption effect except in the host EU Member State (in your case Ireland) so you might well need a visa, and should check the visa

requirements for other EU Member States before you travel.

Will there be immigration formalities for non-British/non-Irish citizens on entry to the UK? Will there be entry formalities for non-British/non-Irish citizens going into Northern Ireland and thence to Britain, and, if so, how and where they will happen?

The UK does not operate routine immigration controls on journeys from Ireland, including when crossing the land border to Northern Ireland. That will not change from 1 January 2021. However, it is still a requirement for individuals who wish to enter any part of the UK to do so in line with the UK's immigration framework, and intelligence led checks do take place, including at GB ports of entry. EU, EEA and Swiss citizens will continue to be able to travel to the UK for holidays or short trips – up to 6 months when travelling via Ireland – for other nationalities you may need a visa for even short trips.

What is the effect of the new Immigration Act and the Immigration Rules that result from it, and how do these affect EU26 or non-EU citizens married/civilly partnered with Irish citizens?

A. UK nationals living in the EU will have until 29 March 2022 to bring their existing close family members – a spouse, civil partner, unmarried partner in a long-term relationship, child or dependent parent – to the UK on EU law terms. The family relationship must have existed before the UK left the EU on 31 January 2020 (unless the child was born or adopted after this date) and must continue to exist when the family member seeks to come to the UK.

Those family members will then be eligible to apply to remain in the UK under the EU Settlement Scheme, under which resident EEA citizens and their family members can also obtain the UK immigration status they need to remain here.

There will remain scope for UK nationals to return to the UK from the EU with their family members after 29 March 2022, but to do so they will, like other UK nationals wishing to be joined here by foreign national family members, then need to meet the requirements of the UK family Immigration Rules.

The 2022 cut off does not affect Irish citizens who can enter the UK freely, without any immigration restrictions. Their third country national family members (which includes EEA citizens for the purposes of this answer) will require leave under the Points Based Immigration System if they are not otherwise eligible for the EU Settlement Scheme (for which they would have to be resident in the UK before 1 January 2021).

Post 29 March 2022, British and Irish citizens will both be able to bring EU26/non-EU family members into the UK on the basis of a visa application under UK immigration rules for family members, which amongst other things includes the Minimum Income Requirement and the requirement to prove the relationship is genuine.

Unlike other non-British citizens however, Irish citizens are considered

“settled” from the point they enter the UK and can therefore bring family members in under these rules immediately. Nor do Irish citizens have to make the move first – their family members can apply for a visa in order to accompany them from day one, as well as join them later.

This offer reflects the unique CTA arrangements and does not apply to other non-British nationals who are required to have permanent residence before being joined by family members.

[UK Minister for Africa visits Nairobi to progress UK-Kenya Partnership on security and education](#)

Help us improve GOV.UK

To help us improve GOV.UK, we'd like to know more about your visit today. We'll send you a link to a feedback form. It will take only 2 minutes to fill in. Don't worry we won't send you spam or share your email address with anyone.

Email address

Send me the survey

[Joint statement by the UK and Viet Nam](#)

News story

Joint Ministerial statement from the United Kingdom (UK) and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam (Viet Nam) on the conclusion of the UK-Viet Nam Free Trade Agreement



The UK and Viet Nam are pleased to announce the conclusion of the UK-Viet Nam Free Trade Agreement (FTA). 1. UK and Viet Nam enjoy excellent diplomatic relations and increasingly common goals. This is demonstrated by the renewing of our UK-Viet Nam Strategic Partnership for a further ten years in September this year. The Partnership provides a framework for a strong bilateral relationship and outlines key priorities, including low-carbon development, multilateralism, the promotion of human rights, and trade. Under Viet Nam's effective role as chair of ASEAN in 2020, the UK has taken the significant step of requesting to become a Dialogue Partner of ASEAN.

1. The UK and Viet Nam share a strategic commitment to global trade, and the free flow of capital and investments. The bilateral Free Trade Agreement provides vital continuity for our fast-growing and dynamic trading relationship. In 2019, UK businesses exported goods to Viet Nam worth over £600 million. In the same year, Vietnamese businesses exported goods to the UK worth around £4.6 billion.
2. The bilateral FTA locks in benefits of our existing trading relationship through the EU-Viet Nam Agreement. Trade in goods ranging from clothing and footwear to seafood and pharmaceutical products can continue uninterrupted. Trade in services, in particular financial services and e-commerce, can continue to flourish.
3. Companies can continue to benefit from reduced tariffs on imports and exports, from increased access to services and from the protection of key British and Vietnamese products. This includes 65% of all tariffs that have already been eliminated on UK-Vietnam trade. This will increase to 99% of tariffs by the time of full implementation. Vietnam stands to benefit from tariff savings of £114 million on Vietnamese exports. For UK exports, this figure will be £36 million.
4. This bilateral agreement therefore represents the beginning of a new phase in the relationship between our two countries in developing key areas of trade. Not only does the FTA liberalise goods and services trade, it incorporates many other important elements, such as working towards clean growth and sustainable development.

5. This agreement is also a key step towards the UK joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). As a founding member of the group, Vietnam has welcomed the UK's interest in joining the CPTPP agreement and publicly shown their support for the UK's accession to the CPTPP in the future. Accession to the CPTPP is a priority for the UK Government, which plans to apply for this in early 2021. CPTPP is one of the most important free trade agreements in the world, accounting for 13% of global GDP in 2019. This would rise to 16% of global GDP if the UK were to join. The UK and Vietnam look forward to working closely on this.

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE, UNITED KINGDOM, RT HON ELIZABETH TRUSS MINISTER OF INDUSTRY AND TRADE, VIET NAM, MR H.E TRAN TUAN ANH 11th DECEMBER 2020

Published 11 December 2020

[People with long-term health conditions urged to get flu vaccine before Christmas](#)

Health chiefs, and a coalition of charities, are urging people with long-term health conditions to get the [flu vaccine](#) before the virus starts to circulate. Public Health England (PHE) analysis shows 6 in 10 deaths from flu are seen in people with underlying conditions.

A coalition of charities, including the British Heart Foundation and Mencap, are joining PHE and the NHS in urging them to get vaccinated before Christmas.

Flu is a highly infectious disease and can lead to serious complications for those living with a long-term health condition, including:

- respiratory and heart conditions
- diabetes
- kidney disease
- liver disease
- chronic neurological disease like multiple sclerosis or cerebral palsy

People with chronic respiratory diseases, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or asthma, are 7 times more likely to die if they catch flu compared to healthy adults. People with cardiovascular problems, such as chronic heart disease or angina, or who have had a stroke,

are 11 times more likely.

Some people with certain long-term health conditions may not view themselves as being at increased risk of serious illness from flu, especially if their condition is not related to the respiratory system. However, people with chronic liver disease and immunosuppression are 48 and 47 times more likely, respectively, to die from flu compared to healthy adults.

So far this year, 46.8% of people with a long-term health condition (under the age of 65 years) have had the flu vaccine. While vaccine coverage in this group is higher than it has been at this point compared to the last 6 flu seasons, it still lags behind coverage in other eligible groups. This year, we have already achieved the highest ever recorded flu vaccine uptake among older people.

Uptake also varies greatly between the different at risk groups. Last year, it was highest in people with diabetes at 61.2% and lowest in people with a BMI over 40 at 30.9%.

Over the last 5 years, flu has killed an average of 11,000 people in England each year, but the figure has ranged from around 4,000 deaths in the 2013 to 2014 season to more than 22,000 deaths in 2017 to 2018.

This year, with those most vulnerable to flu also being at high risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19), it is more important than ever that eligible people get the flu vaccine.

Dr Vanessa Saliba, Head of Flu at Public Health England said:

The flu vaccine is the best defence against what can be a serious illness, especially for those living with long-term health conditions, such as respiratory diseases, diabetes and liver disease.

People living with long-term health conditions are also at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19, and having both flu and COVID-19 at the same time is associated with a greater risk of more severe illness and death. Therefore, it is more important than ever to get vaccinated against flu.

People aged 6 months to 65 years with one or more long-term health conditions, pregnant women and those aged 65 years and over are at a greater clinical risk from flu. All these groups are eligible for a free vaccine, which is the best defence against flu. From 1 December, 50 to 64 year olds also became eligible for the first time.

Public Health Minister, Jo Churchill, said:

The flu vaccine is there to protect as many people as possible, especially those living with long-term health conditions who carry

a higher risk of falling seriously ill.

This winter with COVID-19 circulating, it's more important than ever that all those eligible get their jab. Our brilliant GPs and pharmacists are delivering the vaccine to record numbers and if you are contacted by your GP, make sure you take the opportunity to get your free flu vaccination.

Dr Nikki Kanani, Medical Director of Primary Care in England, said:

As well as kicking off the world-first COVID-19 programme this week, the NHS continues to offer essential flu vaccines for those who need it, and it's especially important that those most at-risk, including with long-term conditions, get vaccinated.

We have written to eligible patients inviting them to get vaccinated without delay, and NHS services have put a range of measures in place to minimise any risk of COVID-19.

Dr Michael Brady, Medical Director at Terrence Higgins Trust, said:

We strongly encourage people living with HIV to visit their GP or local pharmacy for a quick, painless flu jab this winter. Research shows that HIV is associated with an increased severity of flu and greater risk of complications relating to that. Being on effective HIV treatment reduces the possibility of hospitalisation because of flu, but it's still better to get the protection of the flu jab, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when infection with both viruses could cause additional problems.

Vanessa Hebditch, Director of Policy and Communications at the British Liver Trust, said:

The liver is a vital weapon in our body's armoury for fighting infection. If the liver is damaged, our bodies find it much harder to fight off illnesses of all kinds, including the flu. Liver disease has many different causes, but any kind of long-term damage to this organ, no matter what the cause, can leave people more prone to infection.

Many people with chronic liver disease don't realise that they are at much higher risk of serious illness or even death if they were to catch the flu. The shocking statistics speak for themselves. That's why it's so important people with long-term liver disease take steps to protect themselves by getting their winter vaccinations.

Dr Keith Brownlee, Director of Policy, Programmes and Support at the Cystic Fibrosis Trust said:

We urge everyone with cystic fibrosis and their families to protect themselves by getting the flu jab. Everyone with cystic fibrosis is at higher risk of being seriously unwell from the flu, and flu can also cause long term damage. However every year lots of people miss out on getting their jab which is an important layer of protection against becoming ill so don't delay, get the jab.

Karen Davies, Senior Clinical Advisor at Diabetes UK, said:

Flu can be incredibly serious, and people with diabetes are particular vulnerable to serious complications if they get it. Getting flu can make your diabetes harder to manage and can cause your blood sugar levels to rise dangerously high. With the coronavirus pandemic still posing a very real threat, it's incredibly important that people with diabetes stay well and stay out of hospital. That's why this year, more than ever, it is so important that people with diabetes take up the offer of a free flu jab.

We know all flu jab providers will be facing increased demand this year. But we want to reassure people that there are a number of options available to them to get their jab, that include their GP surgery or their local pharmacy. The jab can take up to 2 weeks to be effective, so we're urging everyone with diabetes to get booked, and get vaccinated, as soon as possible.

If anyone needs advice on how or where to get a flu jab, our helpline is available on 0345 123 2399, Monday to Friday from 9am to 6pm, or you can find more information on diabetes and flu at [diabetes.org.uk](https://www.diabetes.org.uk).

Ismail Kaji, Parliamentary Support Officer at the learning disability charity Mencap, who has a learning disability, said:

It's very important people with a learning disability get the flu vaccine to stop them getting ill, especially as many people with a learning disability also have health conditions which means they could become very unwell. And while you should get it every year, it's more important than ever this winter because of coronavirus – and it's also free for people with a learning disability and their main carer. You can keep you and those around you safe.

If you're feeling nervous, remember you can ask for reasonable adjustments to get the support you need. You can ask for more time in the appointment and for the nurse to explain everything clearly

to you, and show you the equipment they will use to help you feel more comfortable.

People with a learning disability can have more health problems than other people and can find it harder to get the healthcare they need, so it's a good idea to get as much protection as possible. The flu jab can help with this so make sure you get it done this winter.

Barbara Kobson, Senior Cardiac Nurse at the British Heart Foundation, said:

With the COVID-19 pandemic still looming, getting your flu jab is as vital as ever, especially if you have a heart and circulatory condition or are older. It only takes 5 minutes and reduces your chances of catching flu, which can exacerbate conditions such as coronary heart disease and heart failure. Getting the jab will mean you're also supporting the NHS as it may stop you becoming ill and needing treatment at a time when hospitals are under immense pressure from a potential winter rise in COVID-19 cases.

Jessica Kirby, Head of Health Advice at Asthma UK and the British Lung Foundation, said:

One in five people in the UK has a long-term lung condition, including asthma and COPD, making them more likely to develop the most severe symptoms of the flu, which is more likely to be fatal for people with health conditions.

We'd urge everyone who is eligible for a free flu vaccine to get one as soon as possible and ideally before the Christmas break, when people are likely to mix in larger groups making it possible for the virus to spread more rapidly. For those who have been unable to get a vaccine due to shortages in their area, do keep trying as new stocks are becoming available. If you are unsure if you are eligible, our advice is to speak to your GP who can assess your individual risk.