

Community Pharmacy Living Well Campaign

HSC Public Health
Agency

HSC Health and
Social Care

October 2026

'Stay well this winter' campaign briefing

The 'Stay well this winter' campaign aims to help the public prepare for the winter months by encouraging them to take actions to protect their health. The campaign will run during October and November 2026.

Campaign overview

During winter a number of respiratory viruses circulate, which increases pressure on our health service. Older people and those with long-term health conditions such as heart or kidney disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (including emphysema and chronic bronchitis), asthma or diabetes are particularly vulnerable.

The 'Stay well this winter' campaign aims to help the public prepare for the winter months by encouraging them to plan ahead and to take actions to protect themselves and to stay well. This will help reduce pressure on the health service.

Target audience

All adults, especially those aged 65 or older, people with underlying health conditions, pregnant women, parents and guardians.

Key messages

- Self-care is often the best way to treat minor illnesses.
 - Pharmacists are qualified to give advice about different health matters, including minor illnesses, so consider speaking to a pharmacist before going to your GP.
 - If you are feeling unwell, antibiotics are not always needed. You should take your GP or pharmacist's advice and only take antibiotics when you need them.
 - Washing your hands with soap and water is one of the easiest ways to protect yourself and others from catching many viruses.
 - It's important to keep warm in winter – both inside and outdoors.
 - Regular exercise can help improve your physical and mental health, reduce the risk of falls and can be beneficial for recovery if you do get ill.
 - Look out for others such as older family members, friends or neighbours, who may need a bit of extra help over the winter.
 - Be aware of the signs of serious illness and seek medical advice urgently.
- If you are eligible for the free flu, COVID-19, Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) and/or pneumococcal vaccine/s because you are at greater risk of serious illness from these viruses, it's best to get vaccinated ahead of the winter months. Getting vaccinated against these viruses is the most important thing you can do to reduce your chances of getting seriously ill.



Campaign materials

Copies of the following materials are enclosed:

1 x A1 poster

You can help yourself stay well this winter



1 x A3 poster

You can help yourself stay well this winter



1 x A3 poster

Your pharmacist can help you stay well this winter



A5 leaflet

Stay well this winter

Pharmacies should display the posters and leaflets in the pharmacy within a designated health promotion display area. Posters can be rotated over the two month period, but if space permits within the pharmacy all posters may be displayed at the same time. Pharmacies must show a poster in at least one window unit for the full duration of the campaign.

Social media

For pharmacies using social media channels, there is an opportunity to let followers know the pharmacy is involved in the campaign and to promote the campaign messages. Please share the Public Health Agency's (PHA's) posts or create your own posts and tag the PHA, Health and Social Care NI, Community Pharmacy NI and the Northern Ireland Centre for Pharmacy Learning & Development (NICPLD) in your posts. Please include the hashtags #LivingWell and #StayWellThisWinter on social media posts for this campaign.



X:

@publichealthni
@HSC_NI
@compharmacyni
@NICPLD1



Facebook:

@publichealthagency
@healthandsocialcareni
@communitypharmacyni
@NICPLD



Instagram:

@publichealthni
@health_and_social_care
@compharmacyni
@NICPLD1

All Living Well materials to support this campaign can be found at <https://bso.hscni.net/living-well>

Suggested campaign activities

Use the campaign leaflet to highlight the key messages

The leaflet can be handed out to those attending the pharmacy, with prescriptions, and to people buying over-the-counter medicines or enquiring about medicines for common winter ailments.

Educate patients on self-care

Promote self-care to patients, giving them the confidence to treat themselves at home. It is important patients are aware of the duration of their illness and when to seek help if their condition does not improve. Factsheets on lots of common winter illnesses are available at www.selfcareforum.org/fact-sheets. You may wish to print these out and give them to patients.

Promote winter vaccines to those who are eligible

Encourage people who are eligible for winter vaccines, especially the flu and COVID-19 vaccines, to get vaccinated. Advise if the pharmacy provides the vaccine/s and explain to patients how they can book an appointment.

Promote World AMR Awareness Week

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is one of the biggest threats facing us today. World AMR Awareness Week (WAAW) runs from 18 to 24 November 2026 and is a good opportunity to remind the public of the simple steps they can take to keep antibiotics working.

- Most simple infections clear up on their own. Ask your pharmacist about over-the-counter medicines to help you to manage symptoms.
- Take your doctor's advice and don't expect to receive antibiotics for minor ailments and common infections.

- Taking antibiotics when you don't need them can reduce their effectiveness over time. This is called antimicrobial resistance (AMR). This means that antibiotics may not work when you really need them, putting you and your family at risk of a more severe or longer illness. In the same way that we can spread infections, resistant bacteria can spread to others, including family members and loved ones.
- If your GP prescribes an antibiotic make sure you take it according to their instructions.
- Return any unused antibiotics to your local pharmacy.
- Never share antibiotics with anyone else, including pets.
- Don't take antibiotics that haven't been prescribed for you.
- Regularly wash your hands and keep up to date with vaccinations to help prevent infections.



Encourage patients to become an Antibiotic Guardian by making a simple pledge about how they'll make better use of antibiotics at www.antibioticguardian.com. You may also wish to appoint a staff member to be the Antibiotic Guardian for your pharmacy.

Set up a visual display

You may wish to run an in-store demonstration for good hand hygiene. The leaflet *Hand hygiene* provides helpful advice and a walk-through example of hand hygiene. The leaflet is available at www.pha.site/hand-hygiene

Training and professional development

NICPLD has a number of e-learning courses available at www.nicpld.org/url/elearning

- Ears, eyes and oral health under the Minor Ailments section.
- Respiratory under the Minor Ailments section.
- Common infections under the Antimicrobials section.

Further support and signposting

Treat Antibiotics Responsibly, Guidance, Education and Tools (TARGET) has a useful toolkit produced by the UK Health Security Agency in collaboration with the Royal College of General Practitioners. It includes resources that can be used to support prescribers and patients with responsible antibiotic use as well as self-care information. It can be accessed at <https://elearning.rcgp.org.uk/course/view.php?id=553>

Questions and answers

Q: I am eligible for the flu and/or COVID-19 vaccine/s. I've had the vaccine/s before. Why do I need to get it/them again?

A: It's important to get the flu and/or COVID-19 vaccine/s if you are eligible because viruses change and protection fades over time. Getting the vaccine/s will top up your protection.

Q: Why am I no longer eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine?

A: COVID-19 is now a relatively mild disease for most people. Adults aged 75 years and over, all residents in a care home for older adults and people with a weakened immune system are at greater risk of serious illness from COVID-19 and are being offered the vaccine.

Q: I heard the flu/COVID-19 vaccine/s can give you flu/COVID-19. Is that true?

A: No. The flu/COVID-19 vaccine/s cannot give you flu/COVID-19 infections.

Q: Is it safe to get both the flu and COVID-19 vaccines at the same time?

A: Yes. It is safe to get both vaccines in a single appointment and getting them together will not lessen the efficacy of either vaccine. You'll get the same level of protection that you would from getting the vaccines in two separate appointments.

Q: I heard the flu vaccine protects you from getting COVID-19. Is that true?

A: No. The flu vaccine only protects against flu. It does not protect you against COVID-19. If you are eligible for the flu and COVID-19 vaccines, getting both will offer you the best protection.

Q: Can you still catch flu/COVID-19 after getting the vaccine/s?

A: Yes. No vaccine is 100% effective. Some people may get flu/COVID-19 even if they have been vaccinated, but it is likely to be a milder infection than if they had not been vaccinated.

Q: I have recently had flu/COVID-19. Should I still get the vaccine?

A: Even if you think you have had flu or COVID-19, getting the vaccine can still help protect you. It is best to wait until you feel well before receiving the vaccine. You should not attend a vaccine appointment if you think you could be infectious to others.

Q: I spoke to my GP as I have a cold but I didn't get an antibiotic. Why not?

A: Antibiotics do not treat viral infections. Colds and flu are caused by viruses. The campaign leaflet shows how long common illnesses could last up to and provides advice as to when you should seek help, if your symptoms do not improve with self-care.

Signposting for patients

- For flu and COVID-19 vaccination programmes, visit www.nidirect.gov.uk/flu-vaccine and www.nidirect.gov.uk/covid-vaccine
- For the RSV vaccine, visit www.nidirect.gov.uk/rsv-older-adult or www.nidirect.gov.uk/rsv-pregnancy
- For the pneumococcal vaccine, visit www.nidirect.gov.uk/conditions/pneumonia
- Leaflets on vaccines can be found by searching the Publications section of the PHA website. See www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications
- For antimicrobial resistance and antibiotic use, visit www.nidirect.gov.uk/antibiotic-resistance



Public Health
Agency

Public Health Agency

12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS.
Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).
www.publichealth.hscni.net

Find us on:

