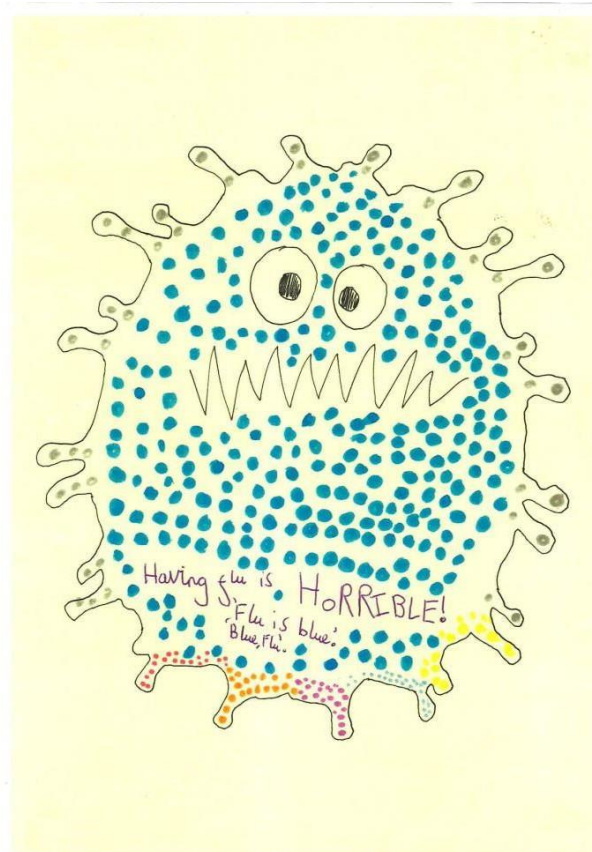


Free flu vaccination for people with diabetes, chronic heart disease or chronic respiratory disease



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1 Introduction

1.1 The seasonal flu vaccination programme for people with diabetes, chronic heart disease or chronic respiratory disease

Flu vaccination is available every year, free on the NHS, to help protect people at risk of flu and its complications. The best time to have the flu vaccine is in the autumn, from the beginning of October to the end of November before the flu season starts (December to March).

If you have an underlying health condition like diabetes, chronic heart disease, asthma, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, flu on top of health conditions like these can easily develop into something very serious and mean you have to go in to hospital. Having the flu vaccination each year means you're more likely to avoid getting the flu over the winter months. Even if you do get flu, it's likely to be milder and shorter-lived than it would otherwise have been. Don't put off getting the flu vaccination every year. It's free because you need it.

The following table gives more information about people with chronic respiratory disease, chronic heart disease or diabetes who are eligible for their free flu vaccination:

Clinical risk	Examples (this list is not exhaustive and decisions should be based on clinical judgement)
Chronic respiratory disease	Asthma that requires continuous or repeated use of inhaled or systemic steroids or with previous exacerbations requiring hospital admission. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) including chronic bronchitis and emphysema; bronchiectasis, cystic fibrosis, interstitial lung fibrosis, pneumoconiosis and bronchopulmonary dysplasia (BPD). Children who have previously been admitted to hospital for lower respiratory tract disease.
Chronic heart disease	Congenital heart disease, hypertension with cardiac complications, chronic heart failure, individuals requiring regular medication and/or follow-up for ischaemic heart disease.
Diabetes	Type 1 diabetes, type 2 diabetes requiring insulin or oral hypoglycaemic drugs, diet controlled diabetes.

1.2 Purpose of this toolkit and who it is for

This purpose of this toolkit is to bring together information and resources to encourage people under the age of 65 with diabetes, chronic respiratory disease or chronic heart disease to have the flu vaccination. This toolkit is for use by self-help groups for people who have any of these conditions, by staff who work with them, or by organisations that can promote messages to the general public.

Chapter 2 gives some facts about flu vaccination. This section may be helpful to you in conversations you have about flu and the flu vaccination. In *Chapter 3* of this pack you will find a variety of example communications resources such as tweets, Facebook messages, newsletter and website materials that you can adapt and use. *Chapter 4* gives website addresses of national organisations for people with long term health conditions for further information.

This pack can be used by a wide variety of people and organisations including:

- Local support groups for people with diabetes, chronic heart disease, or chronic respiratory disease
- Voluntary sector
- GP Practice staff including GPs, practice nurses, district nurses, health care workers, receptionists
- Acute Trust staff
- Clinical Commissioning Groups
- Sustainability & Transformation Partnerships (STPs)
- Local authorities
- Frontline health and social care staff including occupational therapists, health visitors, care workers, social care workers
- Pharmacies
- Therapy centres
- Media
- Parish Councils and faith groups
- Local Councillors
- Healthwatch
- Community venues including libraries, leisure centres, community centres

2 Facts

2.1 Flu Fact Sheet

This flu fact sheet provides general information about flu vaccination for people with diabetes, chronic heart disease, or chronic respiratory disease. If there are questions that need the input of a health care professional, please contact a pharmacist or your GP.

Flu Fact Sheet

1. How serious is flu?

The flu can be a serious illness, especially if you have a long-term condition. Flu symptoms come on suddenly and sometimes severely. They include fever, chills, headaches and aching muscles, as well as coughs and a sore throat. You're likely to spend two or three days in bed. A bad bout of flu is much worse than a heavy cold.

For the majority of people who catch it, flu is unpleasant but not life-threatening.

However, for some people, it can lead to chest infections, severe complications and even death. Flu spreads very easily.

2. If I get flu will it have any effect on my asthma/COPD/diabetes/heart condition?

Yes – the flu can have a significant effect on long-term conditions, making a serious illness more likely.

If you are living with a lung condition it can worsen your asthma symptoms or trigger a flare up in your COPD.

If you have diabetes, flu can make your blood sugar go all over the place. If your blood sugar isn't within target, the effects of flu can be dragged out and increase your risk of developing serious complications.

If you have a heart condition, flu can put added stress on your body, which can affect your blood pressure, heart rate, and overall heart function.

3. How does the flu spread? Does the vaccine help to stop it spreading?

Flu is very infectious and easily spread to other people. It is spread by germs from coughs and sneezes, which can live on hands and surfaces such as tables or door handles for 24 hours. Some people who catch the flu have no significant symptoms at all but can still pass the virus on.

Vaccination isn't just about keeping yourself safe, it's also about protecting your family, your friends, neighbours, and people you work or volunteer with. You can carry and pass the virus on to others

without having any symptoms yourself so, even if you consider yourself healthy, you may be risking the lives of others.

4. What's the worst that could happen if I did catch flu?

People with asthma are more likely to have an asthma attack if they catch flu. People with COPD are more likely to develop pneumonia if they catch flu. Both of these complications can lead to hospitalisation and in the worst case, even death.

Catching flu when you have diabetes means you are more likely to develop other complications such as pneumonia, which may lead to hospitalisation. Having flu can also lead to higher blood sugar levels and increase the risk of serious short term complications such as diabetic ketoacidosis (DKA). It may mean urgent admission to hospital and taking a long time to recover from the effects of the treatment and the virus.

If you have a long term heart condition getting flu can make your heart problems much worse and can lead to problems with other organs in your body. Having a heart condition can limit the types of drugs you can have to help treat the flu virus and any complications. If you take warfarin, flu symptoms can affect your blood clotting rate (INR). It may mean spending time in hospital and taking a long time to recover from the effects of the treatment and the virus. There is evidence that heart attacks happen more often during or immediately after an acute inflammatory illness, such as flu.

The best way to protect yourself against flu is to have the flu jab.

5. If I did catch the flu, can it be treated?

Flu can't be treated with antibiotics. Antibiotics only work against bacteria, and flu is caused by viruses. A bacterial infection may occur as a result of having flu, in which case you may be given antibiotics.

You may be prescribed antiviral medicine to treat your flu. Antivirals do not cure flu, but they can make you less infectious to others and reduce the length of time you may be ill. To be effective, antivirals have to be given within a day or two of your symptoms appearing.

However, the best way to protect yourself against a possibly serious illness and needing treatment is to have the flu jab.

6. Who is eligible for the flu vaccine?

If you have chronic asthma, chronic respiratory disease, or diabetes, you will be eligible for the flu vaccine for FREE. It's free because you need it.

If you have someone who looks after you and you couldn't manage without that person's help if they got ill, then let them know that they are also eligible for a free flu vaccination every year.

7. Do I need the flu jab - I'm feeling really well/managing my condition well?

Yes. Even if you feel well while you are managing a long-term condition like asthma, COPD, heart disease or diabetes you can still catch flu and it can still have serious complications for you at any age.

8. When should I have the flu vaccine?

The best time to have a flu vaccine is in the autumn, from early October, but don't worry if you've missed it, you can have the vaccine later in winter.

It may take 10-14 days for your immunity to build up fully after you have had a flu vaccination.

9. Where can I get vaccinated?

You can have your free flu jab at your GP surgery or most pharmacies from October each year. Ask your GP when they are running clinics, or your local pharmacy if they are offering this service.

10. Why should I get vaccinated? I had the flu vaccination last year, do I need it again?

Flu is unpredictable and over time, protection from the injected flu vaccine gradually decreases and flu strains often change. So new flu vaccines are produced each year which is why people advised to have the flu jab need it every year too.

Flu vaccination is the best protection we have against an unpredictable virus that can cause unpleasant illness in children and severe illness and death among at-risk groups, including older people, pregnant women and those with an underlying medical health condition.

11. I've never caught flu before, could I still get it now?

Yes. Flu strains change every year so it's important to get vaccinated every year.

12. I've had the flu vaccination before and I still got the flu -why did that happen?

It's likely you caught something before the vaccine had a chance to work. It takes between 10 and 14 days for your immune system to respond to the vaccine fully. Book your jab as soon as possible to avoid flu this season. Having the flu jab will not only reduce your risk of catching the flu, but if you do catch it, it's likely to be much milder.

As flu is caused by several viruses that can change each year, you will only be protected by the immunity you developed naturally against one of them. You could go on to catch another strain, so it's recommended you have the jab even if you've recently had flu, and that you have the vaccine every year so that it matches the new virus strain.

13. Is the vaccine safe?

The vaccine is one of the safest in the world; the risk of having a serious (anaphylactic) reaction to the flu vaccine is less than one in a million, much lower than the risk of getting seriously ill from actually catching flu. Seasonal flu vaccine is given to millions of people in the UK each year. The specific strains of flu that are included may change from one year to the next, but vaccines are still thoroughly tested and are safe. It's impossible to get flu from having the flu vaccine because the flu injection doesn't contain live viruses.

14. Are there any side effects from having the flu jab?

A very small number of people experience mild side effects. After the flu jab you may get a mild fever and slight muscle aches for a day or so. These are short-term, temporary and much less severe than symptoms of flu. Contact a pharmacist or your GP if you experience severe side effects that are not improving over time.

If you have had a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a flu vaccine before, please talk to a clinician before getting vaccinated. If you have a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to hens' eggs, you should ask about vaccines with a very low egg content and be vaccinated under clinical supervision.

15. If I'm pregnant, can I have the flu vaccine?

Pregnant women can have the flu vaccination at any stage of their pregnancy. There is good evidence that pregnant women have a higher chance of developing complications if they get flu, particularly in the later stages of pregnancy. Women who have had the flu vaccine while pregnant also pass some protection on to their babies, which lasts for the first few months of their lives.

3 Communication templates and resources

3.1 Social media messages

Social media platforms can be used to promote the flu vaccination, as a key way to engage with a large audience. Below are a number of example tweets and Facebook posts that can be used on social media profiles. It's recommended that a number of tweets are put out regularly between October and January.

3.1.1 Tweets and Facebook posts for people with chronic asthma

Asthma specific messages
If you have asthma and get a free #FluJab you're more likely to avoid flu over the winter months. Even if you do get flu, it's likely to be milder and shorter-lived than it would otherwise have been
If you have asthma and get a free #FluJab, you'll be protecting yourself against the flu and will also prevent those around you from catching the flu from you. Ask your GP or pharmacist today http://ow.ly/43YG50jtWlt
Chronic respiratory diseases make people more susceptible to the flu virus damaging their lungs. They are seven times more likely to die from flu than individuals without an underlying health condition. Get a free #FluJab. It's free because you need it
Flu can make asthma symptoms worse and increase the risk of a potentially life-threatening asthma attack. See your GP or Pharmacist about your #FluJab
Eight out of ten people with asthma say flu triggers their asthma symptoms, raising the risk of a life-threatening asthma attack. Don't take a risk, see your GP or pharmacist about a #FluJab
Facebook: Many people with asthma and other respiratory conditions are used to managing their health well, but don't realise that flu can hit you fast. If you have asthma or another chronic respiratory condition it's important that you get vaccinated from flu, so that you are protected this winter
Facebook: If you have asthma, having a free #FluJab will help you stay well and reduce your chances of becoming ill. While all vaccines have the potential to cause side effects in some people, the reality is that most tend to be mild and don't last longer than a few days. Some people don't get any side effects at all. Any side effects are much less severe than the symptoms of flu

3.1.2 Tweets and Facebook posts for people with chronic heart disease

If you're living with a heart condition, getting a free #FluJab will help you #HelpUsHelpYou http://ow.ly/1BOR50jtWmS
If you have a heart condition and get a free #FluJab you're more likely to avoid flu over the

winter months. Even if you do get flu, it's likely to be milder and shorter-lived than it would otherwise have been

If you have a heart condition, having flu can increase your risk of having a heart attack. Don't risk it; see your GP about your free #FluJab

People under the age of 65 with chronic heart disease are approximately 11 times more likely to die if they catch flu than individuals who have no other underlying health condition. Get a free #FluJab. It's free because you need it

If you suffer from chronic heart disease, it's important you get your #FluJab. Speak to your pharmacist or GP for more information. It's free because you need it

Facebook: If you have a heart condition, having a free #FluJab will help you stay well and reduce your chances of becoming ill. While all vaccines have the potential to cause side-effects in some people, the reality is that most tend to be mild and don't last longer than a few days. Some people don't get any side effects at all. Any side effects are much less severe than the symptoms of flu

3.1.3 Tweets and Facebook posts for people with diabetes

In people with diabetes, #flu can affect blood sugar levels, potentially causing hyperglycaemia (high blood sugar). <http://ow.ly/kuj550jtWnj> Get a free #FluJab. It's free because you need it

Anyone with diabetes, including those who are pregnant, should get a jab against flu. This is because people with diabetes are more at risk of getting the flu and having diabetes will make it worse

Flu is serious, and can make your blood sugar levels fluctuate. If your blood sugar isn't within target, the effects of flu can be dragged out and increase your risk of developing serious complications. Getting a flu jab will help you avoid this

If you have diabetes and get a free #FluJab you're more likely to avoid flu over the winter months. And if you do get flu despite having the jab, it's likely to be milder and shorter-lived than it would otherwise have been

Facebook: If you have diabetes, there are lots of great reasons for getting your free #FluJab:

- You'll be protecting yourself from symptoms and complications of the flu, which can be severe
- You'll reduce the risk of short term diabetes complications which are more likely to occur if you have the flu
- You'll prevent those around you from catching the flu from you

Facebook: If you have diabetes, having a free #FluJab will help you stay well and reduce your chances of becoming ill. While all vaccines have the potential to cause side effects in some people, the reality is that most tend to be mild and don't last longer than a few days. Some people don't get any side effects at all. Any side effects are much less severe than the symptoms of flu

3.1.4 Tweets and Facebook posts for carers looking after people with diabetes, chronic asthma, or chronic heart disease

Does someone with asthma, diabetes or a heart condition rely on you to look after them?
Make sure you stay well this winter and see your GP or pharmacist about a free #FluJab

Looking after someone with asthma, diabetes or a heart condition who can't get by without your help? Ask your GP or pharmacist about a free #flu jab for you and the person you look after. Cut the risk of being too ill to care. #HelpUsHelpYou

3.1.5 Tweets and Facebook posts for people with long term conditions more generally

If you have a long-term health condition, make sure you get your free #FluJab and #HelpUsHelpYou <http://ow.ly/43YG50jtWlt>

People with a long-term health condition are urged to get their free #FluJab
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/flu-influenza-vaccine/>

The flu jab is free for anyone aged 65 or over and those with a long-term health condition.
#HelpUsHelpYou <http://ow.ly/1BOR50jtWmS>

Flu can be very serious for people with a long-term health condition. Get your free #FluJab now <http://ow.ly/1BOR50jtWmS>

Facebook: If you have a chronic condition such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease, getting your #FluJab can stop preventable diseases like flu and pneumonia which can lead to serious complications, hospitalisation or even death. Protect yourself – get vaccinated

Facebook: If you have an underlying health condition like COPD, bronchitis, emphysema, diabetes, heart, kidney or liver disease or have suffered a stroke, flu on top of health conditions like these can easily develop into something very serious and mean you have to go into hospital. Don't put off getting the flu vaccination. It's free because you need it.
Contact your GP or pharmacist to get the free flu jab now

Do you have diabetes or asthma? If so, you're eligible for a free #FluJab. Protect yourself & #HelpUsHelpYou <http://ow.ly/43YG50jtWlt>

If you have a weak immune system, catching flu can have serious consequences – get your free #FluJab. It's free because you need it. <http://ow.ly/1BOR50jtWmS>

3.2 Press release templates

Press releases can be used to promote the flu vaccination through local media; newspapers and radio etc. Below are two template press releases that you can adapt.

Template 1:

A good time to think about staying well this winter

People diagnosed with diabetes are being urged to have the flu vaccine to reduce their risk of developing serious complications arising from flu infections. Complications can include pneumonia, inflammation of the heart, and multi-organ failure (e.g respiratory and kidney). A patient's raised blood glucose level, which occurs as a natural response to fighting infection, can, if left untreated also become a serious risk to diabetic patients, with potentially fatal consequences.

Clinicians' advise that even patients whose diabetes is well managed and under control should still have the flu vaccine.

XXXXX said, "It really is important that patients with diabetes make sure they have the flu vaccine. Having the vaccine is the best way of protecting yourself from contracting the flu virus. This can reduce the risk of more serious complications that might come from infection caused by the flu virus. It's just not worth the risk of exposing yourself to potentially higher risks of more serious illness."

Diabetic patients can have the vaccine free of charge from their GP surgery or local pharmacy. Patients should have the vaccine as soon as possible, giving themselves the best chance of immunity before the flu virus begins actively circulating in the community.

A good time to think about staying well this winter

People with heart disease need flu vaccination

People in Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon or Wiltshire who have heart problems should have the free flu vaccine this winter to reduce their risk of becoming more seriously ill from flu.

Dr xxxxxx, Clinical Chair of NHS xxxxx Clinical Commissioning Group and a GP in xxxxx said: “I see lots of patients at my surgery with complex health conditions such as heart disease for whom flu can be severe and lead to serious health complications. It is really important that everyone who is offered a free NHS flu vaccination has one, to protect themselves and those around them who may be even more vulnerable. This needs to be done as soon as possible so that they can enjoy a happy, healthy Christmas and New Year.”

Flu is highly infectious and caused by viruses that spread from person to person. The viruses are constantly changing and this is one of the main reasons why people should be vaccinated every year. The symptoms, which can come on very quickly, included fever, chills, headaches, aches and pains in the joints and muscles and extreme tiredness.

Many people think having the flu is like having a bad cold, but in reality, flu is a nasty respiratory virus that can make people feel very unwell, and for anyone with chronic heart disease, it makes fighting off infections much harder and can lead to problems with other organs in the body. Some of these complications can be life-threatening.

Other groups at risk of complications from the flu and urged to get the vaccine include the over 65s, pregnant women, children, health and social care workers, and people with other long-term conditions. People who look after elderly or disabled people who couldn't manage without their help if they became ill are also eligible.

Contact your GP or pharmacist to get the free flu jab now.

3.3 Newsletter and website content

If your group or organisation produces a newsletter or has a website, here is some information you can use or adapt to promote the uptake of flu vaccination to people with different long term conditions, or for people who help care for them.

Free flu jabs for people with chronic asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

If you've ever had flu, you'll know it can put you in bed for days. And it's not just a horrible illness. Even if your respiratory condition is only mild, flu can trigger symptoms that could leave you fighting for breath.

Having a chronic respiratory disease means that if you get flu, extra strain is put on your lungs. A survey carried by Asthma UK in 2017 of more than 7,500 people with asthma found that that 81 percent of people with asthma - an estimated 4.3 million people in the UK - say cold and flu viruses makes their asthma symptoms worse, increasing their risk of having a life-threatening asthma attack. Flu can make COPD symptoms worse and increase your risk of pneumonia. People with chronic respiratory diseases are seven times more likely to die from it flu than those without an underlying health condition, and this is why the flu vaccination is offered free to you. It's free because you need it.

One in two people with chronic respiratory diseases across B&NES, Swindon and Wiltshire had their free flu jab last year. Having the flu jab each year means you'll be more likely to avoid getting the flu over the winter months. Even if you do get flu, it's likely to be milder and shorter-lived than it would otherwise have been. So get vaccinated early in the season for maximum protection - the vaccine takes 10 to 14 days to work, so get it in October or November to help make sure you're protected during 'peak flu' season in December and January.

Contact your GP or pharmacist to get the free flu jab now. It's free because you need it. For more information go to: [Flu vaccinations | Asthma + Lung UK \(asthmaandlung.org.uk\)](#) or <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/chronic-obstructive-pulmonary-disease-copd/living-with/>

Free flu jabs for people with diabetes

Many people think having flu is like having a bad cold, but in reality flu is a nasty respiratory virus which can put you in bed for days. If you have diabetes, getting flu can make it much harder for you to manage your blood sugar levels. This in turn can increase your risk of developing serious complications, like pneumonia, stroke and kidney disease. Some of these complications can be life threatening.

Over 64% of people with diabetes across Swindon, Wiltshire and B&NES had their flu jab last year. Having the free flu jab means you'll be more likely to avoid getting the flu over the winter months. And if you do get flu despite having the jab, it's likely to be milder and shorter-lived than it would otherwise have been.

The flu jab is one of 15 healthcare essentials that every person with diabetes is entitled to through the NHS every year. These include having your blood pressure measured, having your eyes screened for signs of retinopathy (disease) and having your feet and legs checked. For more information go to: <https://www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/managing-your-diabetes/flu-jab>

Contact your GP or pharmacist to get the free flu jab now. It's free because you need it.

Free flu jabs for people with chronic heart disease

If you've ever had flu, you'll know it can make you feel weak and unwell and put you in bed for days. If you have a chronic or long-term heart condition you have a greater risk of becoming more seriously ill from flu than the general population and it is recommended that you have the flu vaccination. Then, even if you do get flu, it's likely to be milder and shorter-lived than it would otherwise have been.

So get vaccinated early in the season for maximum protection - the vaccine takes 10 to 14 days to work, so get it in October or November to help make sure you're protected during 'peak flu' season in December and January. It is important to have the vaccination every year because the virus can change, and the previous year's vaccine may not offer you the right protection against the virus in circulation this year.

If somebody voluntarily cares for you they can also have a FREE flu vaccination so they don't become ill and have to stop looking after you.

Contact your GP or pharmacist to get the free flu jab now. It's free because you need it.

For more information go to: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/who-should-have-flu-vaccine>

This article is focused on encouraging carers who look after people with long term health conditions to have the flu vaccination.

If you're a carer, you need the flu jab

As a carer for someone else, it can be easy to overlook your own health. Flu can knock even the healthiest people off their feet for a couple of weeks, making it impossible for you to look after the person you care for. This is why the NHS offers a free flu vaccination for you if you are in receipt of a carer's allowance or look after someone who is elderly, disabled, or somebody who lives with a serious long term condition who couldn't manage without your help.

It's not just about protecting you as a carer from getting flu, but also preventing you from passing the virus onto the vulnerable person you care for. Flu is a highly infectious disease which is easily spread from one person to another.

For those who already have a long term health condition, catching flu can be even more dangerous as their body will struggle more to fight off the illness and they are more at risk of complications such as bronchitis or pneumonia. Getting flu when you already have a long-term condition can lead to serious complications, and it can even be a killer.

It's impossible to get flu from having the flu vaccine because there is no live influenza virus in the flu injection.

So get vaccinated early in the season for maximum protection - the vaccine takes 10 to 14 days to work, so get it in October or November to help make sure you're protected during 'peak flu' season in December and January. It is important to have the vaccination every year because the virus can change, and the previous year's vaccine may not offer you the right protection against the virus in circulation this year.

Please take the time to look after yourself and have the flu jab if you are a carer. It's free because you need it.

4 Useful websites

A number of national organisations for people with long term conditions give further useful information about flu vaccination. Examples include:

- For more information on diabetes go to: <https://www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/managing-your-diabetes/flu-jab>
- For more information on asthma go to: [Flu vaccinations | Asthma + Lung UK \(asthmaandlung.org.uk\)](https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk)
- For more information on COPD and respiratory conditions go to: <https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/copd/treatment/managing-my-copd>
- For more information on heart conditions go to: <https://www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/support/practical-support/seasonal-influenza>
- For more general NHS information about flu vaccination go to: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/flu-influenza-vaccine/>

5 Acknowledgements and contact details

5.1 Acknowledgements

Thanks to all the members of the Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire Sustainability and Transformation Partnership (STP), Flu Steering Group, who have helped to produce this resource. This resource has also drawn heavily on flu communications materials prepared by NHS England.

5.2 Contact details

For any further information please contact:

BaNES, Swindon and Wiltshire Sustainability and Transformation Partnership

Kemphorne House

St. Martins Hospital

Clara Cross Lane

Bath, BA2 5RP

W: www.bswstp.nhs.uk

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