

28<sup>th</sup> August 2020

## Expanded flu programme to focus on most vulnerable groups first

This winter, the flu vaccination is more important than ever to protect those most vulnerable as we prepare for the potential risks of both flu and COVID-19.

GPs and community pharmacists across the East of England have welcomed plans to extend the flu vaccination programme to those 50-64 year olds who weren't previously eligible for a free jab, but we must make sure that those most at risk are able to get the vaccine first.

In line with national plans to protect the most vulnerable first, those aged 65 and over, people with certain long-term medical conditions, pregnant women, and young children will be vaccinated from September onwards.

In a phased approach, people aged 50 - 64 who are not in a clinical risk group are to be offered the vaccine later in the season - likely in November or December when additional vaccine stock becomes available.

There has been a reported increase in enquiries from people aged 50 to 64 to GP practices and community pharmacies about the vaccination. If you are in this newly eligible group, please do not contact your practice or pharmacy about the vaccination or to try to book an appointment for a flu jab at this time.

This will allow GP practices and pharmacies to focus on their work to get the most vulnerable groups in our community vaccinated first.

Your practice will contact you as soon as they are ready to offer you an appointment so please wait to hear from them or to receive more information. Community pharmacies will also be able to offer the vaccine to you from November onwards. Please rest assured that if you are eligible for the vaccine, you will be contacted once it is being offered to your group.

Debbie Bodhanya, Managing Partner of The Limes Medical Centre, Essex said: "We are so pleased to be able to expand our flu campaign this year. Wait until we have vaccinated the very vulnerable, young and elderly, then we'll be ready to vaccinate the over 50's. Check back with us after 1st November. Let's work together to support the NHS this wintertime and keep our patients safe and well!"

Flu should be taken seriously; it is more than just a bad cold. Some people may need to stay in bed for a few days but for others who are more vulnerable it can lead to more severe illness, can worsen existing illness and can lead to pneumonia or bronchitis. In the worst cases, flu can result in a stay in hospital, or even death.

Dr Sarah Whiteman, GP and Medical Director of Bedfordshire, Luton & Milton Keynes Clinical Commissioning Groups, said: "This year, more than ever before, it is important for patients at risk to have the flu vaccination. Flu vaccination offers important protection against flu, saves lives and helps to reduce the pressure on the NHS in the busy winter months. Expanding the programme is welcome but it is important that those usually at higher risk are protected first as they are likely to be more seriously affected by flu."



Practices and pharmacies are following strict guidance and social distancing measures to make sure that it is safe for you to come for your vaccination. When you are offered your vaccine, please take the opportunity to gain this valuable protection for yourself and your community.