

Flu Vaccination and Mental Illness

An important message for general practice teams and pharmacy teams

People living with a mental illness and their carers and families may be eligible for a free flu vaccination from the NHS.

You can help to save lives by ensuring those who are eligible get the vaccination this winter.

As a practitioner you may wish to consider:

...obtaining feedback where possible from patients with severe mental illness on what method of communication they prefer: text, phone calls or a letter. Letting them know that they are entitled to have the vaccination and where possible provide support with booking the appointment.

Some people might need their carer to receive the information too. Long forms or phone queues can be offputting for people with a mental illness.

...that some people may have fears about the vaccination. We recommend enquiring, listening to their concerns and discussing with them.

...that some patients may need extra support to attend. This might include help with physical access or support with phobias or anxieties.

...combining the physical health check with the vaccine to offer a full annual physical health check to patients on the severe mental illness registers. Combining the health check with the vaccination appointment might be helpful for people who have difficulties getting to their GP surgery. Some patients might not know about the physical health check so it's important to explain why you are offering it. This is an important opportunity to 'make every contact count'.

No one should miss out on basic health care because of a mental illness. Too many people do. This year more than ever it's vital to reach out to everyone who is eligible for their flu jab.

We have shared some advice and guidance with people with Severe Mental Illness and their carers

The NHS advises that getting a flu vaccination is especially important for anyone over the age of 50 who has any of the above long-term conditions.

If you're in any of these groups, you can get your flu vaccine for free at your GP surgery or a pharmacy. This will be done in a way that is safe. It saves lives. That is especially the case this year, as getting flu and COVID-19 at the same time means you are more likely to be seriously ill.

If you have concerns about the vaccination, your GP surgery (General Practitioner) or pharmacist should be able to discuss your concerns with you.

Speak to your GP surgery about the support that would help you in having your vaccination and physical health check.

When booking your vaccination with the practice it might be worth combining the appointment with your physical health check if you have not yet had it this year.

If you're eligible to get your flu jab, it's your right to have it. And no one should miss out on this vital vaccination because of their mental health.

The list of people eligible for a free flu vaccination includes:

- People aged 50 and over and people who will be 50 by 31 March 2021
- Pregnant women
- People in long-stay residential care
- Frontline health or social care workers
- People who receive a carer's allowance, or are the main carer for an older or disabled person who may be at risk if they get sick
- People who live with someone [who's at high risk from COVID-19](#) (on the NHS shielded patient list)



It also includes people with a number of long-term health conditions. The NHS lists these as including:

- respiratory conditions, such as [asthma](#) (needing steroid inhaler or tablets), [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease \(COPD\)](#), including emphysema and [bronchitis](#)
- [diabetes](#)
- heart conditions, such as [coronary heart disease](#) or [heart failure](#)
- being very overweight – a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above
- [chronic kidney disease](#)
- liver disease, such as [hepatitis](#)
- neurological conditions, such as [Parkinson's disease](#), [motor neurone disease](#), [multiple sclerosis \(MS\)](#), or [cerebral palsy](#)
- [a learning disability](#)
- problems with your spleen, for example, [sickle cell disease](#), or if you have had your spleen removed
- a weakened immune system as the result of conditions such as [HIV and AIDS](#), or taking medicines such as [steroid tablets](#) or [chemotherapy](#)



It may be possible to offer a physical health check for patients on your severe mental illness (SMI) register at the same time as providing the vaccination.

Commonly asked questions

Should I let people with severe mental illness (SMI) and their carers know if we have run out of the vaccine or when it is back in stock?

It is helpful that patients with SMI and their carers are told why the vaccination has run out and where possible when they will be able to get one to avoid unnecessary anxiety.

Why offer a health check at the same time as a flu vaccination?

As part of the NHS Long Term Plan, the NHS has committed to ensuring that 60% of people with Severe Mental Illness (SMI) receive an annual comprehensive physical health-check. We know that people with SMI already have a reduced life expectancy compared with the general population, and evidence shows they have been disproportionately impacted in the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, including significantly higher mortality rates.



'If the vaccination was explained to me, I could see it helping my fears.'
Expert by Experience



'I try to combine appointments where possible and provide tailored support for the individual.' **Clinician**



'When in hospital I noticed staff receiving the vaccination so I enquired if I could also have one, it was only then that it was offered.'
Expert by Experience

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