

Record numbers offered flu vaccine as those with flu and COVID-19 more likely to die

Three of the nation's senior medics – Dr Yvonne Doyle, Professor Jonathan Van-Tam and Dr Nikita Kanani – are calling on all eligible people to get vaccinated against flu, as new research from Public Health England (PHE) suggests the risk of death more than doubled for people who tested positive for both flu and COVID-19, compared to those with COVID-19 alone.

The research, looking at cases between January and April this year, also found that those with co-infection of the 2 viruses were more at risk of severe illness. Most cases of co-infection were in older people and more than half of them died.

Flu is a serious condition that kills, on average, 11,000 people in England each year and hospitalises many more. Adults at high risk from flu are also most at risk from COVID-19. The free vaccine is more important than ever to help protect the nation from a double threat this winter.

This year, the programme is being expanded to help protect people from flu and ease pressure on the NHS and urgent care services.

The health system is working to provide the free flu vaccine to 30 million people, the highest number on record.

All primary school children and, for the first time, Year 7 children will be offered the flu 'nasal spray' in schools to reduce community transmission. Two- and three-year-olds will be offered the vaccine through their GP.

The most vulnerable, including adults aged 65 and over, those with long-term health conditions and pregnant women, will be offered the flu vaccine first through their GP or pharmacy.

It will also be offered to household contacts of people on the [NHS Shielded Patient List](#) and all health and all social care workers who have direct contact with the people they care for.

Once uptake has been maximised in the most at-risk groups, the newly eligible 50- to 64-year-olds will be invited for vaccination later in the season. Anyone who is 50 to 64 years old with long-term health conditions should be vaccinated earlier in the season, in line with all others in risk groups.

As part of England's biggest ever flu campaign – alongside adverts across the media and posters in GP surgeries, pharmacies and hospitals – eligible people will receive additional direct reminders prompting them to book their appointment, supporting the hard work of local GP practices and pharmacies in driving uptake among their registered eligible patients.

To help increase uptake in the social care sector, for the first time, pharmacists will be able to vaccinate residents and care home staff at the same time.

Employers of frontline health and social care workers also have a responsibility to ensure their staff can get the free vaccine. A record number of NHS staff – three-quarters of a million (74.3%) of frontline healthcare workers – took up their workplace vaccination last year.

Overall, nearly two-thirds of eligible people received their free vaccine last year, making uptake rates in England among the highest in Europe.

Dr Yvonne Doyle, Medical Director at Public Health England, said:

It is dangerous to dismiss influenza as ‘just’ the flu – it can be extremely serious and can lead to hospitalisation, permanent disability or even death.

The flu vaccine is more important than ever, to help reduce transmission of flu and protect the nation from the double threat of flu and COVID-19. You may be offered it for the first time this year – it is important that you take up the offer to protect yourself and others.

Deputy Chief Medical Officer Professor, Jonathan Van-Tam, said:

Flu can be deadly and it is easily spread in children and adults. The vaccine is the best way to protect yourself from becoming ill with the flu, especially if you are in a vulnerable group.

This winter with COVID still circulating, and the increased risk to life if you are ill with both viruses simultaneously, it is even more vital to get the free jab as soon as you can.

Dr Nikita Kanani, London GP and NHS medical director for primary care, said:

My frontline NHS colleagues across England are working harder than ever to prepare for winter, including expanding and adapting services to ensure people can get the care and vaccinations they need safely and conveniently.

So if you are eligible, please help us help you and get your free flu vaccine as soon as possible. It could save your life, or someone you love.

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock, said:

This year more than ever, it's vital that those eligible for the flu jab get it this winter, so you can protect yourself, your family and the NHS. We're pulling out all the stops to prepare for this uniquely challenging winter and we have enough vaccines for 30 million people this year, more than we've ever done before.

With the simultaneous risk of flu and COVID-19, make sure you get your flu jab if you're eligible, don't gather in groups larger than 6 and remember 'Hands Face Space', so we can look after each other.

The unprecedented vaccine drive will be supported by a scaled-up marketing campaign across TV, radio and digital advertising. The 'Just' The Flu campaign, launching in early October, will reinforce the seriousness of flu, urge people to re-evaluate their own risk to the virus and remind people that vaccination is the best protection for themselves and those around them.

For further information please contact: