

**Strictly embargoed Wednesday 12 October 2016 00.01**

## **Nearly 380,000 children in East Midlands to be offered vaccination against flu**

- **Public Health England (PHE) and NHS England launch a major campaign to help children and the vulnerable stay well over the winter months**
- **Nationally, more than half a million more children are offered flu vaccination, with the programme extended to those in school year 3**
- **Vaccination will help protect millions of people most at risk including young children, the elderly and those with long-term health conditions**

The Stay Well This Winter campaign (SWTW) launches today in the East Midlands and around the country, making it the biggest ever flu vaccination programme in England.

This year nearly 380,000<sup>1</sup> children (379,469) aged 2-7 years in the East Midlands will be offered protection.

At risk adults, including those with long-term health conditions, pregnant women and those over 65 will also be offered flu vaccination.

An extension of the programme to children in school year 3 this year means a further 65,000<sup>2</sup> (65,636) can be vaccinated. Across England, more than 4 million children will be offered protection against flu – around 600,000 more than last year.

As well as offering protection to these children aged 2 to 7 years, it will help reduce the spread of this infection to the most vulnerable in the community, particularly younger children, the elderly and those with long-term conditions.

Building on the success of last year, children aged 2, 3 and 4 can get the vaccination, in the form of a nasal spray, from their GP. Parents of children in school years 1, 2 and 3 are asked to give permission for their child to receive the free nasal spray vaccination at school.

A survey showed that nearly 4 out of 10 (37%) parents of eligible children are unaware of the nasal spray. A TV, radio and online advertising campaign starts this week targeting parents and adults in at risk groups who are also eligible for free vaccination.

Children are most likely to spread flu to others, so targeting them helps protect the wider community too. It is estimated that several million people get flu each winter, leading to more than 2,000 NHS intensive care admissions across the UK last year. Reducing transmission by children can potentially help cut the number of GP appointments and unplanned admissions for children and adults, reducing winter pressures on the NHS. The programme will be extended gradually to older age groups in primary school in future years.

Flu can be particularly dangerous for those with long-term health conditions, like respiratory disease, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, bronchitis or emphysema, diabetes; heart, kidney or liver disease; and chronic neurological diseases, like multiple sclerosis or cerebral palsy. People with these conditions are eligible for vaccination because if they get flu, it is more likely to develop into a serious illness, which could result in admission to hospital. Last year, 44 per cent<sup>3</sup> of people with a long term health condition in the East Midlands were vaccinated against flu.

On average someone with a long-term condition is 11 times more likely to die if they get flu than those not in at risk groups. The risk of death varies by condition, with patients with chronic liver disease 48 times more likely to die on average than those without an underlying chronic health condition. There are nearly 6.8 million people with a long-term condition in England under 65 years of age.

The campaign is also encouraging pregnant women to get vaccinated against flu. Pregnancy naturally weakens the body's immune system, and so flu can cause serious complications for mother and her newborn baby. The free vaccine is offered to other groups at particular risk of infection and complications, or liable to spread it to those at risk: anyone aged 65 and over; residents of long-stay care homes; and carers. Those eligible should contact their GP, pharmacist or midwife, as appropriate, for more information.

Last year 12.4 million people were vaccinated overall in England.

The NHS and social care workforce is also being targeted to help protect them, and reduce the risk of frontline workers spreading infection to patients, particularly those in vulnerable groups. The NHS is running its 'Flu Fighter' campaign throughout the flu season providing advice, guidance and promotional materials to support local NHS trusts to get staff vaccinated.

**Chief Medical Officer, Professor Dame Sally Davies, said:**

"Flu can be much more dangerous for children than parents realise, and of course, when they get it, they tend to spread it around the whole family. Every year, thousands of children get sick and it is not uncommon for them to be admitted to hospital.

"The single best way to help protect your little ones, and the rest of the family, is to get them vaccinated. For most it is not even an injection, it's just a quick, easy and painless nasal spray."

**Dr Tim Davies, Consultant Lead for Screening and Immunisation, PHE East Midlands, said:**

"It can be easy to put off or ignore getting your flu vaccine, as many people who get flu make a full recovery and don't suffer any complications. But flu can make people seriously ill and it can be deadly.

"Along with getting as many children in the region vaccinated as we can, we are calling on all East Midlands residents who could be more at risk from flu – including pregnant women, people with a long-term health conditions and those over 65 – to speak to their GP, pharmacist or midwife about getting the vaccine and making sure they are protected against flu."

**Ends**

For more information, interviews or imagery please contact Emma Cooper, PHE East Midlands press office, via [emma.cooper@phe.gov.uk](mailto:emma.cooper@phe.gov.uk) or 01158 441399.

**Notes to Editors:**

1. 2016/17, the following are advised to receive flu vaccination:
  - all children aged two to seven (but not eight years or older) on 31 August

2016

- all primary school-aged children in former primary school pilot areas
- 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 (people who are in receipt of a carer's allowance, or those 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 workers directly involved in delivering care

2. For patient information got to <http://www.nhs.uk/staywell/>

## Background

References:

1 and 2: Estimated number of eligible children 2016-2017 based on regional uptake of the flu vaccine for 2015/16 for those aged 2, 3 and 4, those with long term health conditions and pregnant women: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seasonal-flu-vaccine-uptake-in-gp-patients-in-england-winter-season-2015-to-2016> and regional uptake of the flu vaccination for 2015/16 amongst children in school years 1 and 2:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seasonal-flu-vaccine-uptake-in-children-of-primary-school-age-winter-season-2015-to-2016>

3: Population influenza vaccination of at risk individuals, 2014/15:

<http://fingertips.phe.org.uk/search/influenza#page/0/gid/1/pat/15/par/E92000001/ati/6/are/E12000004/iid/30315/age/226/sex/4>

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