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Guidance

Flu vaccines and supply for the national flu programme

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Flu is a serious virus, killing an average of 11,000 people every year in England with thousands more needing hospital treatment.

The UK has one of the most comprehensive flu vaccination programmes in the world. We offer the vaccination to those who are already vulnerable and at increased risk from the complications of flu, our health and social care workers, and we have a programme for all primary school-aged children, which for the first time includes children in school year 7.

This year, as announced by the government, 30 million people in England will be able to get the free flu vaccination – twice as many as were vaccinated last year. Getting the flu vaccine is more important than ever this year, as people at high risk from COVID-19 are also those most at risk from flu.

We have already seen huge early demand for the flu vaccination and a lot of people have already been vaccinated. However, some people have not been able to get vaccinated straight away as some GP practices and pharmacies have used their first deliveries of flu vaccine, due to the level of early demand.

Flu vaccine is delivered to GP practices, pharmacies and other services in batches in the run-up to and throughout the flu season. This means that GP practices, pharmacies and other providers will be getting more vaccines.

This is partly because the vaccine is produced in a phased way because it is a complex biological product. This is also partly to allow GPs and pharmacies to schedule clinics and appointments alongside their other usual services and to allow people to choose when to have their vaccination.

People shouldn't feel they have to rush out and get vaccinated in September or October, as the vaccination programme continues right up until and into the flu season, which doesn't normally start until December. There will however be enough flu vaccine for everyone who is eligible.

There is no problem with the production and delivery of stock which has been ordered: a third of the national total of the vaccine was ordered for September and has been delivered, with more still to come during October, November and December to vaccinate over 30 million people.

There are several types of flu vaccines available. You will be offered one that is recommended for you based on your age. This means some people will be offered a flu vaccine that is in stock while others, who need a different type of vaccine, may have to wait.

GP practices and pharmacies are doing their very best to ensure that social care and health care workers and people who are at the greatest risk from flu are vaccinated as early as possible, in line with their supply. Please therefore treat people working in GP practices and pharmacies with respect.

As well as offering the free flu vaccine to people who are at greatest risk, there is an ambition to offer the vaccination to all people aged 50 to 64 years old who aren't already in an at-risk group later in the year. People in this age group should therefore wait until later in the year when they are advised by their GP practices or pharmacy.