

# Cumbria residents urged to take up the offer of the free flu vaccine

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Cumbria County Council, NHS North Cumbria Clinical Commissioning Group and Cumbria Partnership NHS Foundation Trust are working together to support this year's joint Stay Well This Winter campaign from Public Health England which launches today.

People in Cumbria who are the most vulnerable to flu are being urged to get their free flu vaccination, ahead of the winter period when the virus is most common and this year's vaccination programme is now available across Cumbria to all eligible people.

The Stay Well This Winter campaign will help the most vulnerable people in the county prepare for winter and avoid having to visit hospital due to common winter illnesses. It will target: These groups are at particular risk from flu and vaccination is the best protection we have against an unpredictable virus. That's why the flu vaccine is free because eligible groups really need it.

I strongly encourage everyone in vulnerable groups to get the flu vaccine as we head into winter. The vaccine is the best protection against this unpredictable virus, it can also help to reduce the impact on health services at a time of year they're needed most.

This winter, a new vaccine will be available for those aged 65 and over and for children the nasal spray vaccine will be offered to children aged 2-3 year olds and in years reception, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, meaning all children aged 2-9 can be vaccinated.

Flu vaccination will also be available from GP surgeries and local pharmacies offering the service and if you work in frontline health or social care speak to your employer about arrangements for you to get vaccinated. For pregnant women, the vaccine may also be available through maternity services. The flu vaccine is free for those most at risk, so if that's you make an appointment to receive the vaccine as soon as possible.

## **Underlying conditions**

Flu is a highly infectious disease and can lead to serious complications if you have an underlying health condition such as COPD, bronchitis, emphysema, diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, liver disease or a chronic neurological disease like multiple sclerosis or cerebral palsy. Flu on top of health conditions like these increases the chance of serious health complications and a hospital visit.

## **Adults aged 65 and over**

A free flu vaccination continues to be available to adults aged 65 years old and over, who are more vulnerable and may suffer more than most people if they catch flu. This year a more effective vaccine is being given to those aged 65 and over, which is proven to give better protection against flu for people of this age.

The newly available adjuvanted vaccine is expected to significantly boost effectiveness by improving the body's immune response to the vaccine. This is important because typically, older adults' bodies do not respond as well to the flu vaccine due to their naturally weaker immune systems. Older adults are also more likely to suffer complications from flu.

## **Children**

Flu can be nasty for little children. Children also tend to be super-spreaders of flu so if they get it, they are likely to infect more vulnerable older

family members. Children who get flu have the same symptoms as adults including fever, chills, aching muscles, headache, stuffy nose, dry cough and sore throat. Some children develop a very high fever or complications of flu, such as bronchitis or pneumonia and may need hospital treatment. The flu vaccine will help protect your child from flu and also reduce the chance of it spreading on to others. For most children, the flu vaccine is not usually an injection, just a quick and easy nasal spray. Children aged 2 and 3 receive the vaccine through their GP and children reception and school years 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 receive it in school. If you have a child who is of the eligible age, make sure you sign the consent form allowing them to have the flu vaccine at school.

### **Pregnant women**

Pregnancy naturally weakens the bodys immune system and as a result flu can cause serious complications for you and your baby. One of the most common complications of flu is bronchitis, a chest infection that can become serious and develop into pneumonia. If you have flu while you're pregnant, it could mean your baby is born prematurely or has a low birthweight, and may even lead to stillbirth or death. You may be less able to fight off infections, increasing the risk of becoming ill from flu. The flu jab is the safest way to help protect you and your baby against flu, no matter how many months pregnant you are or however fit and healthy you may feel.

### **Dr David Rogers, Medical Director at NHS North Cumbria Clinical Commissioning Group said:**

We are encouraging people who are eligible to take a moment to plan when they can have the jab. Even if you had your jab last year, you will need to have one again, because flu changes every year.

The flu jab is a simple procedure which could ultimately save lives. Dont wait until there is a flu outbreak this winter; get your vaccination as soon as possible, especially if you are in an at risk category.

Real flu can be debilitating and if you are already living with a condition, you are either very young or very old it can hit you harder.

All NHS staff are encouraged to get the vaccination which will also help to protect patients, colleagues and their families.

### **Professor John Howarth, Deputy Chief Executive at Cumbria Partnership NHS Foundation Trust and North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust adds:**

Flu is an unpleasant illness at best and fatal at worst. For those with long term conditions or in vulnerable groups, it is particularly important you do everything you can to protect yourself. Each year we also ask NHS staff to have the flu vaccination as an important part of protecting the vulnerable people we work with every day - even if you are fit and healthy, you can still be a carrier of the virus and in turn put the most vulnerable patients at risk.

"Last year we had record numbers of staff protected and again this year we are encouraging all of our staff to have their flu vaccination to offer as much protection as possible to our patients as well as staff members and their families."

To get your vaccine or find out if you are eligible, contact your GP, pharmacist or midwife for more information. Visit [nhs.uk/staywell](https://www.nhs.uk/staywell) for more details on how to help you and your family to stay well this winter.