

UKHSA calls for everyone to get their flu jab this week

The vaccine takes 14 days before it provides maximum protection, so people should get it before 10 December to help keep themselves and vulnerable relatives safe throughout the festive season.

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 or a chronic neurological disease like multiple sclerosis or cerebral palsy. People with underlying health conditions overall are 11 times more likely to die if they catch flu compared to healthy adults.

Pregnant women are also at increased risk of serious complications and should have the flu vaccine to help protect themselves and their babies.

While many people aged 65 and over have already come forward for their flu vaccination, exceeding the WHO target of 75%, less than half of those with underlying health conditions have taken up the offer. Uptake in pregnant women also lags behind other groups, with just 34.4% vaccinated so far this season.

While levels of flu infection are still low, typically levels ramp up over December, with a peak in January. We are calling on people to take up the flu vaccine, along with practicing good hygiene, ventilating rooms, and staying at home if unwell.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Sajid Javid said:

Getting your winter vaccines – whether that is your flu jab if eligible or your booster jab – is one of the most important things people can do for yourself and your family this winter.

Record numbers of people took up the offer of a free flu vaccine last year and the programme is expanding even further this year, with a record 35 million people in England eligible.

Don't delay – book your flu vaccine as soon as possible.

Dr Conall Watson, Consultant Epidemiologist at UKHSA, said:

The threat of flu has not gone away – it can cause serious illness and be fatal. Flu vaccination saves lives. If you are eligible, you don't have to wait to be called up – book your flu vaccine as soon as possible to help protect yourself and family this Christmas.

In England, more than 35 million people are eligible for a free flu vaccine this winter. These include people aged 65 and over, those with underlying health conditions, and pregnant women. Children are also offered the flu vaccine to help protect them and reduce the spread of flu to more vulnerable people. This includes children aged 2 and 3 years on 31 August, and schoolchildren aged up to year 11.

There is a significant difference in flu vaccines uptake between different ethnic groups. The lowest uptake is among people from a Black Caribbean or Black African background that the government has been urging to come forward.

Eligible adults can book their free NHS flu vaccination at their GP practice or local pharmacy. Mums-to-be can also get the jab at their maternity service. Children are offered a quick and painless nasal flu spray. Parents can book an appointment at their child's GP surgery for 2 and 3 year olds. Schoolchildren receive their flu vaccine at school; parents should look out for the consent form.

Frontline health and social care worker should be offered the flu vaccine through their employer or, for some staff groups, they are eligible to receive it through their GP or pharmacy.