

Now more than ever, get your winter vaccines!

Information pack for older Londoners

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What do we mean by winter vaccines?

Vaccines

Vaccines are the most effective way to prevent infectious diseases as they teach our immune system how to recognise and fight viruses. During the coming winter, the NHS is concerned about the spread of flu as well as Covid-19 and we have vaccines for both of these dangerous viruses.

We are all aware of the dangers of Covid-19 but we must not forget that flu is also a very dangerous virus that kills thousands of people a year and complications from flu can include pneumonia, inflammation of the heart, brain or muscle tissues, as well as multi-organ failure.

Being vaccinated against both viruses will not only help to protect yourself and those around you from flu and Covid-19, but will help protect everyone from a potentially devastating double threat this winter.

Flu vaccine

You need to have a flu vaccination every year as the antibodies that protect you from flu decline over time, and flu strains may change from year to year. It can take up to two weeks for your immunity to build up fully after you have had your winter vaccines. Therefore, you are not protected immediately and should continue to be careful following your jabs.

Booster Covid-19

A booster vaccine is recommended in order to give longer-lasting protection. This will help to ensure that people at higher risk from coronavirus, who were prioritised at the start of the vaccine programme, have enough protection going into winter and may offer extra protection against variants that have resistance to existing vaccines.

The Covid-19 booster will be given at least six months after a person had their second dose. The flu jab and Covid-19 booster vaccine can be offered at the same appointment, depending on when you had your second Covid-19 vaccine.

Most adults can have the winter vaccines but if you suffer from allergic reactions please do inform your GP or pharmacist before you take up the offer.

Why the free winter vaccines are so important this year

Catching flu and Covid-19 - risks

It is likely that flu viruses as well as the virus that causes Covid-19 will both be circulating this winter. Catching flu and Covid-19 seriously increases the risk of being hospitalised, ending up in intensive care or even dying. This is particularly the case for those with long-term conditions and older Londoners from BAMER communities - who experienced worse health outcomes from Covid-19. Taking up the offer of the free winter vaccines will protect you and those around you and ensure immunity for those most at risk.

There are concerns that flu levels could be high this winter. Thanks to social distancing and other measures taken to stop the spread of Covid-19, flu levels were extremely low last winter. As a result, it is expected people will have a lower level of immunity against the flu this winter.

Vaccines have been shown to reduce the risk of illness, hospitalisation, and death. They are also an important preventative tool for people with chronic health conditions. Getting your winter vaccines can prevent thousands of doctor's visits and save healthcare resources for the care of patients with other critical illnesses.

Vaccines work

The UK Covid-19 vaccination programme has so far prevented an estimated 24m Covid infections and 112,000 deaths but as Professor Jonathan Van-Tam, (England's Deputy Chief Medical Officer) warned on 14th September, 2021, "*This pandemic is still active*". After clean water, vaccinations are the most important thing we can do to protect ourselves against ill health and have almost wiped out deadly diseases like smallpox, polio and tetanus.

Symptoms

The viruses that cause both the seasonal flu and Covid-19 **spread in similar ways**, mainly from person to person through respiratory droplets. Symptoms such as fever and body aches are similar in both Covid-19 and the seasonal flu. Therefore, it is important that everyone and particularly those most at risk from both flu and Covid-19, take up the offer of the free winter vaccines if they are eligible.

Who is eligible and how will they know?

Eligibility

The roll-out of both free winter vaccines will be phased so that those most at risk will be first to be offered their winter vaccines. This includes those who are:

Flu vaccine	Covid-19 booster
<p>The flu vaccine is given free on the NHS to people who are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 50 and over• have long term health conditions• in long-stay residential care• a carer• living with someone who is more likely to get infections• frontline health and social care workers	<p>Stage 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• adults with long term health conditions or considered clinically vulnerable• living in a residential care homes• all adults aged 70 years or over• frontline health and social care workers <p>Stage 2. The following people should be offered a third COVID-19 booster vaccine as soon as practicable after stage 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• all adults aged 50 years and over• all adults aged 16 to 49 years who are in a flu or COVID-19 at-risk group• adult household contacts of immunosuppressed individuals

Covid-19 booster vaccine

Booster vaccine doses are now available for free for everyone aged 50+ (see eligibility criteria above) who have already had a 2nd dose of the Covid-19 vaccine at least 6 months (182 days) before.

You can book your booster appointment in a variety of ways if you are eligible:

- Book your Covid booster in advance online if it's been 5 months (152 days) since you had your 2nd dose.
- You can get your booster dose at a walk-in Covid vaccination centre if you had your 2nd dose at least 6 months ago and you are eligible (see criteria above).

However, if you have recently had Covid you need to wait 28 days after testing positive before being vaccinated.

Who is eligible and how will they know?

Flu vaccine

You may be offered an appointment at your GP surgery or at your local pharmacy or at a community venue in your area. You can go into your pharmacy and book the flu vaccine yourself. You can find your local pharmacist using this website.

Covid-19 vaccine

Everyone aged 16+ is eligible for a covid vaccine and can either:

- Book online for an appointment at a vaccination centre or pharmacy
- Find a walk-in vaccination centre without needing an appointment
- Book an appointment with the GP

If you cannot book online, telephone 119 free of charge. You can speak to a translator if you need to or textphone 18001 119 or NHS 119 BSL interpreter service.

You do not need to be registered with a GP or have an NHS number to get a Covid-19 vaccine. However, you cannot use the standard online national booking system and will need to attend a walk-in service. You cannot be refused a vaccine if you are not registered with a GP. Registering with a GP is an important thing to do as it allows you access healthcare services, but you should not be turned away from a walk-in site.

Mythbusters – Flu & Covid-19 vaccines

Myth 1 Flu is just a bad cold

A bad bout of flu is much worse than a heavy cold. If you get complications caused by flu, you could become seriously ill, have to go to hospital, and may get pneumonia, organ failure or it could lead to death.

Myth 2 You can catch the flu or Covid-19 from the vaccines

Neither of the injected vaccines given to adults contain active viruses so they cannot transmit infection and so **it cannot give you flu or Covid-19**. Your arm may feel a bit sore where you were injected, and some people get a slight temperature and aching muscles for a couple of days afterwards. More serious reactions are rare.

Myth 3 Flu can be treated with antibiotics

Viruses cause flu. Antibiotics only work against bacteria. A bacterial infection may occur because of having the flu, in which case you may be given antibiotics to treat that infection, this will not protect against the flu.

Myth 4 You do not need to get the flu jab every year

The viruses that cause flu changes (mutates), so you need vaccination that matches the new viruses each year.

Myth 5 I have had the flu so it is too late to be vaccinated

As flu is caused by several viruses, the immunity you naturally developed will only protect you against one of them. You could catch another strain.

Myth 6 Healthy people do not need to be vaccinated

While it is especially important for people who have a long-term condition or chronic illness to get the flu jab, everyone benefits from being vaccinated. In addition, it is free if you are 50 years and over, and as we age our natural immunity weakens increasing vulnerability to viruses.

Myth 7 Getting the flu jab is all you need to protect yourself

Do not forget to wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and try to avoid contact with people who have the flu. This is particularly important in the context of Covid-19.

Mythbusters – Flu & Covid-19 vaccines

Myth 8 I don't have any symptoms, so even if I have Covid-19 I won't give it to anyone else

Wrong. People who never get symptoms from Covid-19 may be less infectious than people who get symptoms, but they can still pass on the virus. In addition, the highest rate of infection transmission from those who do develop symptoms is the day or two before they start feeling ill.

Myth 9 I won't pick up or transmit the Covid-19 virus because I am fully vaccinated

This is not true. The Covid-19 vaccines are between 65-95% effective at preventing symptomatic disease from the Delt variant of COVID-19 (the dominant strain in the UK), with higher levels of protection against hospitalisation and death. This means that some people who are double vaccinated may still catch COVID-19. While the vast majority will not need hospitalisation, some people may still feel very unwell. Vaccination helps prevent infection and reduces transmission, but no vaccine is 100% effective and it's important you continue practising good hand hygiene.

Myth 10 I have had Covid-19 already, so I do not need the vaccine

Having had Covid-19 does give you reasonable protection from being infected again, but it is not as good as the protection you get from being vaccinated. Immunity from vaccination lasts longer and is more robust to new variants. If you have already had Covid-19 then vaccination gives your existing immunity an extra strong boost. The best immunity we see now is in people who are fully vaccinated after having had Covid-19.

Myth 11 I have a good immune system so I do not need the vaccine

Previously healthy people can still get very sick with Covid-19, including ending up in hospital and dying. We also know that a small number of people end up with long Covid-19, even with a mild initial illness. In addition, it is not just about you, we can all come into contact with vulnerable people, friends and family, in the supermarket, on public transport, visiting family or at the pub. We owe it to them to try to avoid being infected ourselves.

Myth 12 This wave will be the last

Things are unpredictable and infections may rise again as we go into autumn and winter. *“The UK Covid 19 Vaccination programme has so far prevented estimated 24m Covid infections and 112,000 deaths but warned, “This pandemic is still active”.*

Frequently Asked Questions

Are the winter vaccines safe?

Yes both the flu vaccine and the Covid-19 booster are safe and have been approved by the Medicines & Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) in the UK. You cannot get coronavirus or flu from the winter vaccines.

How well does the flu vaccine work?

Usually flu vaccination reduces the risk of flu illness by up to 60%. The flu vaccine is never 100% effective in preventing flu. However, it drastically reduces your chances of getting it (and passing it on to others), and it lessens the severity of symptoms if you are infected with the virus.

Where can I get my winter vaccinations?

At a GP surgery or pharmacy, hospital hubs or vaccination centre in the community. Health professionals may vaccinate care home staff and residents on-site. See Section 3, 'Who is eligible, where and when'.

Do the winter vaccines cause serious side effects?

Mild side effects, such as soreness and aching muscles are not uncommon, but these are far less serious than the effects of contracting either the flu or Covid-19.

Can I just walk into a pharmacy and ask for my free winter vaccines?

If you are eligible, you can walk in to pharmacies and get the flu vaccine. It is advised that once contacted - you book an appointment for your Covid-19 booster, as there must be a 6-month gap between your second dose and your booster shot.

Do I have to have a flu vaccine every year?

Each year, public health experts research which flu strains are most likely to be circulating. The strains that make up the annual flu vaccine each year may change. In addition, studies have shown that the body's ability to fight off the flu after a vaccine wanes over time, so that is another reason why you need a vaccine each year.

What if you have put off the flu vaccine until December, or even later?

It is never too late to get the vaccine to protect yourself and those around you, but the earlier you get your flu vaccine the better protected you will be as we go in to winter so book with visit your GP or pharmacist as soon as you can.

Why do we need to target particular communities?

Research has shown evidence of low uptake of both the free flu vaccine and the Covid-19 vaccine in some ethnic groups in the UK. There is also a growing body of evidence showing that the pandemic has not affected all communities equally, with some communities being more affected.

Older adults with long-term conditions from BAMER (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and Refugee) communities have been hit particularly hard.

Hence, we need to ensure that they have information and access to the free winter vaccination program in the context of the heightened risk and impact of Covid-19.

Getting the message out

- Many older adults are not online and rely on their community groups, health groups and faith groups for support and advice. By working with trusted voices within targeted communities, it is possible to get the message out and encourage people to take up winter vaccines.
- Information on winter vaccines in a range of community languages.
- It is important to develop a respectful partnership as many small community groups are volunteer-led and run and will not have much resources or time to help promote the winter vaccines.
- Offer to write a winter vaccine article for a community newsletter.
- Offer to speak at a community event on the benefits of vaccinations, e.g. community centres, pensioners forums, Ethnic Elders groups, local faith and interfaith groups, diabetes groups, MS Societies.
- Offer to provide marketing materials, i.e. posters.
- Offer to send winter vaccine toolkits to community leaders.
- Work with a community organisation to put a case study together.

Running a local winter vaccine information session

Below is a suggested format for running a local information session to promote the winter vaccines.

Introduction (5 minutes) - see toolkit

- Covid-19 and flu are serious health hazards especially for people with long-term conditions and can affect you and those around you.
- It is likely that both the flu virus and the Covid-19 virus will both be circulating. Both of these viruses have **similar symptoms** and they also spread in a **similar way** through respiratory droplets.
- London has the lowest flu vaccine and Covid-19 vaccine uptake across the country.

Icebreaker (10–15 minutes) depending on numbers

- Who do you think is eligible to get a free winter vaccine?
- Refer to the toolkit and the expansion of the flu vaccine program again this year as well as the Covid-19 vaccine booster program.
- Have a virtual show of hands for who has already had their winter vaccines?
- Discuss apprehension of those that shielded last winter.
- Discussion on above – build on positive stories from participants.

Background to winter viruses and winter vaccines (15 minutes)

- What are the winter vaccines? Refer to sections in the toolkit.
- Benefits of the winter vaccines especially during Covid 19 – refer to sections in the toolkit
- Myth busters re flu and Covid and the vaccines – raise each myth and discuss.

Resources (5-10 minutes)

- Refer to sections of the toolkit and the poster from Age UK London.

Next steps (5-10 minutes)

- Ask participants how they can promote the free winter vaccines through their communities and networks.

Holding an online event

Before the event

- Have a simple programme or agenda so everyone knows what to expect - email this to participants.
- Give clear guidance on how to join the online meeting.
- Ask each attendee if they have any accessibility needs.
- Think about timing of the event and the length of the event - more than 1.5 hours is too much.

Content of the event

- Use the winter vaccine toolkit to devise a simple programme.
- Share web links to the winter vaccine toolkit and have copies available online and also available to post out to attendees.
- Explain where all the web links are on the Age UK London website so they can be shared.
- Demonstrate and discuss the marketing materials e.g. posters, social.
- Follow up the online session with a thank you email enclosing all links.
- Email attendees a list of evaluation questions that they can easily reply to. Do not send a word document that cannot be edited or reformatted. Ask questions such as :
 - Was the information useful?
 - How will they share the information in their communities and networks?
 - What other actions they can take to promote winter vaccines

Getting people to come along

- Use Age UK London winter vaccine poster that can be emailed and/or put up in the community e.g. local community centres, community noticeboards, surgeries, places of worship.
- Set up an event page on Facebook or use Eventbrite to send out invitations via email.
- Do not forget to provide contact details so people can ask for more information.

After the event

- Ask attendees to follow Age UK London on social media so we can share your story and good practice with others across London.

Resources and contacts

- [Age UK London winter vaccines campaign](#) - toolkit and press pack
- NHS flu [web page](#)
- [Downloadable information on flu and vaccine](#)
- [Find my local GP](#) - enter a postcode to find nearest GP service
- [Find my local pharmacist](#) - enter a postcode to search for your nearest pharmacist
- [Find my local Age UK](#) - enter a postcode to search for your local London borough Age UK
- [Age UK 'Keep Well in Winter' pages](#) - advice and information on looking after your health, keeping your spirits up, managing your money and much more
- [NHS 111](#) can help if you have an urgent medical problem - dial 111 (available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

If you have difficulties communicating or hearing, the NHS 111 British Sign Language (BSL) [interpreter service](#)

For more information on Age UK London's winter vaccine campaign, contact Kathleen Egan at kegan@ageuklondon.org.uk