

To:
Chief Pharmacists/Pharmaceutical
advisers of PCTs
Chief Executives of Strategic Health
Authorities
Chief Executives of NHS Trusts
Chief Executives of NHS Foundation
Trusts
PCT Directors of Public Health
Immunisation and Flu Co-ordinators
Medical Directors of NHS Trusts
Chairs of Primary Care Trusts
General Practitioners
Directors of Nursing
Lead Nurses at PCTs
Practice Nurses
For circulation to all Occupational
Health Departments and Directors of
Infection and Prevention Control

cc:
Regional Directors of Public Health
Chairs Infection Control Committees
Consultants in Communicable Disease
Control
Accident and Emergency Departments
All Pharmacists
Monitor - Independent Regulator of NHS
Foundation Trusts

19 November 2010

Gateway reference no: 15154

Dear Colleague,

Uptake of the seasonal influenza vaccine

I am writing to you to seek your further help in achieving high seasonal flu vaccination coverage in:

- people aged 65 years and over;
- people aged under 65 in the clinical risk groups¹; and
- frontline healthcare professionals.

We don't know how serious flu will be this winter. But we do know that improving seasonal flu vaccine uptake will ensure that more vulnerable people are protected.

Current data show that vaccine uptake levels are similar or slightly lower than last year (see annex 1). Improving vaccine uptake will benefit those individuals protected and will reduce demands on the NHS during the winter months.

It is important that Trusts work with their GPs and other providers in order to encourage more eligible people to come forward for vaccination. This could be through initiatives such as sending letters to individuals; advertising locally; or

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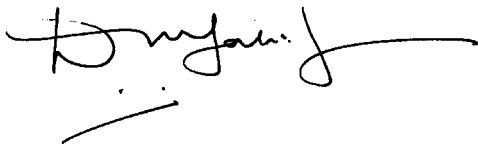
working with local media in order to communicate the importance of the vaccination. Communication needs to be clear and accessible to all risk groups. GPs and other health professionals are encouraged to seek opportunities to offer the vaccine opportunistically during visits and appointments as well as through organised vaccination clinics. Continuing this work through December and into January will help to ensure that more people are protected.

In order to reassure those patients who may ask about the composition or safety of the vaccine, some Q&As are attached at annex 2. These will help health professionals provide clear factual information. A patient information leaflet is also available on the Department of Health website².

Seasonal flu vaccine uptake in frontline healthcare workers remains disappointingly low. Protecting healthcare workers benefits the individual and reduces the risk of transmitting the virus to vulnerable patients. Trusts are asked to use the lessons learnt from the swine flu vaccination campaign to increase seasonal flu vaccination rates in healthcare professionals.

I remain grateful to you for your efforts to protect the health of the people of England this year as effectively as possible.

Yours faithfully,



Professor D M SALISBURY CB

FRCP FRCPCH FFPH

Director of Immunisation

Annex 1 contains data tables showing:

- Cumulative weekly uptake figures for patients aged 65 years or older and patients aged under 65 years in clinical risk groups, for 2010, 2009 and 2008.
- Weekly data on flu activity for 2010, 2009 and 2008.
- Seasonal flu vaccine uptake at national, SHA and PCT level among people aged 65 and over, and people aged under 65 in a risk group, at GP surgeries up to 31 October 2010 and similar figures for the same date last year.
- Seasonal flu vaccine uptake at national, SHA and PCT level among frontline healthcare workers up to 31 October 2010 and similar figures for the same date last year.

Annex 2 contains the Q&A.

² <http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Flu/Flugeneralinformation/index.htm>