

Winter Preparedness - Seasonal Flu vaccination planning

Introduction

There are a large number of avoidable deaths each winter in England primarily due to heart and lung conditions from cold temperatures. The reasons more people die in winter are complex and interlinked with inadequate heating and poorly insulated housing and health inequalities as well as circulating infectious diseases, particularly flu and norovirus, and the extent of snow and ice.

The multiple impacts of cold weather on health, result in excess winter deaths (e.g. 567 extra deaths in Nottingham in the winter months 2012- 2015 compared with the expected average number of non-winter deaths).

This paper describes local plans to ensure that flu vaccination remains a core part of winter preparedness in Nottingham City. The paper will present an overview of commissioning and delivery arrangements and plans to ensure that performance exceeds last year's uptake. HWBB is being asked to note these plans and put forward recommendations to further increase uptake.

Seasonal Influenza (Flu)

Seasonal Flu is a common infectious viral illness spread by droplets from coughs and sneezes. Whilst it can be very unpleasant, most individuals begin to feel better within about a week. Conversely older people, those with long-term conditions such as heart and lung disease, pregnant women and young children can develop more serious symptoms requiring hospitalisation and can, in some instances, lead to death.

Groups eligible for flu vaccination are based on the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). The national flu immunisation programme aims to provide direct protection to those who are at higher risk of flu associated morbidity and mortality. The objective of the National Flu Programme is to minimise the health impact of flu through effective monitoring, prevention and treatment, including actively offering Flu vaccination to 100% of all those in eligible groups.

Frontline health and social care workers should be provided with flu vaccination by their employer. This should form part of the organisations' policy for the prevention of transmission of infection (flu) to help protect patients, residents, and service users.

A Flu Plan is developed each year which sets out a coordinated and evidence-based approach to planning for, and responding to, the demands of flu across England.

In 2019/20 the following are eligible for flu vaccination:

- All children aged two to ten (but not eleven years or older) on 31 August 2019
- Those aged six months to under 65 years in clinical risk groups
- Pregnant women
- Those aged 65 years and over
- Those in long-stay residential care homes
- Carers
- Close contacts of immunocompromised individuals

NHS England and NHS Improvement is responsible for commissioning all of the national immunisation programmes. Details of the national commissioning arrangements for immunisation programmes are described in NHS public health functions agreement 2016-17¹ and NHS public health functions agreement 2017-18².

Table 1: Delivery of the flu vaccination programme

Service Provider	Cohort
GP Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy Children aged 2, and 3 years • Those in an 'at risk' category (long term condition) aged 6 months -65 years • Over 65's • Pregnant women
School Aged Providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children in school reception, years 1 to 6 (4-10 years of age)
Pharmacies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 18's in an 'at risk' category (long term condition) • Over 65's

¹ Available at <https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2016/02/core-serv-spec-00.pdf>

² Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/694130/nhs-public-functions-agreement-2018-2019.pdf

National Winter Plans

Nationally, NHS England & NHS Improvement communications team coordinates an overarching winter campaign with Public Health England.

The first phase is the Flu vaccination campaign (*Help us Help You Stay Well this Winter*) which runs throughout the month of October with aims to:

- Promote flu vaccination uptake amongst pregnant women, children aged 2-3 years, (targeting their parents), and those with long term health conditions, particularly respiratory diseases (e.g. COPD or bronchitis)
- Improve awareness of the nasal spray among parents of children aged 2-3 years
- Continue to promote reasons to get the flu vaccine amongst pregnant women

The Flu phase of this winter campaign will consist of TV, radio and online messages, Google search, social marketing, BAME targeting and accessibility activity for disabled groups.

Flu Performance in 2018/19

Nottingham City saw a decrease in flu vaccination uptake in most cohorts, although this decrease was also observed nationally. Through joint working, NHS England and Nottingham City Council, in conjunction with other stakeholders such as the CCG, worked together to ensure that all citizens eligible for flu vaccination received their offer of vaccination. It is hoped that the planned initiatives outlined below will increase uptake in 2019/20 to keep the circulation of influenza at a minimum, which in turn will reduce the pressure on our NHS services through the busy winter season. Ongoing support of the annual flu vaccination programme, by all stakeholders, is vital to ensure its success.

Flu Planning 2019/20

NHS England & NHS Improvement(NHSE/I) - Midlands are responsible for commissioning the flu vaccination programme locally and have a flu action plan which encourages all providers to increase flu vaccination uptake through various strategies (including funding midwives at NUH, funding reminder letters for 2&3 year olds and funding vaccination of all special school pupils). In line with NHSE/I PHE's winter plans, Public Health continue to work closely with NHSE/I.

Planned initiatives to improve uptake for the forthcoming flu season

- Ongoing work with AstraZeneca, the sole manufacturer of the nasal flu vaccine, designed to increase uptake in children³. This work includes dedicated engagement with the lowest performing practices via AstraZeneca's telephone support team, distribution of bespoke materials to schools and GP practices and joint working with the CCG.
- A "fluathon" is currently being planned for the autumn which will encourage all practices to open on a chosen weekend and invite parents with eligible children to drop in to receive the flu vaccine. This is being led by CCG and its aim is to vaccinate as many 2-3 year olds as possible in one day.
- Reminder letters will be sent to parents of 2 & 3 year olds. A reminder letter was sent out to all parents of two and three year olds in Nottingham City during the 2018/19 flu season. This reminder had a positive effect and NHSE intend to repeat this for the next flu season.
- Flu vaccine to be offered to all pregnant women who attend maternity clinics
- Flu vaccine to be offered to 'at risk' patients. NHS England & NHSI - Midlands commissioned Nottingham University Hospitals to offer flu vaccinations via their liver and kidney out-patients clinics. Flu vaccination will continue to be offered to patients attending for renal dialysis. Vaccination will be delivered by renal nurses who have received specific training in Flu vaccination.
- Training packages for health care professionals in the run up to flu season
- Maintenance of close working relationships with all stakeholders
- Monthly multi-stakeholder flu meetings
- Development of tailored comms messages to other groups and using existing channels – Care Homes, Home Care, Employee health and wellbeing and schools
- For the first time in 2019/20 patients contacting the NHS111 service will hear a 30 second long Seasonal Flu message encouraging eligible patients to schedule their flu vaccination. This National Initiative will mean that in excess of 1 million people per week contacting the 19 commissioned NHS111 services will this year hear a health promoting message. The message states: "Having your flu vaccination can help protect you against flu and help prevent the spread of flu to others. If you are pregnant, a carer, aged 65 and over or if you

³ Small children are 'super spreaders' of flu, becoming very ill themselves and passing it on to their families and the wider community. The nasal flu vaccination is the best way of stopping the virus in its tracks.

have one of the following health conditions: a chronic respiratory disease, diabetes, heart, kidney or liver disease, immunosuppression or a chronic neurological disease, please contact your GP Practice or local pharmacy to ask about the free flu vaccination. All children aged two on or before 31 August 2019 and all three-year olds can get the vaccine free from their GP practice. Stay Well This Winter.”

- Flu performance presented at Health Scrutiny July 2019
- Flu messages displayed on all Council display screens and staff comms on the intranet
- Staff survey developed and shared with staff to understand the barriers to uptake
- Reminder letters to be sent out to parents of eligible children in November
- Flu vaccination to be offered to all renal and liver outpatients

Ambitions for 2019/20 flu season

Eligible Group	Ambition (2018/19 uptake)
Aged 65 years and over	75% (72.4%)
Aged under 65 'at risk', including pregnant women	At least 55%. Ultimately the aim is to achieve at least a 75% uptake in these groups given their increased risk of morbidity and mortality from flu. (47.5%).
Preschool children aged 2 and 3 years	At least 50% with most practices aiming to achieve higher (44.5% in 2 year olds and 42.2% in 3 year olds)
Primary school aged children.	An average of at least 65% to be attained by every provider across all primary school years. (49.7% to year 5)

Summary

Strong joint working is vital to ensure that the uptake ambitions for the forthcoming flu season are achieved.

Discussion Points

1. What can HWBB member organizations do to actively promote the flu vaccination programme amongst established eligible cohorts?
2. How can the HWBB/ICP support the flu vaccination programme delivered in schools?

3. How can the HWBB/ICP ensure that underserved groups⁴ are targeted appropriately? (people who are homeless or sleep rough, people who misuse substances, asylum seekers Gypsy, Traveller and Roma people, people with learning disabilities, young people leaving long-term care).

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⁴ Adults and children from any background are 'underserved' if their social circumstances, language, culture or lifestyle (or those of their parents or carers) make it difficult to: recognise they are eligible for flu vaccination (for example, they have an undiagnosed clinical condition) access health service attend healthcare appointments.