

# Reflections and Recommendation Early Flu Communication

September 2020

Healthwatch in Sussex has provided insight to the Sussex Integrated Care System (ICS), through various winter planning discussions, on this year's local communication about flu vaccines, having listened to residents. We have provided this through winter planning workshops, in direct conversations with system leaders and via written communication.

Here we reflect on what could be done to support more people to get this important protection.

## Context

General Practices (GPs) and Community Pharmacies are well versed in communicating and running the flu vaccine programme, having refined this over recent years. Many enlist the support of their Patient Participant Groups (PPGs) in this process.



This year, **fear and changing community practices has brought a new dimension** to this. Added to which, the Government's announcement in July that more people will be offered the flu vaccine has meant **GPs and Pharmacies have increased demand and new cohorts of people to communicate with.**

## Reflections

- It is unclear from the examples of patient communication we've seen (letters/text messages/websites - see **examples**) and conversations with residents, that Sussex GPs have recognised people's concerns about whether accessing a flu clinic is safe.

This is an obvious fear when all people have to go on is potentially their experience of crowded clinics.

- Frontline staff don't appear to have the current information and understanding they need to support patients and public health/NHS to deliver on the ambition of making every patient interaction count, to ensure people most in need of the vaccine have it.

- Having a communication toolkit is useful but has come after local general practices have already sent out letters/texts etc to patients. This suggests a huge missed opportunity to align and strengthen the messages being offered to local people.

We've seen examples of really good public/patient communications that appeared at the end of August - which we know is when many of our general practices sent out their communication to patients.

- Whilst we've been involved in many workshops and conversations it has not been clear that there is a Sussex Health & Care Partnership strategic message that has been shared and agreed by all partners.

We have heard duplication of conversations and a warning that local groups/community representatives or ambassadors may switch off if they are asked to have the same conversations again - as they may feel they are not being listened too (because professionals have come back again to ask the same questions).

- We've not been able to see how community pharmacy representatives have been included in local discussions, and understand there is more integration in other parts of England.
- Community Pharmacist's deliver a small part of the annual flu vaccines but do have a role in picking up people who otherwise may be left behind. This year, they may be viewed as a *safer* environment for people to visit than a GP surgery during the pandemic. Particularly, for those who may have visited a pharmacy but not a surgery more recently. They may also be seen as having been open throughout the Lockdown and are recognisably still open.

## Recommendations

- As an integrated care system: public health, local authority community teams and the NHS specialists need to have a strategy and be clear on responsibilities to avoid duplication and the risk of disengaging local communities.
- System-wide communication with primary care (general practice and community pharmacies) needs to occur before they seek to roll out their own messages or the process of delivering initiatives commences. This should enable the delivery of shared clear messages that enable patients to make informed decisions and take proactive action.
- Use patient feedback to reassure others that this year's flu clinics are safe - examples are available. May also want to video one.
- Supporting frontline staff, particularly reception teams in general practice, to understand the importance of making the most of interactions to make it easy for vulnerable patients to have the vaccine when they are already accessing a service. Key is that they know leadership wants them to work flexibly around internal processes to achieve this ambition.

## Examples

### Northern GP practice patient letter - with no information about the process

Dear Parent or Guardian

#### **Annual Seasonal Flu Vaccination**

Medical Group has now started our annual flu vaccinations and your child has been identified as being in an at risk group and therefore are eligible to receive the free nasal flu vaccination.

**Please contact the surgery at either of the above numbers to make an appointment in a vaccination clinic.**

Please ensure that only one parent or guardian attends the appointment with your child.

If they have already had the vaccination or have booked an appointment, please ignore this letter.

If you do not wish your child to have a flu vaccination this year, please complete the slip below and return to the surgery and your records will be updated accordingly.

Please note that if the parent or legal guardian is not bringing the child to the flu appointment then we will require their written consent to give the vaccination.

Kind regards,

Practice Manager

✂ \_\_\_\_\_

I do not wish to have the Flu Vaccination during your campaign

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Patient Reference: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

### Chats with receptionists when trying to book vaccination appointment

Parent called and spoke to surgery's receptionist who was very pleasant and easy to talk too. However, they clearly did not know school years and the children's ages, e.g. that a 12 year old (Year 8 student) was outside the extended age range - now up to Year 7 for school vaccines. They asked *why are you calling the surgery and not getting this done at school?*

Rural, older patient had a face-to-face appointment at the surgery and asked the receptionist if they could book a flu vaccine appointment. They were told no, that they would have to phone the surgery when they got home to book. They mentioned this to the nurse and the nurse gave them the injection there and then.



## Coastal GP practice - only flu information found on website

[Home](#) [News](#) [Opening Times](#) [Prescriptions](#) [Appointments](#) [New Patients](#) [Services](#) [Staff](#) [Contact Details](#)

**Child Health Checks & Immunisations**

Our doctors and health visitors offer health checks and the practice nurses give immunisations. Your child will be sent an appointment by the surgery.

**Health Visitors**

A health visitor is a registered nurse who has received training particularly related to babies, children and pregnant women. Their role is to provide families with children under five years old with support and advice around the general aspects of mental, physical and social wellbeing. They are now situated at Angmerling Medical Centre 01903 775758.

**Flu Vaccines**

Did you know you are entitled to a free flu vaccination if you have any of the following chronic conditions?

- Respiratory Disease
- Heart Disease
- Kidney Disease
- Liver Disease
- Neurological Disease
- Diabetes
- Immunosuppression (Including asplenia)

Or you are:


- Over 65
- Pregnant
- Carer

Please ask at reception for an appointment.

**Pneumococcal Vaccines**

Pneumococcal Vaccinations Patients over 65 or those deemed to be at risk will be invited to receive this vaccination to protect them from pneumonia.

[Have your say](#)



## Northern GP practice - flu information on website

Crawley

### Book Your Flu Jab

You can get your annual flu jab at our surgery, quickly, easily and for free under the NHS.

The flu vaccination is available to help protect adults and children at risk of flu.

Flu is not nice to have, but if you are otherwise healthy it will usually clear up on its own within a week.

However, flu can be more severe in certain people, such as:

- ▶ Anyone aged 65 and over
- ▶ Pregnant women
- ▶ Children and adults with an underlying health condition (particularly long-term heart or respiratory disease)
- ▶ Children and adults with weakened immune systems

Anyone in these risk groups is more likely to develop potentially serious complications of flu, such as pneumonia (a lung infection), so it's recommended that they have a flu vaccine every year to protect them.

The flu vaccine is offered free on the NHS annually to:

- ▶ Adults over the age of 18 at risk of flu (including everyone aged 65 and over)
- ▶ Pregnant women
- ▶ Children aged six months to two years at risk of flu
- ▶ Carers

**65 and overs and the flu vaccine:**

You are eligible for the flu vaccine this year (2018/19) if you will be aged 65 and over March 31 2019 – that is, you were born on or before March 31 1954. So, if you are currently 64 but will be 65 on March 31 2019, you do qualify.

**Booking:**

If you fall in the categories above, you are entitled to a free flu jab. To book in a vaccination please ring the surgery or Request a Routine Appointment through the [website](#).

More information about the flu vaccination can be found on the [NHS Website](#).

