

From the Chief Medical Officer
Dr Michael McBride



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

HSS(MD)1/2018

For Action:

Chief Executives of HSC Trusts
GP Medical Advisers, Health and Social Care Board
All General Practitioners and GP Locums (*for onward distribution to practice staff*)

Director of Pharmacy and Medicines Management,
Health and Social Care Board

Assistant Director of Pharmacy and Medicines
Management, Health and Social Care Board (*for onward distribution to Community Pharmacies*)

Directors of Children's Services/Social Services, HSC
Trusts

All General Dental Practitioners (*for onward distribution to practice staff*)

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Our Ref: HSS(MD)1/2018

Date: 15 January 2018

Dear Colleague

FLU VACCINATION FOR STAFF

Further to our letter of 6 October, we are writing to ask you to make sure you take up the offer of vaccination if you have not done so already. As you will be aware from your daily practice, Health and Social Care is under considerable pressure this winter. Substantial levels of seasonal influenza have placed further strain on primary and secondary care, and hospitalisations and intensive care admissions have increased. As flu is unpredictable, it is not possible to know when levels will peak this season and we are writing for your support in reducing flu levels to help address the challenge this poses to the health system.

Flu can have serious and even fatal consequences, especially for vulnerable patients and the elderly. Although flu can produce severe symptoms which prevent the individual from working as normal, the range of illness is very broad with perhaps 30% of infections being asymptomatic and a similar proportion with only mild respiratory symptoms. Such individuals, with mild or no symptoms, can still pass on the virus to vulnerable people they come into contact with. This is why vaccination of healthcare workers is a critical part of our flu prevention strategy and helps to ensure the well-being of our most vulnerable patients.

Vaccination uptake up to 30 November 2017 shows 29.6% of frontline health care workers were vaccinated, compared to 23.9% at the same period last year, with significant improvements in some trusts and staff groupings. It is very encouraging to see uptake improving; however, there remains considerable room for improvement. It is crucial we maintain the momentum and strive for higher uptake across all HSC Trusts – **it is not too late to get vaccinated and make a difference.**

Healthcare workers have an important role to play in protecting the health of the public – particularly at a time of year when there is increased pressure on the health service. By being vaccinated yourself, and endorsing flu vaccination amongst colleagues and high risk groups in the community, you will help increase uptake rates and protect patients. You can also use this opportunity to challenge some of the commonly held misconceptions about the vaccine. Flu-related staff sickness absence can significantly affect the ability to deliver services safely and effectively. You may be aware of a recent publication suggesting that a 10% increase in staff vaccination reduces healthcare worker sickness absence by about 10%¹. Getting vaccinated is one of the simplest ways of protecting yourself, your patients and your family from flu.

This year three strains of circulating flu virus have generally been identified, influenza A/H1N1, influenza A/H3N2 and influenza B of the Yamagata lineage. All appear well matched against the quadrivalent vaccine and both the influenza A strains appear well matched against the trivalent vaccines in use this season.

It remains the case that flu vaccine is still the best defence we have against the spread of flu and it is not too late to get vaccinated if you have not already. **We have a shared professional responsibility as healthcare workers to take appropriate steps to protect our patients – including getting vaccinated.**

For more information about the national seasonal flu campaign in Northern Ireland visit www.publichealth.hscni.net/directorate-public-health/health-protection/influenza

For more information on the frontline healthcare worker flu campaign visit the Flu Fighters campaign that is being delivered in Northern Ireland this year www.nhsemployers.org/flumatters

Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely



Dr Michael McBride
Chief Medical Officer



Professor Charlotte McArdle
Chief Nursing Officer



Dr Mark Timoney
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer



Mr Simon Reid
Chief Dental Officer



Mr Sean Holland
Chief Social Work Officer

This letter is available on the Department of Health website at <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/professional-medical-and-environmental-health-advice/hssmd-letters-and-urgent-communications>

¹ <http://www.clinmed.rcpjjournal.org/content/17/6/484.full>

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