

MEDIA RELEASE

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DON'T LET SEASONAL FLU CATCH YOU!

NHS North Somerset is urging anyone entitled to a free flu jab to ensure they book a vaccination appointment as soon as they hear from their GP. Practices across the patch are currently dispatching letters to all patients who fall into an 'at risk' category, inviting them in for vaccination. It is not a request anyone in the priority groups should ignore, warns NHS North Somerset Director of Public Health Becky Pollard.

She said: "Flu is a very unpleasant illness. Older people and anyone with certain long-term medical conditions who contract flu are more likely to develop a serious complication as a result of their illness, such as a chest infection. In the UK, about 600 people a year die from a complication of seasonal flu. This rises to around 13,000 during an epidemic. Everyone entitled to receive a flu jab this winter should take advantage of the protection it will give them."

It is recommended that you have a flu jab if you:

- are 65 years old or over
- are pregnant
- have a serious medical condition
- are living in a long-stay residential care home or other long-stay care facility (not including prisons, young offender institutions or university halls of residence)

- are the main carer for an elderly or disabled person whose welfare may be at risk if you fall ill
- are a frontline health or social care worker

Added Becky Pollard: “It is recommended that **all** pregnant women should have the seasonal flu vaccine, whatever stage of pregnancy they're in. This is because there is good evidence that pregnant women have an increased risk of developing complications if they get flu, particularly from the H1N1 strain. Studies have shown that the flu vaccine can be safely and effectively given during any trimester of pregnancy. In fact, studies have shown that mothers who have had the vaccine while pregnant pass some protection to their babies, which lasts for the first few months of their lives.

She added: “We want to ensure that by November, everyone who needs a vaccination has had an opportunity to receive it, The Government is taking steps to ensure that there will be no shortage of vaccine anywhere in the country and it is up to us, as local health advisers, to make sure that everyone - pregnant women, and people with an underling health condition in particular - are protected to what can be a serious, sometimes fatal illness.”

The ‘trivalent’ seasonal flu vaccines give around 70 to 80% protection against infection. The protection provided by the vaccine lasts for at least one flu season but the protection over the longer term is uncertain. Immunisation has been shown to reduce the incidence of bronchopneumonia, hospital admissions and deaths.

Said Becky Pollard: “While not everyone is entitled to a free flu jab, we can all do our bit to stop the infection spreading by following a few common sense rules
“You can protect yourself from contracting flu in the first place or spreading it to others by being careful with your hygiene.

- Always wash your hands regularly with soap and water and:
- regularly clean surfaces such as your keyboard, telephone and door handles to get rid of germs
- use tissues to cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze
- put used tissues in a bin as soon as possible

CATCH IT, BIN IT, KILL IT!

Flu fiction

There's more truth in the Loch Ness Monster than there is in some of the myths surrounding flu! These myths are highly infectious and it is essential to halt their spread! This handy guide tells you the fiction, confusions and illusions that YOU can help dispel.

Healthy people don't get seasonal flu. FALSE!

The reason that free flu jabs are offered to staff is because anyone can pick up the virus. Generally, 15-20 per cent of the population gets flu each year - healthy people included! If you can catch flu, you can pass it on to those who are at more risk of serious illness annually.

Flu is a mild illness so I don't need to be vaccinated. FALSE!

For the majority of people who catch it, flu is simply unpleasant. For some, however, it is much more serious. Globally, seasonal flu accounts for about three to five million cases of severe illness and between 250,000 and 500,000 deaths.

The side effects of the vaccination are really bad. FALSE!

For the most part, side effects of the seasonal flu vaccination are mild or often non-existent. They are usually a slight soreness around the site of the injection and occasionally some aching of muscles or a slightly raised temperature.

I've had the flu jab before so I don't need it again. FALSE!

People should be vaccinated against seasonal flu every year. We don't know how long last year's vaccination will last and for this reason we strongly recommend that even if you were vaccinated last year, you should be vaccinated again this year.

The flu jab isn't safe. FALSE!

The risk of having a serious (anaphylactic) reaction to the seasonal flu vaccine is less than one in a million. It is much less than the risk of getting seriously ill from having the flu itself. The only people who should not have the vaccine are those who have a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of seasonal flu vaccine or to any part of the vaccine. If you have a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to hens' eggs, you may still be able to be vaccinated, but under specialist clinical supervision or have an egg-free flu vaccine.

The flu jab can give you the flu. FALSE!

It is impossible to get flu from the having the flu jab. This is because the vaccine doesn't contain any live viruses.

A very small number of people experience side effects that are similar to those of the flu, such as aching muscles, but this is simply your immune system responding to what it thinks is an attack from flu.

It hasn't been properly tested. FALSE!

The seasonal flu vaccine is one of the safest vaccines in the world and is given to millions of people in the UK each year. The specific strains of flu that are included may change from one year to the next but that does not affect the safety of the vaccine or change it in any other way.

I've heard the vaccine doesn't work. FALSE!

Studies show that trivalent seasonal influenza vaccines give about 70 to 80 per cent protection to healthy adults against infection by influenza virus strains that

are well matched with those in the vaccine. This is thanks to the work of the World Health Organization and others who help ensure the closest possible match between the vaccine and circulating flu strains.

I can't have the jab because I'm pregnant. FALSE!

Pregnant women are advised to have the flu vaccination at any stage of their pregnancy. Importantly, having the vaccination when pregnant helps protect their baby from flu over the first few months of life.

I had a reaction to the swine flu jab so can't have the seasonal flu jab.

FALSE!

Almost everybody can have the vaccine, but you should not be vaccinated if you have had a serious allergy to the seasonal flu vaccine in the past. If you have a serious allergy to hens' eggs, you can still be vaccinated under specialist clinical supervision or have an egg-free flu vaccine.

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors

- NHS North Somerset is the local Primary Care Trust for North Somerset. The trust was established in April 2002 to ensure the provision of the highest quality healthcare services to the residents of North Somerset. It was recently assessed as one of the most improved PCTs in England by the Care Quality Commission.

Press Release issued by Karen Daniel at NHS North Somerset. For more information please contact Karen on 01275 546895.