



Public Health  
England



# NHS public health functions agreement 2019-20

**Service specification No.13  
Seasonal influenza immunisation programme (2019-20 programme)**

NHS England and NHS Improvement



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## **Service specification No.13**

### **Seasonal influenza immunisation programme**

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Promoting equality and addressing health inequalities are at the heart of NHS England and NHS Improvement values. Throughout the development of the policies and processes cited in this document, we have:

- Given due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity, and to foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (as required under the Equality Act 2010); and
- Given due regard to the need to reduce inequalities between patients in access to, and outcomes from, healthcare services and to ensure services are provided in an integrated way where this might reduce health inequalities (in accordance with the duties under sections 13G and 13N of the NHS Act 2006, as amended).

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## Service specification No.13

This is a service specification to accompany the 'NHS public health functions agreement 2019-20 (the '2019-20 agreement').

This service specification is to be applied by NHS England and NHS Improvement in accordance with the 2019-20 agreement. Where a specification refers to any other published document or standard, it refers to the document or standard as it existed at the date when the 2019-20 agreement was made between the Secretary of State and NHS England and NHS Improvement, unless otherwise specified. Any changes in other published documents or standards may have effect for the purposes of the 2019-20 agreement in accordance with the procedures described in Chapter 3 of the 2019-20 agreement

Service specifications should be downloaded in order to ensure that commissioners and providers refer to the latest document that is in effect.

The 2019-20 agreement is available at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) (search for 'commissioning public health').

All current service specifications are available at [www.england.nhs.uk](http://www.england.nhs.uk) (search for 'commissioning public health').

This service specification is not intended to replicate, duplicate or supersede any other legislative provisions that may apply. It must always be read in conjunction with the [core service specification](#) and the online version of the [Green Book](#).

# 1 Purpose of the influenza immunisation programme

This document relates to the influenza vaccination programme which aims to protect those who are most at risk of serious illness or death should they develop influenza.

The purpose of the service specification is to enable NHS England and NHS Improvement to commission influenza immunisation services to a standard that will prevent the infections and outbreaks caused by flu viruses. This means achieving high coverage rates across England as well as within upper tier local government areas and within the context of populations with protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010. This specification should be used alongside specification 13A (Seasonal influenza immunisation programme for children – implementation of the extended programme for children).

This specification provides a brief overview of the vaccines including the disease they protect against, the context, evidence base, and wider health outcomes.

This specification will also promote a consistent and equitable approach to the provision of the commissioning and delivery of the influenza vaccine across England. It is important to note that this programme will change and evolve in the light of emerging best practice and scientific evidence. Guidance is issued annually through the Flu Plan and related ‘annual flu letter’ from DHSC, NHS England and NHS Improvement and PHE. NHS England and NHS Improvement and service providers will be required to reflect these changes accordingly in a timely way as directed by the national schedule.

[Immunisation against infectious disease](#) (known as ‘The Green Book’), issued by Public Health England is the main source of guidance for all immunisation programmes. This service specification must be read in conjunction with the core service specification (which underpins national and local commissioning practices and service delivery), the online version of the Green Book, all current relevant official public health letters and with additional evidence, advice and recommendations by the [Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation](#) (JCVI).

This service specification is not designed to replicate, duplicate or supersede any relevant legislative provisions that may apply e.g. the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

The specification will be reviewed and amended in line with any new recommendations or guidance, and in line with reviews of the Section 7A agreement.

## 2 Population needs

### Background

- 2.1 Influenza vaccine is routinely used to protect those most at risk of serious illness or death should they develop influenza.

### Influenza

- 2.2 Influenza is an acute viral infection of the respiratory tract. There are three types of influenza virus: A, B and C. Influenza A and influenza B are responsible for most clinical illness.
- 2.3 The disease is characterised by the sudden onset of fever, chills, headache, myalgia and extreme fatigue. Other common symptoms include a dry cough, sore throat and stuffy nose.
- 2.4 The risk of serious illness from influenza is higher amongst children under six months of age, older people and those with underlying health conditions such as respiratory disease, or cardiac disease or immunosuppression and pregnant women.
- 2.5 Estimates of excess winter deaths potentially attributable to influenza over the past five years in England and Wales are an annual average of 12K ranging from about 3K influenza associated deaths in 2013/14 to 34K deaths in 2014/15.

### Influenza vaccine – key details

- 2.6 The key details are that:
- the genetic make-up of the flu virus is unstable and new strains often emerge therefore vaccination is required annually;
  - all authorised influenza vaccines need to meet immunogenicity, safety and quality criteria set by the European Medicines Agency (EMA), with the assessment of efficacy based on meeting or exceeding indicated requirements in serological assessments of immunogenicity;
  - influenza vaccine is offered to those in the target populations as detailed in the [Green Book](#); (see section 4.2 for details of those eligible under the Section 7a agreement)
  - the vaccine will provide protection against the strains of seasonal influenza that the World Health Organization (WHO) specifies as the most likely to cause disease each year. In recent years, we have typically seen around 50% (ranging from 25% to 70%) effectiveness for the flu vaccine in the UK, and there has generally been a good match between the strains of flu in the vaccine and those that circulate – though this may be lower in certain sub-groups e.g. the elderly or against certain subtypes e.g. A(H3N2). Flu vaccine is still the best protection against an unpredictable virus

## 3 Scope

### Aims

- 3.1 The aim of the influenza vaccination programme is to protect those who are most at risk of serious illness or death should they develop influenza, and reduce transmission of the infection, thereby contributing to the protection of vulnerable individuals who may have a suboptimal response to their own immunisation.

### Objectives

- 3.2 The aim will be achieved by delivering an evidence-based, population-wide vaccination programme that:
- identifies the eligible population and ensures effective timely delivery with optimal coverage;
  - is safe, of a high quality and is independently monitored;
  - offers the most effective and cost-effective vaccine for each eligible group, consistent with national guidance
  - is delivered and supported by suitably trained, competent healthcare professionals who participate in recognised on-going training and development in line with national standards;
  - delivers, manages and stores vaccine in accordance with national guidance;
  - is supported by regular and accurate data collection using the appropriate returns.

### Direct health outcomes

- 3.3 In the context of health outcomes, the influenza vaccination programme aims to:
- protect the health of individuals and the wider population;
  - protect those who are most at risk of serious infection or death should they develop influenza;
  - reduce the transmission of infection, and thereby contribute to the protection of vulnerable individuals who may have suboptimal response to their own immunisation;
  - achieve high coverage across all eligible groups identified;
  - minimise adverse physical/psychological/clinical aspects of immunisation (e.g. anxiety, adverse reactions).

### Baseline vaccine coverage

- 3.4 Local services must ensure they maintain and improve current immunisation coverage (with reference to vaccine coverage public health outcomes framework indicators) with the aim of 100% of relevant individuals being offered immunisation in accordance with the Green Book and other official DHSC / PHE / NHS England and

NHS Improvement guidance. This also includes reference to performance indicators and key deliverables that are set out in Annex B of the NHS Public Health Functions Agreement (Section 7A) for 2019-20.

- 3.5 Vaccine uptake ambitions for 2019-20 will be set out in the annual flu letter issued in Spring 2019.

## 4 Service description / care pathway

### Local service delivery

4.1 The delivery of immunisation services at the local level is based on evolving best practice. This section of the document specifies the high-level operational elements of the seasonal influenza vaccination programme, based on that best practice that NHS England and NHS Improvement must use to inform local commissioning, contracts and service delivery. There is also scope to enable NHS England and NHS Improvement and providers to enhance and build on specifications to incorporate national or local service aspirations that may include increasing local innovation in service delivery. However, it is essential, in order to promote a nationally aligned, high-quality programme focusing on improved outcomes, increasing coverage and local take-up that all the core elements as set out in the core specification are included in contracts and specifications.

### Target population

4.2 Service providers will be required to make seasonal influenza vaccine available to:

- all children aged two to ten (but not eleven years or older) on 31 August 2019
- those aged six months to under 65 years in clinical risk groups
- pregnant women
- those aged 65 years and over
- those in long-stay residential care homes
- carers
- health and social care workers

4.3 Any changes to the groups recommended to be offered immunisation will be advised in the annual flu letter to be published in spring 2019.

4.4 Medical practitioners must apply clinical judgement to take into account the risk of influenza exacerbating any underlying disease that a patient may have, as well as the risk of serious illness from influenza itself. Influenza vaccine should be offered in such cases even if the individual is not in the clinical risk groups specified above.

4.5 Consideration should also be given to the vaccination of household contacts of immunocompromised individuals, specifically individuals who expect to share living accommodation on most days over the winter and, therefore, for whom continuing close contact is unavoidable.

### Vaccine schedule

4.6 The guidance in the Green Book should be followed: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/influenza-the-green-book-chapter-19>

4.7 In order to provide early protection, providers must aim to complete the vaccination as early as possible after flu vaccines become available and before flu viruses start to circulate, which is often before the end of December in UK.

4.8 Sufficient immunisation appointments must be available so that individuals can

receive vaccinations on time. Vaccinating individuals as soon as the recommended vaccine is available will provide them with protection should the flu season prove to be early.

## Vaccine ordering

- 4.9 GPs, and others requiring supplies of flu vaccine, should order recommended vaccines for those aged 65 years and older and those in adult clinical risk groups directly from the influenza vaccine manufacturers/wholesalers. Detailed arrangements for the supply and ordering of vaccine for the 2019-20 season will be set out in the annual flu letter issued in Spring 2019.
- 4.10 Live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV) will be purchased centrally for all children from 2 years of age and up to and including 10 years, and for children aged 2 to 17 years in risk groups. For children in risk groups under 18 years of age where LAIV is contraindicated, suitable inactivated influenza vaccines will be provided centrally. Apart from this central procurement of vaccine for children less than 18 years of age, it remains the responsibility of general practices to order sufficient flu vaccine for older eligible patients of the flu programme in 2019-20 directly from manufacturers/wholesalers. Centrally procured vaccines should be ordered via the ImmForm website ([www.ImmForm.dh.gov.uk](http://www.ImmForm.dh.gov.uk)) as per the usual mechanisms for the routine childhood immunisation programme, details of which are given in the core specification.

## Recording & Reporting requirements

- 4.11 The collection of data is essential. It has several key purposes including monitoring the local delivery of the programme, coverage at national and local levels, and for outbreak investigations and response. In-depth analysis of coverage underpins any necessary changes to the programme, which might include the development of targeted programmes or campaigns to improve vaccination coverage.
- 4.12 PHE will monitor and publish:
- WEEKLY cumulative data for national flu vaccine uptake by GP registered patients aged 65 years and older, six months to less than 65 years in clinical risk groups (excluding pregnant women) and women who are pregnant. Children aged 2 and 3 years old (both in and not in clinical risk groups) are also included in the collection. Weekly data collection is likely to begin in week 36 2019, and will continue to week 4 2020. Data is collected by ImmForm through the automatic extraction of data from GP records by GP IT suppliers from a large national sample of GP practices.
  - MONTHLY cumulative data for national flu vaccine uptake by GP registered patients aged 65 years and older, six months to less than 65 years in clinical risk groups (excluding pregnant women) and women who are pregnant. Children aged 2 and 3 years old (both in and not in clinical risk groups) are also included in the collection. Data is collected in four monthly surveys from all GP practices. Data covers flu vaccinations given from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019 up to the end of October, November, December and January respectively. Data extracted automatically (by GP IT suppliers on behalf of GP practices) and manual submission of data (directly by GP practices and Area Teams) are submitted to ImmForm.

- MONTHLY cumulative flu vaccine uptake by front line healthcare workers with direct patient contact working in Acute, Care, Foundation, Mental Health and Ambulance Trusts, Cumulative data for primary care staff, by Area Team is also collected. Both Trusts and Primary care are required to submit data manually in five monthly collections, covering vaccinations from 1 September 2019 up to the end of October, November, December, January, and February via ImmForm.