

North East and North Cumbria Screening and Immunisation Clinical Flu Bulletin August 2021

Dr Jonathan Slade - Deputy Medical Director Responsible Officer, System Improvement and Professional Standards
NHS England and NHS Improvement (North East and Yorkshire)



“Welcome to the first edition of the flu bulletin - something which we will produce periodically to update you on our flu programme as it is delivered for this winter”.

My goodness - there is nothing like a global pandemic to put infectious diseases right back into the centre of our thinking once again. In the Western world deaths and serious illness from infections have reduced radically over the last century because of improved social conditions, better nutrition, better general health of the population and the impact of various vaccination programmes. Unfortunately, this is not the case in many poorer countries where infectious diseases are continually a threat to populations.

Last winter there was an almost global absence of seasonal flu - first observed in the Southern hemisphere in July/August 2020, and then replicated in the Northern hemisphere - this was as a result of non-pharmaceutical interventions (social distancing/face masks/reduced human to human contact) designed to control the spread of COVID-19.

Whilst that was a good thing, it means that the background natural immunity to flu will fall and therefore there will likely to be increased vulnerability to circulating seasonal flu viruses for this winter, as we move to a more “normal” level of social interactions.

The first vaccination was given in 1796 and the science of vaccinology has developed rapidly in the last 200 years. After clean drinking water, vaccinations are the next most effective intervention at preventing serious illness and death, currently 2-3 million deaths prevented worldwide.

This year, we are embarking on our most ambitious flu vaccination programme ever - offering vaccine to 35 million eligible people in the UK. We know how effective flu vaccine is, and with our increased vulnerability this year it is even more important than ever that we achieve very high levels of uptake.

We have seen with the COVID-19 vaccine programme just what we can achieve together, and I am optimistic that this collective endeavour will deliver our most successful flu vaccination campaign ever.

Finally, may I personally thank you all for help and hard work in supporting us.

Is your practice ready for flu season?

- Modelling has suggested that the **flu season could begin earlier than usual** this year due to lower levels of population immunity, therefore local models must ensure all eligible groups are called for vaccination as **early as possible** once flu vaccine is available
- We expect further guidance on the opportunities for co-administration of COVID-19 and flu vaccination if it is safe and appropriate to do so and, in the meantime, **do not delay** offers of flu or COVID-19 vaccination for any eligible group for example to facilitate possible co-administration at a later date
- International evidence identifies **convenience** as key contributor to driving vaccination uptake therefore local models must
 - Seek to **build on the range and amount of access points** for vaccination and as a minimum not reduce the number of venues offering flu vaccination compared to last season
 - **Build on learning** from the COVID-19 vaccination programme in terms of the need for vaccination opportunities to be provided in the right places and at a range of times, taking into account ever-increasing public expectation
- Evidence also shows that **complacency** around the severity of the disease is a key driver of vaccine hesitancy in populations yet modelling suggests that the coming flu season could be up to 50% larger than typically seen. A robust communications strategy will be delivered nationally and regionally however there are actions for local delivery, including:
 - Making every contact count – **ensure the importance of flu vaccination is promoted to all eligible individuals at every encounter with services**. If co-administration with COVID-19 is unavailable, coordinate with COVID-19 vaccines sites to opportunistically confirm eligible people are scheduled for flu.
 - a **proactive offer** is made to all eligible individuals and that this is followed up by repeated recall ensuring an ‘evergreen’ offer throughout flu season. Consider opportunities for alignment with COVID-19 recall.
 - Aim to operate an **advance booking system or simple waiting list**, ensuring that any eligible person proactively seeking out vaccination **is not turned away or asked to call back later**
- Confidence in the vaccine is a further driver of uptake and there is a need for all local models to promote and deliver vaccination – in appropriate, culturally sensitive ways which reflect the needs and concerns of local communities. Examples include: Female only clinics, Q&A sessions with local clinicians, supporting peer flu/ COVID-19 ‘champions’ to have fact-based conversations and having communication materials in relevant languages.

Primary care workers eligibility

All primary care practitioners including dentists and optometrists are now entitled to a free NHS Flu vaccination as a health care worker (a definition of a 'primary care practitioner' will be confirmed in due course). They can access the vaccine via their GP or pharmacy and whilst we would suggest they bring ID it is not a mandatory requirement.

Dr Jane Lothian - Chief Officer Northumberland Local Medical Committee



Local Medical Committees are the organisations that exist to represent GPs and their teams across the health care system. For most of the time we beaver away in the background making sure that practices are not forgotten and are treated fairly. Here in the Northeast and North Cumbria we are very lucky in that LMCs work very closely with their partner CCGs in the effort to make things run smoothly. The flu vaccination season is one such time that working collaboratively is of great importance.

This year's vaccination programme promises to be one of the most challenging any of us have ever had to provide. Considering the added complexity of COVID-19 boosters, extension of the target groups and health inequalities exposed by COVID-19, running the vaccination programme efficiently is so important, not least to allow clinicians to see all the other patients that are in need.

As LMCs we see the range of hurdles that practices must overcome. However, our teams never fail to achieve fantastic results to deliver what is one of the greatest public health interventions ever. LMCs aim to maintain primary care's profile, and I think all organisations now realise more than ever what a vital role you play. The

stress of the last 18 months cannot be overestimated, but it has been demonstrated that the place our patients will continue to turn to for support is their GP and team.

Keep up the good work and remember your Local Medical Committee is there to support you.

Geraint Morris - Chief Officer North of Tyne Local Pharmaceutical Committee



Local Pharmaceutical Committees (LPCs) are the organisations that represent community pharmacy contractors and their teams within local NHS systems. The role of Pharmacy in the flu season began with small pilots in 2011. Since then, LPCs across the North have worked passionately to improve community vaccine uptake and shape the national flu service. From the winter of 2015 we have been proud to offer the community pharmacy advanced Flu Service and last year's flu campaign proved record breaking for our Community Pharmacies and NHS Region. Our NEY Region plans to build on this success this year as we aim to vaccinate and protect over five million people for the flu season.

Our Community Pharmacists hope to administer more than 500,000 vaccines this year. Through proactive work with PCNs and collaboration with practices, pharmacy hopes to increase vaccine uptake by identifying and encouraging eligible individuals who have never had a flu vaccine to make 2021 the year they do.

The flu vaccination programme has always been a race to vaccinate ahead of the worst of the flu season: this year should be no different. We should prioritise vaccinating eligible individuals for flu as soon as possible and must not be distracted by the evolving and uncertain COVID-19 booster programme.

The challenges that General Practice and Community Pharmacy have experienced over the last 18 months and continues to operate within cannot be ignored, however the success of last year's flu vaccine campaign should give us all confidence. It will be amazing for our NEY Region to have surpassed our five million dose ambition and to have no, or very little, flu vaccine left in our fridges by the end of October.

Stewart Findlay - Primary Care lead for the COVID Vaccination Programme across the North East and North Cumbria



As healthcare teams across the North East and North Cumbria continue to work tirelessly to roll out the COVID-19 vaccination programme we remain acutely aware that, as winter approaches, there could be a very difficult flu season ahead of us.

With many protective measures helping to prevent flu transmissions last year we may be entering this flu season with a higher level of vulnerability than usual which could intensify the risk.

We hope that our experiences with COVID-19 may lead to continued changes in behaviour that will work in our favour with people more willing to wear face masks, adhere to social distancing and take other precautions to help prevent transmission during the peak of the flu season.

Flu vaccination still remains the best way to protect people and their loved ones against the virus and I know that across the North East and North Cumbria we can, and we will, do our bit to help protect our communities. Wherever possible and depending on the results of ongoing trials, we would wish to give Flu and COVID-19 boosters at the same time this year.

We want to hear from you...

If there are any specific topics you would like featured in the Bulletin or any shared learning you would like to offer, please let us know. We would like to use these Bulletins to showcase the hard work carried out by staff and colleagues across practices and pharmacies throughout the flu season. Please share any good practice and methods used to improve or encourage more people to have their flu vaccination. Please send in information (and pictures where appropriate) to our inbox england.cane.screeningimms@nhs.net using email title 'Flu Bulletin'. Thank you and we look forward to hearing from you.

Resources you may find useful...

- Regional Comms campaign - [Flu Toolkit | #DoYourBit \(doyourbit-nenc.co.uk\)](#)
<https://www.fluenztetra.co.uk> (copy & paste link into browser) – please note this website is currently being updated for the 2021/2022 season
[Medisa](#) – resources created by Sanofi
- Alternative language leaflets for non-English speaking communities and patients – improve equity of access - [Search Publications - Health Publications](#)
- The PHE Immunisation publication team have the translated and produced accessible versions of the children and young people's leaflets and posters. The links are below <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flu-vaccination-leaflets-and-posters>
- Vaccine ordering/ deliveries – [maintaining cold chain](#) training to all staff handling vaccines – don't get caught out and waste vaccine unnecessarily.
- Staff training and peer support – how to identify those more at risk from flu, confidence when talking about flu benefits, use admin staff effectively as the first point of contact - [Flu Immunisation Training Recommendations](#), [Make every Contact Count \(MECC\)](#), [Influenza: the green book, chapter 19 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- Know your vaccines and offer the correct vaccine to the patient - [2021382 Flu vaccines for the 2021 to 2022 season poster - Health Publications, Which flu vaccine should children and young people have? \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)
- Annual flu programme <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/annual-flu-programme>
- National flu immunisation programme 2021 to 2022 letter
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-flu-immunisation-programme-plan/national-flu-immunisation-programme-2021-to-2022-letter>
- The Green Book - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-green-book-appraisal-and-evaluation-in-central-government/the-green-book-2020>
- ImmForm - [Intranet Portal - Logon \(phe.gov.uk\)](#)
- Vaccine update - <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/vaccine-update>
- NHS webpages have been published for the 2021/22 season. You can access them here: 'Flu vaccine' and 'Children's flu vaccine'
- The BSL videos are now available on the children's resource page: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flu-vaccination-leaflets-and-posters>
- The translations / alternate formats for the who should have it and why leaflet is live:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flu-vaccination-who-should-have-it-this-winter-and-why>