

Flu

Influenza (flu) is a highly infectious disease and an unpredictable pressure that the NHS faces every winter. In England and Wales, it is estimated that 18,500-24,800 deaths are attributable to influenza infections annually. Flu has led to 19,000-31,200 hospital admissions per year resulting in huge financial strains for the NHS. Community pharmacies in England have been offering patients flu vaccinations, both NHS funded and privately, for a number of years. This year NHS England has commissioned a national community pharmacy flu vaccination Advanced Service, meaning all pharmacies can offer an NHS vaccine to eligible patients aged 18 or over. The national flu vaccination programme aims to protect those people deemed more at-risk from the virus (people aged over 65 years or those 'at risk' from serious complications due to clinical circumstances). Patients identified as eligible for the NHS flu vaccine are identified in the following link:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/418428/Annual_flu_letter_24_03_15_FINALv3_para9.pdf

This service will be the fifth Advanced Service in the English Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework (CPCF) and will commence in September 2015. As high street healthcare businesses, community pharmacies are intrinsically accessible, flexible and responsive to the needs of their customers. Community pharmacies located near train or bus stations are particularly convenient for working commuters and the travelling public. Those community pharmacies that are open 6 or 7 days a week are able to serve patients outside of the working hours of both the patients and the GPs surgeries and are therefore capable of extending vaccine provision. The belief is that working together, GPs, nurses and pharmacists are in a prime position to translate patient needs into vaccination services.

Benefits for patients

- Community pharmacy offers a more flexible and convenient option for getting vaccinated, with 'drop-in' clinics and extended opening hours compared with traditional clinics.
- Less burden on the GP practices to provide flu vaccinations, frees up nurse and time for other patient needs.

Benefits for the NHS and public health

- Relieves the pressure on GP practices providing vaccinations during flu season.
- Increased uptake reduces the number of people getting flu and the spread of the virus.
- Potential to reduce the number of GP consultations and hospital admissions.
- Trained pharmacists could provide additional resources to administer vaccinations in periods of increased demand e.g. during a pandemic.



Local example of Pharmacy Flu Service

In 2013-14 in Hertfordshire 1109 patients were administered an NHS flu vaccination in community pharmacy.

In 2014-15 in Hertfordshire 1689 patients were administered an NHS flu vaccination in community pharmacy.