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**Flu**

The flu virus typically peaks during the winter months, the best way to help protect yourself and others from catching and spreading flu is to have the flu jab every year.

Flu strains can change from year to year, which means last year’s jab may not protect you from this year’s strains. The vaccine usually provides protection for the duration of that year's flu season.

The flu vaccination offers important health protection. Flu can lead to existing health conditions getting worse or the development of an illness such as bronchitis or pneumonia, or it could even be fatal. A vaccination helps protect the health of a pregnant mother and her child.

Getting vaccinated is important each year but this year more than ever people are urged to have the vaccine in order to protect themselves, and the NHS, this winter.

Children aged 2 and 3 years old, plus all primary school aged children and school year 7 in secondary school, will be offered the nasal spray vaccination. The adult flu vaccine is offered free to those in groups at particular risk of infection and complications from flu (for more details see the list at the end of this page).

The groups being offered the adult flu vaccine are:

* Pregnant women
* Those aged 65 or over
* Those aged under 65 with long-term conditions (see list below)
* Carers
* Shielded patients and those in the same household aged 18 or over
* Pending supply, 50 - 64 year olds will be invited no earlier than November

Due to the pandemic, flu vaccination clinics may be held in a slightly different way this year. Please refer to our website for updated information. For those who are eligible, GP surgeries across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland are providing special clinics to offer patients their annual flu jab.

Flu vaccines will be released in batches, according to both availability and also the need to prioritise those most at risk. This means flu clinics will be staggered in the months ahead.

Please book a place in forthcoming flu clinics as soon as they are advertised. If you are housebound, please ensure the Practice are aware of this.

Those who do not fall within the eligible categories for a free NHS vaccination will be able to buy a flu vaccine from their local participating pharmacy.

This year eligibility for the flu vaccination has been extended to those aged 50 to 64 years. Please note that people in the 50 to 64 year old age group (with no other risk factors) will NOT be vaccinated until November and December, providing there is sufficient vaccine, and no appointments will be offered for this age group until then. This is to ensure those who are most at risk are vaccinated first.

You can see the full list of those eligible for a flu vaccination below.

To help us to make sure we are reaching all groups in our local communities, we are asking patients to check that their GP practice has recorded their ethnicity status in their records.

**Help to stop spreading colds and flu.**

Colds and flu are caused by viruses and easily spread to other people. Germs from coughs and sneezes survive on hands and surfaces for up to 24 hours. You are infectious until all symptoms are gone which usually takes a week or two.

You can help prevent colds and flu spreading by using tissues to ‘catch it, kill it, bin it’. Washing your hands regularly with soap and water destroys bugs that you may have picked up from touching surfaces used by other people, such as light switches and door handles. It is also important to keep household items clean, including cleaning such items as cups, glasses and towels, especially if someone in your house is ill.

People with worsening symptoms or respiratory problems are advised not to visit a GP surgery or a hospital but to call their GP first or call NHS111 for further advice.

**Who is eligible for a free NHS flu vaccine?**

In 2020/21, flu vaccinations will be offered under the NHS flu vaccination programme to the following groups:

* chronic (long-term) respiratory disease, such as severe asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or bronchitis
* chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
* chronic kidney disease at stage three, four or five
* chronic liver disease
* chronic neurological disease, such as Parkinson’s disease or motor neurone disease,
* learning disability
* diabetes
* splenic dysfunction or asplenia
* a weakened immune system due to disease (such as HIV/AIDS) or treatment (such as cancer treatment)
* morbidly obese (defined as BMI of 40 and above)
* all children aged two to eleven (but not twelve years or older) on 31 August 2020
* people aged 65 years or over (including those becoming age 65 years by 31 March 2021)
* those aged from six months to less than 65 years of age, in a clinical risk group such as those with:
* all pregnant women (including those women who become pregnant during the flu season)
* household contacts of those on the NHS Shielded Patient List, or of immunocompromised individuals, specifically individuals who expect to share living accommodation with a shielded patient on most days over the winter and therefore for whom continuing close contact is unavoidable
* people living in long-stay residential care homes or other long-stay care facilities where rapid spread is likely to follow introduction of infection and cause high morbidity and mortality. This does **not** include, for instance, prisons, young offender institutions, university halls of residence, or boarding schools (except where children are of primary school age or secondary school Year 7).
* those who are in receipt of a carer’s allowance, or who are the main carer of an older or disabled person whose welfare may be at risk if the carer falls ill
* health and social care staff, employed by a registered residential care/nursing home or registered domiciliary care provider, who are directly involved in the care of vulnerable patients/clients who are at increased risk from exposure to influenza.
* health and care staff, employed by a voluntary managed hospice provider, who are directly involved in the care of vulnerable patients/clients who are at increased risk from exposure to influenza.
* health and social care workers employed through Direct Payments (personal budgets) and/or Personal Health Budgets, such as Personal Assistants, to deliver domiciliary care to patients and service users. 2. Additionally, in 2020/21, flu vaccinations might be offered under the NHS flu vaccination programme to the following groups:
* individuals between 50-64 years, following prioritisation of other eligible groups and subject to vaccine supply