

Don't put off the flu vaccination – it's free because you need it

Flu vaccination is part of the Stay Well This Winter campaign, a joint initiative from NHS England and Public Health England, supported by Kent County Council, to help the public ward off common winter illnesses.

Flu is a highly infectious disease and can lead to serious complications if you have a long-term health condition like COPD; bronchitis, emphysema; diabetes; heart, kidney or liver disease or have suffered a stroke, flu on top of health conditions like these can easily develop into something very serious and could land you in hospital. People with these and other long-term health conditions are eligible for a free flu jab through their GP or pharmacist.

Pregnant women, children aged two and three, as well as school children from reception class through to year five, are also eligible for the free flu vaccine. For eligible children, the flu vaccine is not an injection, just a quick nasal spray.

Kent County Council's Director of Public Health, Andrew Scott-Clark said: "Flu can be horrible for little children, and if they get it, they can spread it around the whole family. Children who get the flu have the same symptoms as adults – including fever, chills, aching muscles, headache, stuffy nose, dry cough and sore throat. Some children develop a very high fever or complications of flu, such as bronchitis or pneumonia and may need hospital treatment. The flu vaccine can help protect you from flu and also reduce the chance of flu spreading to others."

If you have a child aged two or three, get them vaccinated against flu with the free nasal spray flu vaccine from your GP. School children from reception class through to year five will get their vaccinations through their school.

Pregnancy naturally weakens the body's immune system and as flu can cause serious complications for you and your baby, pregnant women who get the flu may be less able to fight off infections, increasing the risk of becoming ill. The flu jab is the safest way to protect you and your baby against flu and you can have it at any stage of pregnancy, however fit and healthy you might feel.

Over the coming weeks, KCC social care workers will also be have the flu vaccine. KCC Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, Graham Gibbens, has taken up his invite for the flu jab. He said: "To ensure robust protection across the community, the flu vaccination will be offered to frontline health and social care workers including those caring for patients in nursing and residential care homes.

"This invite is also going out to health and social care workers offering direct patient care in the voluntary managed hospice sector, as well as clients living in long-stay residential care homes or other long-stay care facilities where rapid spread of infection is likely. If you are eligible for the flu vaccine get it now – it's free because you need it. Contact your GP, pharmacist or midwife to the get the For more information, visit www.nhs.uk/staywell and www.kent.gov.uk/winterhealth