

## Primary care communications pack

### Adult flu vaccinations

#### About this document

This briefing pack aims to provide clinicians and support staff with information and materials that can help support conversations with patients about the importance of having the vaccinations they are entitled to. The pack brings together local data and insight, alongside ideas for communicating informed by evidence-based techniques to change behaviour.

#### Why are vaccinations so important this year?

Primary care colleagues work hard each and every year to deliver vaccinations to patients, but there is increased national focus on ensuring good uptake this year for a number of reasons:

- **Last winter was very challenging**

Last winter, seasonal viruses accounted for almost 600,000 lost beds in England. This is greater than the population of Malta, and is a stark reminder of the impact of flu and other seasonal viruses on system capacity.<sup>1</sup>

The [Health Foundation's analysis of winter pressures in 2024/25](#) highlighted significant pressure caused specifically by flu:

*a record number of hospital bed days were needed for patients with flu – over 315,000 compared with around 174,000 in 2023/24 and around 211,000 in 2022/23. This is likely because the weekly admission rate peaked before Christmas at a level higher than most winters; the peak was lower than in 2022/23 but took longer to fall back to normal levels. Record flu-related hospital bed days (315,000+)*

The flu vaccine remains one of the most effective tools we have to reduce admissions, protect patients, and safeguard the health and care system this winter.

When fewer people have flu vaccinations, it can significantly increase pressure on primary care services. Flu spreads quickly and without the protection that vaccination offers, more people are likely to need GP appointments, urgent same-day care, or ongoing support for complications linked to flu. This additional demand makes it harder for practices to provide timely care for all patients and puts extra strain on already busy primary care teams. Encouraging uptake of the flu vaccine helps protect individuals while also reducing avoidable pressure on frontline services.

- **High levels of flu in the southern hemisphere**

The 2025 flu season in Australia was particularly severe, suggesting we are likely to see high flu activity in the UK this winter. The [NINDSS dashboard](#) shows that there have been 350,000 confirmed cases of influenza so far this flu season in Australia. This is similar to last year which had the highest rate of all years on record.

- **Flu vaccination rates for NHS staff at historically low levels**

Flu vaccination uptake rates for healthcare workers was at its lowest level in 2024. Each NHS trust is this year required to increase its flu vaccination rates by 5% from last year.

Vaccinating staff not only protects a group of people who are frequently exposed to viruses in the workplace, it helps to ensure services remain resilient at times of extreme pressure by reducing sickness levels.

We also know that when healthcare professionals are vaccinated, it sends a powerful message to patients that the vaccine is safe and effective. Patients look to clinicians for

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<sup>1</sup> [NHS England » Beds lost to seasonal viruses this winter greater than population of Malta](#)

guidance. Seeing staff confidently receive vaccinations can reduce hesitancy and reinforce public health messaging. Vaccinated staff are able to speak from personal experience which builds rapport and helps staff respond to questions and concerns with empathy.

## Impact of flu vaccination in 2024/25

An analysis of the impact of flu vaccination for clinical at-risk cohorts in 2024/25 was undertaken to investigate the link between vaccination and impact on health services in Hertfordshire and west Essex. Key findings were:

### Flu vaccination reduced risk of emergency admission:

- At-risk groups who received a flu vaccine were 48% less likely to have an emergency admission for flu or respiratory illness.
- The largest impact was seen among carers, where there was an 86% reduction in risk. For over 65's the risk was reduced by 51% and for chronic heart disease there was a 45% reduction.
- For respiratory conditions (excl. asthma), 61 people needed flu vaccine to prevent 1 admission.

### Key information we want patients to take away

- Flu is not just 'a bad cold' – it can be deadly for people with heart disease, diabetes, asthma, kidney problems, or other long-term conditions. Vaccines remain our best defence.
- ***If you have heart disease, asthma, liver disease or diabetes, you are around twice as likely to be hospitalised with a respiratory illness if you don't have the vaccine.***
- Even if your health condition is well managed, flu can cause serious complications, which could lead to a stay in hospital. It can also make the symptoms of your long-term condition worse, for example causing fluctuations in the blood glucose level for people with diabetes, or triggering more frequent or severe asthma attacks.
- Carers are also at risk – if you catch flu, both you and the person you care for could be in danger.
- ***If you are a carer, you are 7 times more likely to be admitted to hospital with a flu-related illness if you don't have the flu vaccination.***

### Uptake is unequal:

- There was wide variation in uptake across at-risk groups. This ranged from 36.5% for those with a learning disability through to 75% for chronic kidney disease and 77% for moderate frailty.
- Younger people, those in more deprived areas and certain ethnic groups, such as those from black (32.3% uptake) or mixed (35.9%) ethnicities, were less likely to be vaccinated.

## Key information we want patients to take away

- We want all our patients to be able to understand why vaccinations are so important, and to support them in making an informed choice about having vaccinations.
- Patients can help family, friends and neighbours by talking positively about flu vaccinations and helping older people, or those with language barriers, to book an appointment online.
- If you live with, or spend time with young children who at school or nursery, you may be more at risk of catching viruses they bring home. This is particularly important for homes where grandparents may be living with wider family members.

## Barriers to vaccination

People may have a wide range of reasons for not getting vaccinated, and these barriers are often personal, complex, and not immediately visible. For some, it may be a lack of clear information or understanding about the vaccine. Others may face practical challenges, such as difficulty getting to a clinic, inconvenient appointment times, or concerns about taking time off work. Emotional and cultural factors also play a role. Some people may feel anxious, mistrustful, or influenced by misinformation or past experiences with healthcare.

Recognising that these barriers vary from person to person helps us approach conversations with empathy.

The COM-B model is a simple, evidence-based framework that helps us understand what needs to be in place for someone to change their behaviour, in this case, choosing to have the flu vaccine.

### COM-B stands for:

#### 1. Capability

*Does the person have the knowledge and skills to make an informed decision?*

**What you can do:** Check for understanding. Be clear and jargon-free when talking about the reasons why a flu vaccination would be right for your patient.

**Example:** “Would it help if I explained how the vaccine works and why it’s recommended for people in your situation?”

#### 2. Opportunity

*Does the person have the physical and social opportunity to get vaccinated?*

**What you can do:** Help remove logistical barriers – offer drop-ins and well as booked appointments. Consider offering in the evening or at weekends. Consider offering in a community venue where people naturally gather.

**Example:** “We can book you in today while you’re here, or you could phone 119 and they’ll help find you a pharmacy that’s open at the weekend.”

#### 3. Motivation

*Does the person feel motivated to get vaccinated?*

**What you can do:** Explain the risks of flu and other respiratory illnesses on someone with a long term condition during winter. Be open to questions.

Example: “Many people tell me they weren’t sure at first, but they felt reassured after talking it through. What are your thoughts?”

## Barriers to vaccination

| Capability  | Opportunity  | Motivation                                       |
|---|--|--|
| Lack of knowledge or information about the benefits of vaccinations | Practicality / logistical issues – taking time off work or caring responsibilities, too far to travel, low on personal priority list | Belief that risk to self is low                  |
| Confusion caused by negative stories                                | No convenient access   | Mistrust in vaccines or in government or the NHS |
| Lack of understanding about when to have vaccinations               | Missing one-off clinics held by GP practices   | Safety concerns                                  |
| Language barriers   | Strong religious belief and social norms driving behaviour (for example gelatin in vaccines for some religions)                      | Belief that natural immunity is superior         |
|   | Bad previous experiences of health services  | Fear of needles                                  |
|   |  | Belief that side effects outweigh benefits       |

## Text messages for patients with long term conditions

Uptake of flu vaccinations amongst people with a long term health condition is lower than we would like. This may in part be due to people not understanding the risk that flu and other respiratory viruses pose to them personally. We want to encourage more people with a long term condition to come forward for vaccination because they understand that:

1. Their condition increases the chances of complications from flu which can leave them very unwell
2. Their condition may become much harder to manage if they catch flu and are unvaccinated

The following text messages aim to explain that their health condition makes them eligible for the flu vaccination. They are deliberately short and should ideally be accompanied by a hyperlink either to a direct booking form (for GP practices) or to the [national booking service](#) for pharmacies.

They are all within the 160 characters that constitute one message.

|   |
|---|
| Flu can hit harder if you have a long-term condition. Your free flu jab is ready. Book now: <<insert link>>   |
| Flu can lead to serious illness if you have [condition]. Protect yourself with the flu jab. Book now: <<insert link>>   |
| We recommend the flu jab for people with [condition]. Book yours now: <<insert link>>   |
| Flu can cause serious complications if you have diabetes. Book your free flu jab today: <<insert link>>   |
| Flu can trigger asthma attacks. Protect yourself with the flu jab. Book now: <<insert link>>  |
| Flu can be more severe with liver disease. Protect yourself with the flu jab. Book now: <<insert link>>   |
| <b>For under 18s (with a long term condition)</b><br>Flu can be serious if you have [condition]. Your free NHS flu jab will protect you. Ask your parent/carer to book today: <<insert link>> |

## Reminders for patients

Reception and support staff can play a big part in reminding patients of the importance of having their flu vaccine as soon as possible. Ways to do this can include:

- Updating the website with a homepage banner and with [this article on news pages](#)
- Putting up posters and materials from the [2-3 year olds flu spray communications toolkit](#), circulated in August.
- Putting signs up near entrances and exits:  
*'If you have a long-term condition your doctor advises you to have your free flu jab. Please ask at reception for details of our clinics'*
- Updating your initial answerphone message to remind people:  
*'If you're aged 65 years and over, you are a carer, or have a health condition like diabetes, heart disease, COPD or asthma, then your flu vaccination is waiting for you. Please don't delay. Ask our reception team or book at a local pharmacy through the NHS website.'*

## Display screens

Uploaded to all GP practice waiting room screens that are part of the ICB's waiting room screen solution. [Landscape and portrait digital screens](#) are also available to download from the [ICB website](#).



**NHS**

If you're a **carer**,  
you are

**7** times  
more likely to be  
hospitalised if you  
miss your flu vaccine

Emergency admission for a flu-related illness.  
2024/5 data, Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB



**NHS**

Having your  
**flu vaccine**  
protects you  
and the person  
you care for.

Carers are entitled to a free flu vaccine  
from GP practices or pharmacies



**NHS**

If you are aged  
**65+**  
you are  
**twice**  
as likely

to be  
hospitalised  
if you miss  
your flu  
vaccine

Emergency admission for a flu-related illness.  
2024/5 data, Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB



**NHS**

Please have  
your free flu  
vaccination  
as soon as  
possible

Free flu vaccines available  
from GP practices or pharmacies



**NHS**

If you have  
**diabetes**  
you are  
**twice**  
as likely

to be  
hospitalised  
if you miss  
your flu  
vaccine

Emergency admission for a flu-related illness.  
2024/5 data, Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB



**NHS**

Flu can be  
serious if you  
have a long  
term health  
condition

Protect  
yourself with  
a free  
flu vaccine  
today

Free flu vaccines available  
from GP practices or pharmacies



**NHS**

If you have  
**asthma**  
you are  
**twice**  
as likely

to be  
hospitalised  
if you miss  
your flu  
vaccine

Emergency admission for a flu-related illness.  
2024/5 data, Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB



**NHS**

Flu can be  
serious if you  
have a long  
term health  
condition

Protect  
yourself with  
a free flu  
vaccine  
today

Free flu vaccines available  
from GP practices or pharmacies

### Who can get the free NHS flu vaccine?



- People aged 65 or over
- Anyone 6 months to 64 years old with certain long-term health conditions
- Pregnant women
- Children aged 2 to 3 years old
- School aged children (Reception to Year 11)
- Carers in receipt of Carer's Allowance, or those who are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person
- Anyone living with someone who has a weakened immune system

Speak to a member of staff to book your flu vaccine or visit [nhs.uk/bookflu](https://nhs.uk/bookflu)

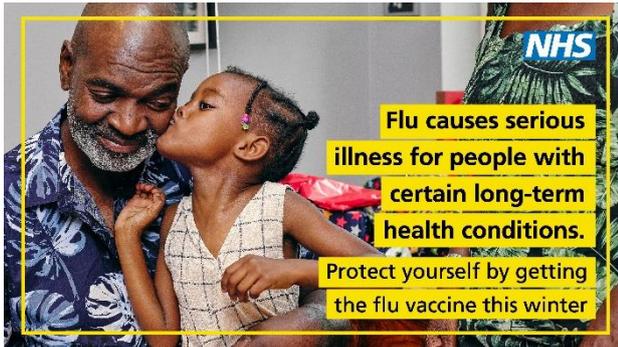
### The COVID-19 vaccine is for people at highest risk of serious illness



This includes:

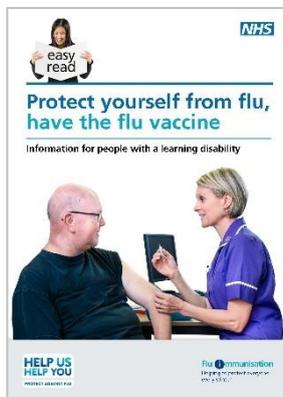
- people aged 75 or over
- people aged 6 months to 74 years who have a weakened immune system
- residents in an older adult care home

Book your appointment in the NHS App, visit [nhs.uk/bookcovid](https://nhs.uk/bookcovid), call 119, or find walk-in sites at [nhs.uk/covid-walk-in](https://nhs.uk/covid-walk-in)



## Simple assets for people with a learning disability or lower reading age

### Easy Read flu booklet



[Download it](#)

[Order paper copies](#)

### Easy Read flu poster



[Download it](#)

### Simple leaflet



[Download it](#)

[Order paper copies](#)

## Newsletter article

### Get your flu jab now to protect yourself and those you care for

The local NHS is urging people with long-term health conditions, and the carers who support them, to get their free flu jab as soon as possible.

People aged over 65, those with certain long term health conditions and people with caring responsibilities can get the vaccine free of charge from their GP or local pharmacy. Vaccinations are available to book now.

The warning comes after Australia recorded one of its toughest flu seasons in recent years, with cases soaring and hospitals under pressure. Experts say this is a sign that the UK could also be facing a severe flu outbreak this winter.

Why it matters:

- Flu is not just “a bad cold” – it can be deadly for people with heart disease, diabetes, COPD, asthma, kidney problems, or other long-term conditions.
- Even if your health condition is well managed, flu can cause serious complications, which could lead to a stay in hospital. It can also make the symptoms of your long-term condition worse, for example causing fluctuations in the blood glucose level for people with diabetes, or triggering more frequent, or severe asthma attacks.
- Carers are also at risk – if you catch flu, both you and the person you care for could be in danger.

Dr Sam Williamson, Associate Medical Director at Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB said: “Flu is not trivial. Every winter we see patients with long-term conditions – such as heart disease, COPD, asthma or diabetes – who become very unwell after catching it. Even if you usually feel in control of your condition, flu can trigger a chain reaction of health problems that, in the worst cases, could put you in hospital. Vaccination is quick, safe, and free. Please don’t wait until flu is already spreading, book your jab now.”

Research from the last flu season in Hertfordshire and West Essex showed that people with heart disease, lung disease, liver disease or diabetes who *did not* get vaccinated were approximately twice as likely to be hospitalised with a serious respiratory illness than those who were vaccinated.

If you are a carer - whether caring for a family member, neighbour, or friend, getting your flu jab is not just about your own health. It’s also a crucial way to protect the person you care for, who may already be vulnerable.

Carers who missed their flu vaccination were seven times more likely to be admitted to hospital with flu-related illness.

### How to get your vaccinations:

Flu vaccinations for over 65s and people with long term health conditions; and [COVID vaccinations for those aged 75 or who are immunosuppressed](#), are available from GP Practices and most pharmacies. You GP practice will invite you or you can book an appointment on the NHS website: <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/vaccination-and-booking-services/>

Children aged 2-3 can have the flu nasal spray at their GP practice, or, in a new addition this year, from some local pharmacies. School-aged children will be offered the flu nasal spray vaccination during the school day by roving vaccination teams.

**<< GP practice or pharmacy to insert contact or booking details for their own vaccination clinics >>**

## Social media

| Message – Facebook/Nextdoor   | Message for Twitter/X  | Image  |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Having your flu vaccine protects you and the person you care for.</p> <p>If you are a carer you can get a free flu vaccine from your GP practice or from a pharmacy. Please take up the offer when invited or visit the NHS website to book.</p> <p>Add link in comments:<br/> <a href="https://www.hertsandwestessex.ics.nhs.uk/news/get-protected-flu-poses-serious-risk-this-winter/">https://www.hertsandwestessex.ics.nhs.uk/news/get-protected-flu-poses-serious-risk-this-winter/</a></p>         | <p>If you are a carer you can get a free flu vaccine from your GP practice or from a pharmacy. Having your flu vaccine protects you and the person you care for.</p> <p><a href="https://www.hertsandwestessex.ics.nhs.uk/news/get-protected-flu-poses-serious-risk-this-winter/">https://www.hertsandwestessex.ics.nhs.uk/news/get-protected-flu-poses-serious-risk-this-winter/</a></p>                                    |  <p>Alt text for image: woman with an older man. Text says “If you’re a carer you are 7 times more likely to be hospitalised if you miss your flu vaccine. Emergency admission for a flu-related illness 2024/5 data, Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB”</p> |
| <p>Join the growing number of people already vaccinated and get yours for free today. They are available from GP practices or pharmacies. You can book only if you are over 65 by end of March 2026. Visit the NHS website or drop in to your practice.</p> <p>Add link in comments:<br/> <a href="https://www.hertsandwestessex.ics.nhs.uk/news/get-protected-flu-poses-serious-risk-this-winter/">https://www.hertsandwestessex.ics.nhs.uk/news/get-protected-flu-poses-serious-risk-this-winter/</a></p> | <p>Join the growing number of people already vaccinated and get yours for free today. They are available from GP practices or pharmacies. You can book only if you are over 65 by end of March 2026</p> <p><a href="https://www.hertsandwestessex.ics.nhs.uk/news/get-protected-flu-poses-serious-risk-this-winter/">https://www.hertsandwestessex.ics.nhs.uk/news/get-protected-flu-poses-serious-risk-this-winter/</a></p> |  <p>Alt text for image: older man eating. Text says “If you are aged 65+ you are twice as likely to be hospitalised if you miss your flu vaccine. Emergency admission for a flu-related illness. 2024/5 data, Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB”</p>        |

Alt text: Image of man over 65 at table eating a biscuit. Text says "If you are aged 65+ you are twice as likely to be hospitalised if you miss your flu vaccine. Emergency admission for a flu-related illness 2024/5 data, Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB"

If you have a long term health condition, like diabetes, flu can be really serious. Protect yourself with a free flu vaccine today. Book online for an appointment or speak to your practice.

Add link in comments:

<https://www.hertsandwestessex.ics.nhs.uk/news/get-protected-flu-poses-serious-risk-this-winter/>

If you have a long term health condition, like diabetes or COPD, flu can be really serious. Protect yourself with a free flu vaccine today. Book online for an appointment or speak to your practice

<https://www.hertsandwestessex.ics.nhs.uk/news/get-protected-flu-poses-serious-risk-this-winter/>



Alt text: picture of Asian woman wearing an apron. text says "If you have diabetes you are twice as likely to be hospitalised if you miss your flu vaccine. Emergency admission for a flu-related illness 2024/5 data, Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB"

If you have a long term health condition, like Asthma, flu can be really serious. Protect yourself with a free flu vaccine today. Book online for an appointment or speak to your practice.

Add link in comments:

<https://www.hertsandwestessex.ics.nhs.uk/news/get-protected-flu-poses-serious-risk-this-winter/>

If you have a long term health condition, like Asthma, flu can be really serious. Protect yourself with a free flu vaccine today. Book online for an appointment or speak to your practice

<https://www.hertsandwestessex.ics.nhs.uk/news/get-protected-flu-poses-serious-risk-this-winter/>



Alt text: image of a man using an inhaler. Text says: "If you have asthma you are twice as likely to be hospitalised if you miss your flu vaccine. Emergency admission for a flu-related illness 2024/5 data, Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB"

## Contact the communications team

Materials and supporting resources will be added to [this webpage](#) as the autumn programme continues.

Please use [this form](#) to contact the ICB communications team either to request materials, communications support or give feedback. The team will respond as soon as possible.