

# Learning Disability and Autism Regional Flu Communications Tool Kit 2021 / 22

September 2021

## Introduction

A big thank you to all our regional colleagues such as GPs Primary Care Networks, Children and Young People Community Immunisation Teams, Integrated Care Systems / CCGs and PHE colleagues for working together creatively to deliver the 20/21 flu vaccination programme during one of the most challenging times in the history of the NHS.

The Learning Disability and Autism Programme at NHS England and NHS Improvement want to support you to continue increasing engagement among people with a learning disability and autistic people and improve access and uptake of any routine immunisations individuals might be eligible for, including flu and COVID-19 vaccinations. It is vitally important therefore that consideration and checks are made to identify any outstanding vaccinations that exist when people attend primary care. As we move into the autumn focus on flu and potentially COVID-19-boosters will be our key concern, but in the meantime we should also be checking opportunistically if individuals are eligible for other types of vaccination which may be outstanding, such as PPV or shingles etc, or if the person is a child if they are up to date with all their childhood immunisations. For people with a learning disability and autistic people in an at risk group, the risk of serious morbidity or mortality may be greater than for other groups in the general population, so it is important that we do everything we can to prevent and reduce these risks by ensuring people are up to date with their vaccinations.

## When

Messaging will run throughout winter as part of the national Public Health England Flu Campaign and the National NHS Winter Pressures Campaign. Support this by scheduling relevant messaging targeting this at-risk, often overlooked, group throughout winter.

## Why

Utilise this toolkit to help address very real health inequalities and the shorter life expectancies of people with learning disabilities. Individuals with a learning disability have poorer physical and mental health compared to others, with only 37% dying aged 65 and over compared to the general population at 85%. Respiratory conditions remain the most significant causes of premature mortality for people with a learning disability where deaths have been reviewed as part of the [LeDeR programme](#).

Children and adults with learning disabilities are [clearly identified as a clinically 'at risk' group](#), eligible for a free flu vaccine as part of the national flu vaccine programme. Carers (family member or support worker) are also eligible to help protect the people they look after.

This toolkit will help health and social care organisations meet their legal obligation to put reasonable adjustments in place to ensure equal access to healthcare services for people with disabilities. This means that services should be making changes that help people with learning disabilities have a flu vaccination. These might be changes at a service level e.g. sending out an easy-read leaflet about why it is important to have a flu vaccination. It might be changes at an individual level e.g. offering a longer visit to someone who needs more time.

All organisations that provide NHS or adult social care have a legal responsibility to follow the [Accessible Information Standard](#). The standard aims to make sure that people who have a disability, impairment or sensory loss are provided with information that they can easily read or understand with support so they can communicate effectively with health and social care services.

## Key messages:

### For Health and Social Care organisations to use with people with learning disabilities:

- It is safe to have your flu vaccine this year.
- Get the flu vaccine as soon you can to stay well this winter.
- Talk to your doctor, nurse or a pharmacist about getting your free flu vaccine.
- The flu vaccine is quick and can protect you from getting very ill.
- The flu vaccine does not always stop you getting the flu. But if you get the flu your symptoms will be milder.
- The flu vaccine is free because you need it. If you do not get the vaccine you could get very ill and have to go to hospital.
- Do not let anything stop you from getting your flu vaccine. The doctor, nurse or pharmacist will look after you.
- You can take a family member or friend along with you to get your flu vaccine.
- If you think you have flu, stay home and rest until you feel better. Call NHS 111 if you have other health conditions or feel very unwell.
- While at the doctors getting your flu vaccine, ask about having your annual health check. Annual health checks are free and can help you stay fit and healthy.

## **For Health and Social Care organisations to use with carers of people with learning disabilities:**

- Family carers can get a free flu vaccination as well as health and social care workers.
- People with learning disabilities are less likely to get the flu if the people around them have also been vaccinated.
- The flu vaccination cannot give you flu. The vaccine offers protection against the flu. If you do get it still, then the symptoms will be milder.
- The flu vaccine will give you, and the person you care for, the very best chance of not falling very ill with the flu this winter.
- It is safe for you and the person you care for to go and get your flu vaccine this year.
- Care for someone with a learning disability? Get the flu vaccine so you do not get ill or pass the virus on.
- Carers can have a free flu vaccine. Protect the person you care for and organise your flu vaccine today.
- Ask the doctor about the person you care for receiving their annual health check. Annual health checks are free and help keep them well.

## **What GP surgeries can do**

- 1: GP surgeries should give a clear message that people with learning disabilities and their carers (family member and support workers) are entitled to a free flu vaccination.
- 2: People on the learning disability register should have it recorded in their notes that they “need a flu vaccine” – there is a specific Read / Snowmed code for this.
- 3: Practices can use this easy read flu invitation letter template for people with learning disabilities.
- 4: Talk to people at their annual health check about why it is important that they have the flu vaccination.
- 5: Put reasonable adjustments in place to help people with learning disabilities have their flu vaccination. This could be extra time, photo cards or an accompanying friend.
- 6: The person seeing the patient may need to assess the patient’s capacity to decide to have the flu vaccine. If they do not have capacity for this decision, then this should

not be a barrier to the flu vaccination being given; there would need to be a decision taken by the health professional that this is in their best interests.

7: Consider the nasal spray flu vaccine as a reasonable adjustment. PHE guidance outlines the nasal spray can be used for people with a severe needle phobia. The nasal vaccine is not as effective as the injection, but some protection is better than none.

8: Capitalise on attendance and offer the pneumococcal vaccine within the same appointment.

9: Learning disabilities will be shown as a separate category on ImmForm this year. You will be able to see the uptake for this cohort

## Updated 2020 / 21 resources

As part of the 20/21 seasonal flu communications strategy a wide range of resources and films were developed to help raise awareness of people with a learning disability and autistic people in an at-risk group of the importance in getting a flu vaccination and to support general practice in the delivery. Updated versions of these resources can be found here:

- **Accessible information:** The NHS England and NHS Improvement learning disability and autism programme have worked with self-advocacy group, Ace Anglia, GP and pharmacy colleagues to produce [a range of accessible resources](#) that will support improved engagement with people with a learning disability and autistic people in the flu vaccination programme:
  - Patient facing information in easy read: Going to My Flu Vaccination
  - A one-page guide for GP surgeries for contacting patients to invite them to their flu vaccine
  - An easy read editable Invite to Your Flu vaccination letter. This resource is an easy read invitation to a flu jab, it can be edited by GP surgeries.
- **Public Health England** have a [suite of easy read materials](#) for use that have been updated this year for people with a learning disability including how to protect themselves from flu and receiving a flu vaccination during a pandemic.
- **Flu vaccination films for [people with a learning disability and autistic people and their family carers](#).** Two short films about the importance of the flu vaccination for people with a learning disability and autistic people with certain health conditions. The film covers why it is important, who is eligible for a free vaccine, where you can get the vaccine and reasonable adjustments. Also available for use is the Misfits Theatre Group – [Guide to flu vaccinations video titled: Don't let anything stop you](#).
- **PHE publications**  
[Flu vaccination: who should have it this winter and why?](#)

[Flu vaccination: easy read flu vaccination resources](#)  
[Flu vaccination for adults and children: simple text version](#)

## Targeting underrepresented groups 2021 / 22

Colleagues at PHE have recently published a range of resources to support colleagues to increase uptake in underrepresented groups as follows and have others in development:

- **Resources targeting CYP and their parent carers:**  
Flu vaccination leaflets and posters targeting school aged children and their parent carers, includes information for at risk children. Large print, braille, BSL and 25 translations of these leaflets and posters have been commissioned:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flu-vaccination-leaflets-and-posters>
- **Supporting social media activity targeting parents of school age children:**  
We are also developing a film for social media, targeting parents of school aged children with a learning disability and autistic children in an at-risk group and will share as soon as it is available.
- **Resources targeting BAME communities:**  
2020/21 easy read flu leaflet has been updated and is being translated into 25 languages. Audio translations of the leaflet have also been commissioned. We will share the link as soon as it is available.

## Importance of Reasonable Adjustments

It is important that we consider any barriers that may prevent the access and uptake of immunisations amongst disabled people, including people with a learning disability and autistic people and make any reasonable adjustments to delivery of our services to help facilitate this. Reasonable adjustments are a legal requirement, as set out in the Equalities Act 2010 and an important consideration for improving quality of care and making sure that our NHS health services are accessible to all disabled people. We have produced a range of resources to support our primary care and immunisation colleagues in addressing reasonable adjustments and increasing uptake in the delivery of the flu vaccination programme amongst people with a learning disability and autistic people in an at-risk group:

- **Reasonable adjustments resources for clinicians:** The importance and range of reasonable adjustments that can be made so people with a learning disability or other disabilities have good access to healthcare is explained in a [new film](#). Resources and tools to support this legal requirement can be found on the [website](#).

