



Department
of Health

NHS
England



Public Health
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health



Letter to healthcare workers regarding flu vaccinations

Dear colleague,

We are writing to ask you to make sure you take up the offer of vaccination if you have not done so already. As you will be aware from your daily practice, the NHS is under considerable pressure this winter. Substantial levels of seasonal influenza have placed further strain on primary and secondary care, and hospitalisations and intensive care admissions have increased. As flu is unpredictable, it is not possible to know when levels will peak this season and we are writing for your support in reducing flu levels to help address the challenge this poses to the health system.

Flu can have serious and even fatal consequences, especially for vulnerable patients and the elderly. Although flu can produce severe symptoms which prevent the individual from working as normal, the range of illness is very broad with perhaps 30% of infections being asymptomatic and a similar proportion with only mild respiratory symptoms. Such individuals, with mild or no symptoms, can still pass on the virus to vulnerable people they come into contact with. This is why vaccination of healthcare workers is a critical part of our flu prevention strategy and helps to ensure the well-being of our most vulnerable patients.

Frontline healthcare worker vaccination rates have been rising year on year since the programme began in 2002. Provisional data from the second monthly collection shows 59.3% of frontline healthcare workers were vaccinated by 30 November 2017, compared to 55.6% at the same period last year, with over 80% in some trusts. We congratulate these trusts; however, there remains significant variation, with as little as 20% vaccination uptake in other trusts which demonstrates considerable room for improvement. It is crucial we maintain the momentum and strive for higher uptake across all NHS Trusts – it is not too late to get vaccinated and make a difference so NHS Improvement will be contacting the Chief Executives of the 20 lowest performing Trusts today.

Healthcare workers have an important role to play in protecting the health of the public – particularly at a time of year when there is increased pressure on the health service. By being vaccinated yourself, and endorsing flu vaccination amongst colleagues and high risk groups in the community, you will help increase uptake rates and protect patients. You can also use this opportunity to challenge some of the commonly held misconceptions about the vaccine. Flu-related staff sickness absence can significantly affect the ability to deliver

services safely and effectively, and you may be aware of a recent publication¹ suggesting that a 10% increase in staff vaccination reduces healthcare worker sickness absence by about 10%. Getting vaccinated is one of the simplest ways of protecting yourself, your patients and your family from flu.

This year three strains of circulating flu virus have generally been identified, influenza A/H1N1, influenza A/H3N2 and influenza B of the Yamagata lineage. All appear well matched against the quadrivalent vaccine and both the influenza A strains appear well matched against the trivalent vaccines in use this season.

It remains the case that flu vaccine is still the best defence we have against the spread of flu and it is not too late to get vaccinated if you have not already. We have a shared professional responsibility as healthcare workers to take appropriate steps to protect our patients – including getting vaccinated.

Attached to this letter is a brief summary of the clinical evidence of seasonal influenza vaccination. Further information about the national flu vaccination campaign for frontline healthcare workers is available at: www.nhsemployers.org/flumatters.

Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely



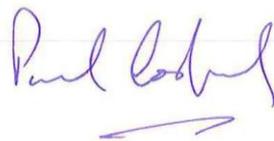
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NHS England



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NHS England



Professor Paul Cosford CB
Director for Health Protection & Medical Director
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¹ <http://www.clinmed.rcpjournals.org/content/17/6/484.full>