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To: All NHS frontline workers

NHS England and NHS Improvement  
Skipton House  
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16 September 2020

Dear colleagues,

### **Protect yourself, your family and our patients from flu this winter**

On average, flu kills over 11,000 people each year – some years this number is much higher – and it hospitalises many more. This is anything but a typical year due to the potential impact of flu and COVID-19 circulating at the same time. It's now more important than ever that we act to protect ourselves, our teams, our families and patients from getting flu.

We strongly urge you to take up the offer of free vaccination against flu as soon as possible; and to remind your patients to get their vaccine.

The flu virus spreads from person-to-person, even among those not showing any symptoms. Healthcare workers are at an increased risk of contracting flu and it's very easy to pass on the virus without knowing. Even if we're healthy, we can still get flu and pass it on to the people we care for, our colleagues and to our family.

As we all know, flu can have serious and even fatal consequences, especially for our most vulnerable patients, such as young children, pregnant women and the elderly.

Therefore, vaccination of healthcare workers is a critical part of the NHS' flu prevention strategy. Flu-related staff sickness absence can also significantly affect your ability to deliver the services safely that patients need and value. In fact, research suggests that a 10% increase in NHS staff vaccination reduces healthcare worker sickness absence by about 10%.

We are proud that frontline healthcare worker vaccination rates have increased significantly in recent years. Last winter, the overall rate topped 74.3% for the first time. This is an increase compared to the year before, with more than 33,000 more

staff vaccinated. This is a great achievement, and we want to thank everyone who made it possible.

Overall our vaccine uptake levels have been increasing for several years, but there is still variation between trusts and in primary care settings. This year let's be more ambitious than ever and increase uptake once again. The flu vaccine is the best defence we have against the spread of flu.

An NHS survey found that patients feel safer, and are more likely to get vaccinated themselves, when they know staff are vaccinated too. It is vital we do all we can right now to reassure patients the NHS is here for them, and that we're ready to see them safely.

We all have a shared professional responsibility to ensure the best possible outcomes for patients this winter. So, let's all do our bit and take this important step to protect our patients, those we care for and ourselves this winter.



Ruth May, Chief Nursing for England



Professor Stephen Powis, NHS National Medical Director



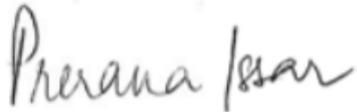
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