

Evaluation of St Helens Flu Programme 2018/19

1. Background

1.1 Influenza

Influenza (flu) is an acute viral infection of the respiratory tract. There are three types of influenza virus: A, B and C, with Influenza A and influenza B being responsible for most cases of flu.

Flu is highly infectious and can spread from person to person very easily. For healthy individuals, flu is an unpleasant but usually self-limiting disease with recovery usually within two to seven days. However certain groups are more likely to develop potentially serious complications of flu such as pneumonia including older people, pregnant women, and those with an underlying medical health condition.

The best defence we have against flu is the flu vaccination. Flu is highly unpredictable as the viruses that cause flu can change from year to year (and within the same winter season). Each year the World Health Organisation (WHO) makes recommendations about which strains to be included in vaccines for the forthcoming year for both the northern and southern hemispheres by monitoring the epidemiology of influenza virus throughout the world. The vaccines are as closely matched as possible to the influenza viruses circulating during the influenza season. However, mismatches between the components in the vaccine and circulating viruses do occur from time to time which can lead to a variation in vaccine effectiveness.

The flu vaccine has been recommended in the UK since the late 1960s with the aim of directly protecting those who are at a higher risk of influenza associated complications. These at risk groups are defined by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) each year. In general, this includes all people aged 65 years or over, those aged under 65 with long term conditions, pregnant women, children aged 2 to 8, those in long stay residential homes and carers. These groups are eligible to receive a free flu vaccination.

1.2 Annual Flu Vaccination Programme

The national flu programme runs each year from the beginning of September to the end of March. Planning commences following the publication of the annual flu letter from NHSE/PHE published early in the year which provides information to allow local areas to prepare to deliver the programme, including outlining eligible groups who entitled to receive a free flu vaccination and vaccine uptake ambitions.

For the 2018/19 programme the letter identified the following eligible groups:

- all children aged two to nine (but not ten years or older) on 31 August 2018
- all primary school-aged children in former primary school pilot areas
- 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

The flu vaccination programme is commissioned directly by NHS England and is delivered through several providers including GPs, local pharmacies, schools, antenatal care and other settings such as Specialist Substance Misuse providers. Each provider signs up to service agreement with NHSE. There is also a national programme to vaccinate health and social care staff via their GP or local pharmacy.

Public Health have an oversight role during the flu programme, co-ordinating the local flu programme and ensuring the vaccine is available to all eligible groups.

CCGs have devolved responsibility through the section 7a agreement, to support with the implementation of the flu programme with particular emphasis on:

- supporting improvement in uptake and reducing variation, and ensuring the recommended vaccines are used
- ensuring that there are clear arrangements in place to support oversight of the flu programme between October and March every year
- supporting general practices to target at-risk population groups to improve uptake and coverage of the flu vaccination to achieve national uptake ambitions, also having a named flu lead in place whose role is to ensure that practices have ordered sufficient vaccine and that there are mechanisms in place to monitor supply and demand and to drive up uptake of flu vaccines;

Based on the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), a new vaccine was introduced for the over 65 population due to the ineffectiveness of the flu vaccine in older people during the previous flu season. For the 2018/19 flu programme the following was recommended:

- The adjuvanted trivalent vaccine (aTIV) for all 65s and over
- the quadrivalent vaccine (QIV) for 18 – under 65s at risk
- The live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV) for the children's programme

1.3 St Helens Flu Vaccination programme

Locally the flu vaccination programme is co-ordinated by the Flu Task Group, a multiagency group lead by Public Health. Each year a flu action plan is developed to ensure the flu vaccine was available to all eligible populations in particular at risk groups and that the flu vaccine was widely promoted across the borough.

The action plan outlines key responsibilities of each of the partners. In addition, attendance at the Cheshire and Merseyside Flu Group ensures the local work within St Helens linked to the regional flu planning work.

2.0 Key Delivery Programmes

2.1 GP Programme

The majority of flu vaccinations each year are delivered through the GP programme.

Each GP practice independently co-ordinates their own flu programme including the ordering of vaccinations, inviting eligible patients and delivery of the vaccination often via flu clinics. GPs are required to upload data to the Immform system to enable payment from NHS England.

Unlike other eligible groups, pre-school children aged 2,3 and 4 can only receive the flu nasal spray from their GP. The vaccine of choice is the live attenuated intranasal influenza vaccine (LAIV Fluenz Tetra®). This vaccine is free and can only be ordered from NHS England.

Figures to date (end of February 2019) show that in general there has been a general decline in St Helens across all of the eligible groups compared to the same time last year. These uptake figures are shown to vary significantly across GP practices.

Programme	Over 65's	Under 65s with at risk conditions	Pregnant Women	2 and 3 year olds	School age children
National Target	75%	55%	55%	40-65%	40-65%
St Helens Achievement 2018/19	74.6%	47.0%	49.7%	Age 2 – 40% Age 3 – 43.1%	Reception – 64.6% Yr 1 – 63.6% Yr 2 – 61.7% Yr 3 – 58.2% Yr 4 – 60.0% Yr 5-57.8%

As part of the evaluation of this year's programme, there is insight work currently being completed with parents and carers of 2 and 3 year olds to determine how to engage with parents to improve uptake in this group during the 2019/20 flu vaccination programme.

2.2 Schools Programme

The Schools programme was delivered by Immunisation Team from North West Boroughs between October and December 2018.

Particular attention was given to schools whose uptake was particularly low last year. In addition 2nd offer clinics were during December for those children who consented but were absent on day of vaccination or requested a vaccine after the set clinic dates.

2.3 Pharmacy programme

An increased number of people received their flu vaccine at a pharmacy during the 2018/19 flu vaccination programme. 58442 people across Cheshire and Merseyside during 2018/19 compared to 57646 in 2017/18. Figures are not available at a St Helens level.

2.4 Other Programmes

All Local Authority Learning disability clients received the flu vaccination. For those that were needle phobic and for whom the needle desensitisation programme was unsuccessful a nasal spray was offered.

CGL, St Helens Specialist Substance Misuse provider offered all their substance misuse clients a free flu vaccination. 98 clients took up this offer. Service users also received a flu vaccination via their GP or local pharmacy.

NHSE commissioned and trained midwives to vaccinate high risk pregnant women who attended Whiston Hospital for their antenatal care.

2.4 Health and Social Care Staff Vaccination

2.4.1 Acute and GP Staff

Of the 3509 health care workers at St Helens and Knowsley Hospitals NHS Trust with direct patient care who were offered the flu vaccination, 3347 received a flu

vaccination (95.4%), the highest rate across Cheshire and Merseyside Trusts, an improvement on 2017/18 uptake when 82.7% of staff received the flu vaccination.

In terms of staff in General Practice within St Helens there was a 70% uptake amongst staff with direct patient care received a flu vaccination based on returns to NHS England from 19 out of 34 GP practices.

2.4.2 Local Authority Employees

In previous years all eligible council employees received the offer of a pre-paid pharmacy voucher to receive a flu vaccination. In 2018/19 a different approach was agreed with the aim of improving uptake in front line Integrated Peoples Services employees. The Infection Prevention Control Team commissioned by Public Health completed 8 clinic sessions at various locations across the Council and then pre-paid vouchers were offered to those unable to attend a clinic session. Eligible Corporate and Place employees were again offered a pre-paid pharmacy voucher as in previous.

Overall the uptake of the flu vaccine amongst eligible employees during the 2018/19 flu programme was lower at 23.07% compared to 29.62% the previous year.

2.4.3 Nursing Home and Domiciliary Care Staff

The Local Authority Quality Team in partnership with the Infection, Prevention Control Team worked with Residential and Nursing Homes to develop flu plans, including outbreak management plans.

Data is not currently available from NHS England on the number of care home and domiciliary care staff who took up the offer of a free flu vaccination at their GP or local pharmacy.

3. Marketing and Communications

Funding from NHS England was used to develop a local marketing and communications plan specifically focusing on increasing uptake of the flu nasal spray in the 2 & 3 year olds. Key messages were disseminated during the campaign to increase awareness and improve uptake of the flu vaccine by distribution of specific resources to key early year's settings, key partners, via the local media and by the use of social media.

All early years settings received a specially designed poster to display, a sticker for each child. In addition, flyers were given out at read and rhyme sessions at local

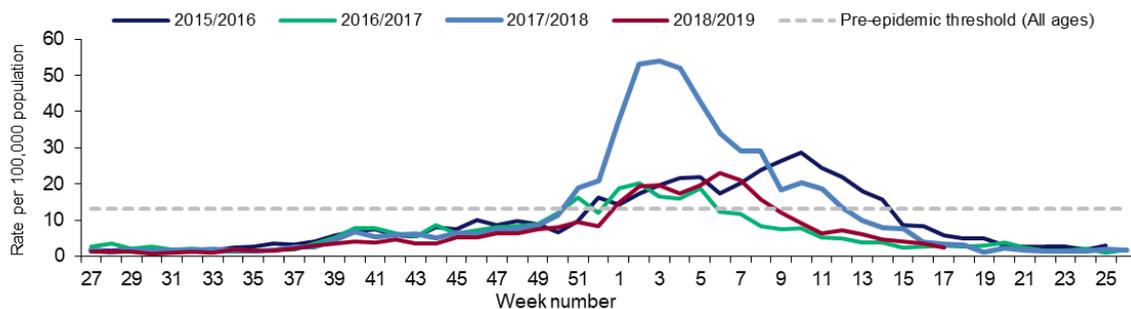
libraries and posters distributed in key places throughout the borough such as soft play centres.

A key focus of the 2018/19 flu campaign as supported by NHS England was the vaccination of care home residents and care home staff due to a number of flu outbreaks within care homes the previous year. Key actions to promote the flu vaccination in these settings within St Helens include developing promotional material to be displayed in all care homes, engaging staff through care home meetings and promoting and encouraging vaccine uptake in direct letters to care home managers.

4. Levels of Flu/Flu Like Illness

Weekly surveillance reports produced by Public Health England provide an overview of national/regional trends of circulating flu/flu like illness throughout the flu programme.

In general, the rates of GP reported flu and flu like illness rates in England during the 2018/19 programme was reduced compared to the high rates seen in 2017/18.



Locally from information gathered from GP practice systems, between 1st September 2017 and the 31st March 2018, 625 patients were reported by GP practices to have had flu or Flu-like illness. The peak of these cases occurred during January-February 2019. All age groups were shown to be affected; with the largest number of cases occurring in patients aged 50-59. This is a reduction on numbers presenting during 2017/18.

ALL Practices

Age-Bands for Patients who have had flu between 1st September 2017 and 31st March 2018

Age	0-9	10 to 19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90-99	100+
2017/2018	45	63	135	162	202	179	138	100	55	16	0
2018/2019	84	37	49	87	92	131	62	58	18	8	0
Month	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total	Males	Females	
2017/2018	24	56	52	97	469	243	194	1135	510	625	
2018/2019	33	61	48	85	207	142	70	625	269	356	

Data obtained from St Helens and Knowsley NHS Trust showed there were 383 admissions for flu or flu like illness between September 2018 and March 2019, a increase on previous years, 2015/16, 59 admissions and 2016/17, 157, 2017/18 360 admissions. Of those admitted during the 2018/19 flu season, the highest number of admissions was in those aged 0 to 10.

The number of outbreaks in nursing homes reported during the 2018/19 flu programme was considerably lower than the previous year, 4 outbreaks compared to 9 in 2017/18.

5. Key Successes & Challenges

The most notable achievements during the 2018/19 flu vaccination programme within St Helens were:

- A smaller number of outbreaks reported in nursing homes. GPs vaccinated their most vulnerable patients early on in the flu programme.
- Responses of the local primary care system to vaccine supply issues including the successful movement of vaccines from practice to practice co-ordinated by the Medicines Management Team.
- Increased number of social care staff accessed a flu vaccination through the national scheme via a local pharmacy than in 2017/18.

There were a number of key challenges in the delivery of the 2018/19 flu vaccination programme:

- Vaccine supply issues due to the introduction of the new aTIV vaccine for over 65s. Practices received this vaccine in across the flu programme rather than at the start of the programme as in previous years. Some practices also had issues with obtaining their vaccine order from the supplier.

- Increasing uptake via the GP programme is difficult. GPs historically order flu vaccinations based on the previous year's uptake (accounting for a small increase in uptake year on year) so only a small improvement in uptake rates are seen each year amongst eligible groups. GPs only receive payment for vaccines administered and often can only return a percentage of vaccines to the suppliers so are often reluctant to over order.
- There are variations in levels of proactive promotion of the flu vaccine (call and recall) by GP practices across St Helens.
- Restrictions of the current commissioning system and training requirements restricted the vaccination in alternative settings such as community antenatal clinics, pre-school settings and acute settings.

These challenges are not specific to St Helens and have been reported as issues at a regional and nation level.

6. Planning for 2019/20 Flu Programme

The flu task group have commenced planning for the 2019/20 flu programme. The key focus this year will be again on improving the uptake of the nasal spray amongst 2 and 3 year olds and improving uptake in the under 65 at risk population.