

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION ON ADULT INFLUENZA VACCINATION



Campaign Overview: England

Authors

Ms. Yifan Zheng

Dr. Jane Barratt



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Authors
Ms. Yifan Zheng
Dr. Jane Barratt

Design
Ms. Chesley Ryder

Reviewer
Ms. Anna Sangster



Executive Summary

Although the United Kingdom has a single, overarching immunization schedule advised by the Joint Committee of Vaccinations and Immunisations, the administration of immunization is devolved to the governments England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Annual vaccination against influenza is well established in the United Kingdom. The traditional vaccination strategy has been to target groups at higher risk of infection and serious complications such as adults and children with underlying chronic medical conditions, pregnant women, and older people.

A sophisticated national campaign is shaped and driven by the public health authorities aimed to improve uptake rates of influenza vaccination. The strategy which is developed and published as part of the annual Flu Plan sets out a coordinated and multi-channel approach to guiding the implementation of an awareness campaign and providing partner organizations with information and resources ahead of the flu season.

The campaign comprises a variety of online and offline communications to ensure that key messages are transmitted effectively to a broad audience. A set of communication tools is shared by the government to maximize the coverage of the messages in the targeted audience, including an up-to-date website, fact sheet, poster, video, postcard, and social media banners.

Several patient associations and organisations that represent at-risk populations including the British Lung Foundation, British Heart Foundation, Diabetes UK and Age UK actively support and participate in the campaign and create customized campaign resources and messages.

Demographic Details

The United Kingdom, in 2018, had an estimated population of 66.5 million with 17.8% under the age of 15 years and 18.7% (12.4 million) aged 65 years and over.¹ By 2050, population projections suggest a significant increase in the ageing population alongside a decline in the younger cohort – one in four people (25.4%) will be 65 years of age and over but only 16.2% will be in the 0-14 years cohort.²

The rapid pace of population ageing also fuels the growing burden of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) in the United Kingdom (UK). In 2016, 89% of all deaths were attributable to NCDs, with some 34% caused by cardiovascular disease (CVD), respiratory diseases or diabetes.³

Context

Seasonal influenza and its complications are a serious health and economic issue for many in the United Kingdom. About half of those aged 6 months to 65 years with one or more chronic conditions were not vaccinated against influenza in 2018-2019.⁴ An enhanced influenza vaccine was introduced in 2019 offering better protection for older people, yet the uptake rate was lower than that recorded in 2017 to 2018.⁶

The burden of NCDs is often concurrent with that of infectious diseases. It is estimated that the majority (72%) of influenza-attributable deaths in hospital occurred in those aged 65 years and over with a chronic disease.⁵

Although the United Kingdom has a single, over-arching immunization schedule advised by the Joint Committee of Vaccinations and Immunisations, the administration of immunization is devolved to the governments England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This environmental scan is confined to the situation in the England.⁶

In England responsibility for immunization is based on a tripartite agreement between the Department of Health, Public Health England (PHE) and National Health Service England (NHS England).⁸ Annually the Public Health England (PHE) partners with the National Health Service (NHS) England to launch an influenza awareness campaign targeting pregnant

women, parents of children, older adults and patients with chronic conditions. In the 2018-2019 season, the campaign was rolled out with “Help Us Help You” brand, encouraging personal responsibility to better enable the NHS to help them counter influenza.⁷ The campaign comprises a variety of online and offline communications to ensure that key messages are transmitted effectively to a broad audience.

Several patient associations and organisations that represent at-risk populations including the British Lung Foundation, British Heart Foundation, Diabetes UK and Age UK actively support and participate in the campaign and create customized campaign resources and messages.

Government Campaign

National Immunisation Program

The national immunisation programme aims to offer vaccines at no costs to those who are at-risk of influenza associated morbidity and mortality.⁸ Since 2000, the programme has been extended to include people aged 65 years and over based on the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). In 2019/2020, groups eligible for the programme included children aged between 2 and 10 years inclusive, those aged six months to under 65 years in clinically at-risk groups, pregnant women, those aged 65 years and over, residents in long-term care facilities, carers and close contacts of immunocompromised individuals.

In line with the national flu immunisation programme, and the NHS scheduled annual influenza vaccination routinely for people aged 65 years and over and encouraged on-time vaccinations.⁹

Web page

The NHS website provides basic information on influenza and influenza vaccination. Messages about influenza vaccination for at-risk populations are addressed through answers to frequently asked questions including who should be vaccinated and why, which type of flu vaccine should be offered,

where and when to receive a vaccination and safety and effects of the vaccine.^{10,11,12}

The NHS stresses that anyone in an at-risk group is more likely to develop potentially serious complications from influenza, such as pneumonia, so annual influenza vaccination is highly recommended and offered without cost.

Invitation letter

General practitioners (GPs) play an instrumental role in identifying and contacting eligible patients for vaccination prior to the flu season.

The PHE and NHS England jointly produce an invitation letter template for GPs which can be personalized for the local situation and the patients.¹³ The letter, which facilitates the doctor-patient communication is a reminder of the free influenza vaccination and a call for those most at-risk from influenza to be vaccinated at their general practice.

Brochure

"The flu vaccination winter 2019 to 2020" booklet is a resource produced as part of the campaign by the PHE and the NHS in 18 languages.¹⁴ Information focuses on the serious nature of influenza and the importance of annual influenza vaccination in at-risk people including those with a chronic condition, everyone aged 65 years and over, children, pregnant women and other at-risk adults.

Figure 1: Brochure



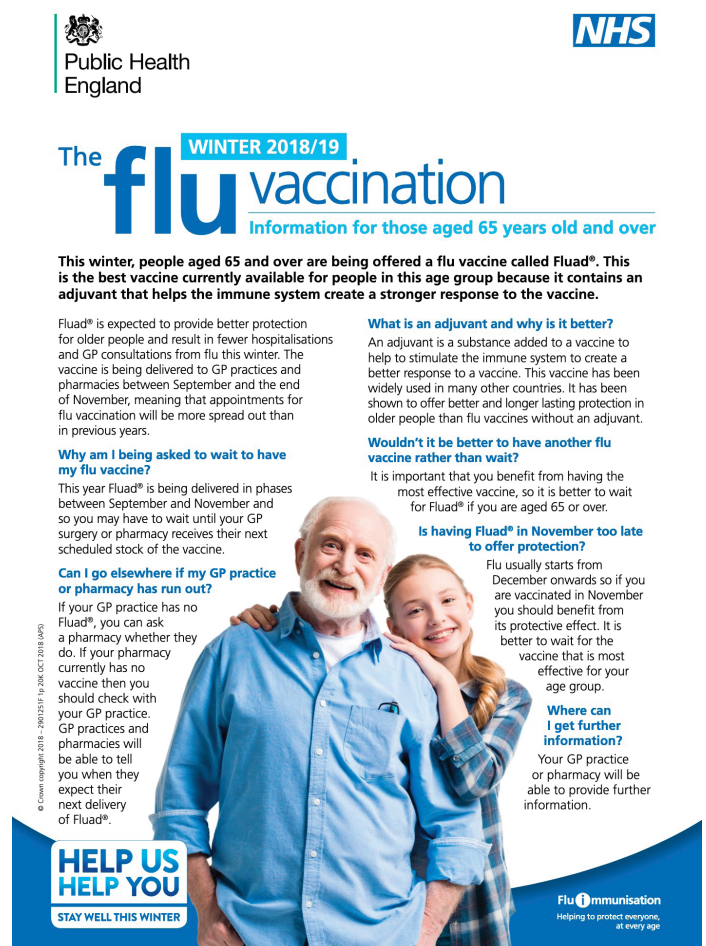
Recommendation of influenza vaccination is also incorporated in the PHE-branded "Keep Warm Keep Well" brochure designed to give advice on staying well in cold weather.¹⁵ In addition to warning that winter conditions can be serious for older people and those with chronic conditions, messages encourage people who are especially frail to have the free influenza vaccination for a healthy winter.

Leaflet

Integrating the spirit of "Help Us Help You" and "Keep Warm Keep Well", the NHS has developed a series of leaflets to provide key information to help the British stay healthy in winter.¹⁶ This leaflet is accessible through various formats including large print, animated easy-to-read messages, audio, sign language and braille versions.

The key message is that the flu can lead to serious complications such as bronchitis and pneumonia, and it can be deadly, so people aged 65 years or over, and those with long-term and chronic conditions need to be vaccinated.

Figure 2: Fact sheet



Fact sheet

Specific to older adults a fact sheet was developed jointly by the PHE and the NHS with a detailed explanation of why the high dose (or sometimes referred to as enhanced) vaccine is recommended, and where to go and when to receive the vaccination.¹⁷

Poster

In support of the “Help Us Help You” campaign, a set of influenza posters are sent to patient and advocacy organisations to spread the message about the free influenza vaccines and encourage their constituents to be vaccinated.¹⁸

Posters targeting older adults feature messages that “more free flu vaccines are available” and “flu can be serious and lead to hospitalisation”.

Figure 3: Poster



Wallet card

Reminders of the free influenza vaccination for at-risk groups are printed in the form of wallet cards by the NHS. The card with a heading “Are you entitled to a FREE flu jab?” lists those who are eligible for the service.¹⁹

Video

Messages about influenza vaccination are also delivered via videos. The NHS, for example, produced a video that features a GP, a nurse and a pharmacist talking about the serious nature of influenza for older people and those with chronic diseases and the value of vaccination as the best prevention strategy.²⁰

A personal message from newsreader and journalist, Mr. Trevor McDonald encouraged those aged 65 years and over to have the influenza vaccination.²¹

Digital banner

Generic and targeted digital banners were created by PHE and NHS England to advertise the free influenza vaccination services to eligible groups.²² All banners are downloadable in different sizes for various social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook.

Also, a banner featuring Mr. McDonald sends a direct call for adults aged 65 and over to have their influenza vaccination.²³

Figure 4: Digital banner



News release

The publically acquire information about the upcoming flu vaccination programme and national awareness campaign comes from a variety of sources including press releases from the PHE.²⁴ For the 2018/2019 season, a news article was published to inform older people on the availability of the enhanced vaccine, a more effective vaccine for those with especially weaker immune systems.²⁵

Non-government Organizations

British Lung Foundation

Web page

The British Lung Foundation (BLF) has a critical role to play in developing and disseminating targeted messages to their members and families. In addition to the general campaign messages from the PHE and NHS the Foundation called on people to “get flu jab” to those with lung diseases as the primary prevention against influenza.^{26,27}

Promoting influenza vaccination in patients living with lung conditions is prioritized in the campaign “Taskforce for Lung Health” with an ambitious target of 75% of people with lung conditions to be vaccinated.²⁸

E-bulletin

Seasonal bulletins broadcast the latest lung health news to its members in an e-bulletin which also serves as a platform to share information about influenza prevention and the message of free vaccines.

Case story

Case stories reinforce the serious nature of influenza infection in people with chronic lung disease.²⁹ “Lan” a member of BLF, talked positively about influenza vaccination and noted that this infection increased the chances of a flare up of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), heart attacks, strokes and hospitalization.

Street campaign

“More Than a Cold” is a campaign launched by industry to increase awareness and understanding of influenza and encourage people most at-risk of infection to be vaccinated. Throughout December 2011 and January 2012, nurses and health care professionals from the BLF partnered to promote the importance of vaccination to shoppers through sharing information and answering questions.³⁰

British Heart Foundation

Fact sheet

The British Heart Foundation (BHF) created a fact sheet to educate its members about influenza, including symptoms, at-risk populations, treatment measures, who should be vaccinated and how the vaccine works.

The fact sheet also provides links to other sources of information including various helplines.

Figure 5: British Heart Foundation Fact Sheet

British Heart Foundation

Seasonal influenza (flu)

The virus which causes flu is highly infectious. You can catch it all year round but it is particularly common in the winter months, and can be very debilitating.

What are the symptoms?	Who is at risk?	What should I do if I think I have flu?
<p>The symptoms of flu include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• fever (a temperature of 38°C or 100.4°F) or above• a runny or blocked nose, sneezing• a dry chesty cough and sore throat• aches and pains in your muscles and joints• headaches• extreme tiredness• loss of appetite. <p>For most healthy people the symptoms of flu will begin to improve after 5 to 8 days. It will clear up on its own, but can be very severe for some people.</p>	<p>If you are in one of the following groups you are considered to be more 'at risk' of becoming very ill if you do catch the flu, increasing your chance of complications.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• anyone over the age of 65 years• pregnant women• children and adults with an underlying medical condition (for example heart or lung disease)• children and adults with weakened immune systems.	<p>If you have a heart condition, or are 'at risk' for another reason, and develop flu-like symptoms you should contact your GP surgery by telephone for advice. Flu is caused by a virus and not by bacteria, so antibiotics are of no benefit. However, your doctor may want to prescribe you antiviral medicines to lessen your symptoms and help you to recover quicker.</p> <p>It is important that you speak to your GP or pharmacist before taking over the counter medicines such as pain killers and cough medicines. This is because some of the medicines to relieve the symptoms of the flu cannot be taken with those prescribed for some chronic diseases.</p> <p>If you take warfarin, it's important to know that if you become unwell with the flu, or flu-like symptoms, it can affect your blood clotting rate (INR). If this happens to you speak to your GP or anticoagulation nurse about monitoring your INR.</p>

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Magazine

Messages about influenza vaccination were also transmitted through articles published in “Heart Matters”, a printed and online magazine for people living with a heart condition.³¹

How influenza can affect blood pressure, heart rate and overall heart function, putting patients with heart disease at higher risk of severe complications is described in the article entitled “How the flu jab has changed this winter”. Also profiled was evidence from a study in Sweden revealing that influenza infection will increase the risk of a heart attack.³²

Web page

General facts about influenza are presented with clear messages that older people, those with heart disease or other chronic conditions, and pregnant women are more likely to be very ill and experience serious complications from influenza. Vaccination is strongly recommended.

News releases

Press releases from the British Heart Foundation reinforce the PHE and NHS messages of the importance of influenza vaccination and warn members about high blood pressure associated with cold weather and the risk of exacerbating a heart condition.^{33,34,35} Featured messages are that influenza contributes to increased winter deaths associated with heart and circulatory diseases and the newly released high-dose vaccine is available to those aged 65 years and over.

Diabetes UK

Guide

In collaboration with the NHS, Diabetes United Kingdom (Diabetes UK) developed a guide with tips on how people with diabetes can stay well in winter. The guide stresses the danger of influenza for people with diabetes and urges them to receive the free vaccination prior to the start of winter.³⁶

Figure 6: Diabetes United Kingdom Guide



Web page

Having the “free flu jab” is one of the 15 health care essentials listed on the website³⁷ which also provides information to families about the importance of vaccination, possible side effects, and what is required after vaccination.⁴⁸

Video

Mr. Dan Howarth from *Diabetes UK* communicates through video messages the importance of the vaccination^{38,39,40} and the fact that influenza infection may dramatically increase blood sugars and the risk of serious short term complications risk, particularly short term complications such as ketoacidosis and the Hyperosmolar Hyperglycaemic State (HHS).













News release

Through various news releases Diabetes UK calls on people with diabetes to be vaccinated and shares information that the influenza infection can destabilize blood sugar levels, and increase the risk of developing serious complications, such as stroke and kidney disease.^{41,42}

Case stories

The life-threatening consequences of influenza to those with diabetes is vividly portrayed through case stories. For example, a gentleman (Steve) diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes was hospitalized with influenza, while⁴³ Simon, a young man living with undiagnosed Type 1 diabetes developed diabetic Ketacidosis (DKA) due to influenza and died soon after.⁴⁴

Status of National Influenza Vaccination Campaign

Comprehensive policies and programs	Influenza vaccination is recommended by government and advisory bodies for at-risk populations including older adults and people with chronic diseases	
	Influenza vaccination is funded under the National Immunization Program (NIP) and administered through the state program for at-risk populations including older adults and people with chronic disease	
Clear communication strategy	Published context-specific communication strategy and action plan which defines communication goals, target audiences, expected roles of partner organizations, communication tools and timeline	
Well-defined audience	Universal message distributed to undifferentiated populations (general audiences regardless of age and underlying health condition)	
	Dedicated and tailored information for specific at-risk audience	
Multiple tools and channels	Online communication such as web content, digital technology, social media, online publications, email	
	Messages are disseminated offline by TV, radio, printout (e.g. leaflet, poster, brochure, outdoor ads)	
	Interactive communication including individual consultation, street campaign and face-to-face mobilization	
Realistic timeline	Timely flu season alert and vaccination reminder	
	National/regional events scheduled for intensive awareness campaign such as national vaccination day/week/month	
Regular updates of information	Information is updated on a regular basis to reflect the most recent evidence and policy, such as recommending newly licensed vaccines for specific recipient	
Engagement and support of civil society	Communication on influenza by patient associations, ageing organizations and advocacy groups	

 Well-developed
  Partially developed
  Not yet developed / No evidence

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