

Now, more than ever - get your flu jab - protect yourself and those around you

Flu Vaccine Toolkit

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What is the flu vaccine?

- Flu is a common and highly infectious disease caused by viruses that infect the nose, throat and sometimes the lungs.
- Flu is much worse than a heavy cold and often results in days if not weeks in bed. While most people recover, others will get serious complications such as pneumonia, become seriously ill and have to go to hospital. Flu is a particular health hazard for older Londoners because of changes in immune defenses that occur as part of the ageing process and can undermine their resilience and independence. Complications from flu include pneumonia, inflammation of the heart, brain or muscle tissues, as well as multi-organ failure.
- The flu vaccine does not contain any live flu viruses and cannot give you flu. The vaccine stimulates your body's immune system to make antibodies to attack the flu virus.
- It can take up to two weeks for your immunity to build up fully after you have had the flu vaccine. So you are not protected from the flu immediately following your flu jab.
- 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.
- In the UK, the flu vaccine is now available from GPs and pharmacists.
- Most adults can have the injected flu vaccine, but you should avoid it if you have had a serious allergic reaction to a flu vaccine in the past.

If in doubt, check with your doctor

Now, more than ever

Why is getting the free flu jab so important this year?

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 are already experiencing worse health outcomes from Covid-19. Having the flu vaccination protects you and those around you and helps to reduce the transmission of the flu virus.

- 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 flu vaccine this winter. This is why the current NHS flu vaccine programme is the largest in UK history.
- Flu vaccines have been shown to reduce the risk of flu illness, hospitalisation, and death. It is also an important preventative tool for people with chronic health conditions.
- In recent years, flu vaccines have reduced the risk of flu-associated hospitalisations among older adults on average by about 40%.
- Getting a flu vaccine can prevent thousands of flu-related doctors visits and save healthcare resources for the care of patients with other critical illnesses.

Why do we need to target particular communities?

Recent research showed evidence of disparity and low uptake of the free flu vaccine in certain 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 flu vaccination this winter in the context of the heightened risk and impact of Covid-19.

- Many older adults are not online and rely on their community groups, health groups and faith groups for support and advice. By working with the trusted voices within targeted communities, it is possible to get the message out and encourage people to take up the free flu vaccine. 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 flu vaccine.
- Offer to write a flu vaccine article for a community newsletter.
- Offer to speak at a community event on the benefits of flu vaccine, 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. flyers and posters.
- Offer to send flu vaccine toolkits to community leaders.

Who is eligible to get the free flu vaccine this winter?

- 65+ years old
- Member of a shielding household
- Those with a long-term health condition (LTHC) such as:
 - a heart problem
 - a chest complaint or breathing difficulties, including bronchitis, emphysema or severe asthma
 - kidney disease
 - lowered immunity due to disease or treatment
 - liver disease
 - stroke or a transient ischemic attack (TIA)
 - diabetes
 - a neurological condition, e.g. multiple sclerosis (MS), cerebral palsy
 - a learning disability
 - a problem with your spleen, e.g. sickle cell disease, or you have had your spleen removed
 - being seriously overweight (BMI of 40 and above)
- Frontline health and social care workers
- Carers of people who are eligible for the flu vaccine
- People who work in frontline care, e.g. care homes/domiciliary care
- Children and adults with weakened immune system
- Pregnant women
- Children aged 2- 11 years old

This year there will be a second phase of the flu vaccination program targeting people aged between 50 and 64 years. This will take place later in the flu season once those at higher risk have been vaccinated.

Who shouldn't have the flu vaccination?

Most adults can have the injected flu vaccine, but you should avoid it if you have had a serious allergic reaction to a flu vaccine in the past.

If in doubt, check with your doctor

Mythbusters - flu and the flu vaccine

Myth 1 **The 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 and have to go to hospital and may get pneumonia or organ failure.

Myth 2 **You can catch the flu from the flu vaccine**

The injected flu vaccine given to adults contains inactivated flu viruses that cannot transmit infection and so it cannot give you flu. 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. Other 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 go on to 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 65 and over and as we age, our natural immunity weakens increasing vulnerability to the Flu virus

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.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is the flu vaccine safe?

The flu vaccination is safe and cannot give you the flu. It does not protect you from Covid-19 but will reduce its impact if combined with a bout of flu. It protects against the strains of flu virus that are circulating this year. Being vaccinated reduces your chance of catching flu by up to 60%.

During the pandemic - Is it safe to attend health clinics?

The NHS is doing everything it can to make sure that vaccinations are given in safe environments. If you have Covid-19 symptoms, do not attend your vaccination appointment but instead self-isolate and book a coronavirus test at nhs.uk/coronavirus or by calling 119. You can rebook your flu vaccination appointment at a later date.

How will I know if I have the flu or Covid-19?

The flu virus and Covid-19 have symptoms which overlap, a high temperature or persistent cough. It is important that you have a flu vaccination and continue to follow guidance on self-isolation and testing at nhs.uk/coronavirus if you have any symptoms of Covid-19.

I am shielding, so do I need to get the free flu vaccination?

There is still a risk of infection that may arise by contact, e.g. carers or delivery personnel.

Where can I get the flu vaccination?

At a GP surgery or pharmacy or another location in your community.

Does the flu vaccine 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 flu.

Can I just walk into a pharmacy and ask for the free flu jab?

If eligible, you can walk in to pharmacies and get the vaccine.

Can I book online?

Eligible Londoners can book their flu vaccine online with their local pharmacist at londonflu.co.uk.

Protect yourself and those around you

Running a local flu vaccine information session

Below is a suggested format for running a local information session to promote the flu vaccine.

Introduction (5 minutes) - see toolkit

- What is flu? Flu is a serious health hazard especially for people with long-term conditions and can affect you and those around you.
- It is likely that both the flu and the Covid-19 viruses will be circulating. They both have very similar symptoms and they also spread in a similar way through respiratory droplets.
- London has the lowest flu vaccine uptake across the country - statistics on lowest uptake levels available on Age UK London website.

Icebreaker (10–15 minutes) - depending on numbers

- Who do you think is eligible to get a free flu vaccine? Refer to the toolkit and the expansion of the flu vaccine program.
- Have a virtual show of hands for who has already had the flu jab?
- Discuss apprehension of those that have been shielding.
- Discussion on above – build on positive stories from participants.

Background to flu and flu vaccine (15 minutes)

- What is the flu vaccine? Refer to sections in the toolkit.
- Benefits of the flu vaccine especially during Covid-19? Refer to sections in the toolkit.
- Mythbusters re flu and the flu vaccine – raise each myth and discuss.

Resources (5-10 minutes)

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

Next Steps (5-10 minutes)

- Ask participants how they can promote the free flu jab and ask if they want to become a volunteer 'flu fighter'.

Holding an online event

Before the event

- Have a simple programme or agenda so everyone knows what to expect.
- Give clear guidance on how to join the online meeting in your email.
- 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 flu/flu vaccine toolkit to devise a simple programme.
- Share web links to the flu 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 and attach 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?
 - Do they want to volunteer as a flu fighter?
 - Other actions they can take to promote flu vaccine

Getting people to come along

- Use Age UK London flu poster and flyers that can be emailed and/or put up in the community e.g. local community centres, community notice boards, 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.

Role of a volunteer 'flu fighter'

If you feel passionate about spreading the word and encouraging others to take up their free flu vaccine then Age UK London would be delighted if you became a volunteer flu fighter.

Only commit to what you are comfortable with.

- You could display an Age UK flu campaign poster where you live, or with your community. Think about the various community spaces in your area - community hubs e.g. community notice boards, places of worship, supermarket notice boards.
- Social media – refer to the social media assets that Age UK London have available in *our press pack* and share on various social media channels including Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and LinkedIn.
- If you are a member of a group or organisation that continues to have meetings (even though they maybe online), see if you can speak at the meeting.
- Set up a meeting yourself, what about an online session with your friends on Zoom?
- Discuss at a local event online or offline.
- Collect case studies or refer case studies to Age UK London as these always help to bring the story to life and convince people of the facts displayed in our toolkit.
- Write a blog
- In addition, do not forget the power of a trusted voice. Talk to your friends and family and encourage them to get their free flu jab if they are eligible this year.

Resources and contacts

- [Age UK London flu campaign](#) - toolkit and press pack
- NHS London 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, you can call 18001 111 on a text phone use the NHS 111 British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter service if you're deaf and want to use the phone service. You can ask for a translator if you need one.

For more information on Age UK London's flu vaccine campaign, contact kegan@ageuklondon.org.uk