

Flu jabs ‘not just for over 65s’

There are fears that younger people and the working population across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight are leaving themselves exposed to the dangerous health risks of flu.

Despite the fact that people under 65 years old, with existing health conditions, are just as vulnerable, if not more so, than older people; only half of people the NHS considers ‘at risk’, protected themselves with a flu jab last year. 70% of the 602 people who died with flu in the UK last winter were young and middle aged people aged 15-64 years.

While the majority of over 65s (74%) had their jab, 248,973 local children, teenagers and adults under 65, with asthma, diabetes, cystic fibrosis, multiple sclerosis and other heart, lung and liver diseases, left themselves defenceless against the virus. Equally worrying is the fact that only 39% of pregnant women had the jab last year, leaving almost 17,000 local women and their unborn babies at risk; 9,800 people who act as carers (56%) also failed to protect themselves.

If you already have a health condition you’re up to 11 times more likely to die from flu than others without existing health conditions – for some people, like those with chronic degenerative neurological diseases, that risk rises to 40 times.

Alison Frater, Public Health Consultant at South Central Strategic Health Authority, said: “Most people don’t hesitate to protect themselves with injections for typhoid and yellow fever before they go on an exotic holiday; however they don’t protect themselves from the flu virus, which people don’t seem to realise is also life-threatening.

“You might not consider yourself as ‘at risk’, but anyone, of any age, who already has a health condition, such as asthma, is more likely to suffer serious

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complications, usually caused by the virus affecting the lungs, resulting in infections such as pneumonia, which can be fatal.”

“Most people don’t realise how horrific the symptoms of flu can be, one minute you’re fine, the next you’ve been knocked for six and are too ill to do anything. Flu is very different from the common cold. Symptoms include fever, headache, cough, sore throat and muscle aches. They appear quickly and generally leave you exhausted for weeks afterwards.”

“A five minute appointment at your GP surgery could save your life. The jab is free to people with existing health conditions; it is safe and the best way to protect yourself and your family this winter. It takes five to ten days for the vaccine to take effect, so it’s best to get vaccinated as soon as possible. This year’s vaccine protects against both seasonal flu and swine flu.”

‘At risk’ groups include people with:

- Chest complaints or breathing difficulties including, bronchitis, asthma and emphysema (COPD).
- Heart problems
- Lowered immunity due to disease or treatment (such as steroid medication or cancer treatment)
- Liver or kidney disease
- History of stroke or a transient ischaemic attack
- Diabetes
- Neurological conditions e.g. multiple sclerosis (MS) or cerebral palsy
- A problem with, or removal of, their spleen e.g. sickle cell disease
- Anyone aged 65 years and over
- Pregnant women
- Carers.

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If you have any of the above conditions contact your local GP surgery to book an appointment.

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Notes to Editors

1. To arrange an interview please contact Sarah Eastman, Communications Officer, South Central Strategic Health Authority on 01635 275613.

NHS South of England comprises South Central, South West and South East Coast Strategic Health Authorities.

2. Local figures for vaccine uptake by individual Primary Care Trusts are available on the Department of Health website
www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_127111.pdf