

8 November 2012

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Dr Jane Anderson  
Chair  
British HIV Association

Sent by email: [janderson@nhs.net](mailto:janderson@nhs.net)

Dear Jane

**Re: Seasonal flu vaccination for people with underlying health conditions**

I am writing to thank you for your support for the seasonal flu vaccine programme last year and to ask for your help again this year to increase the uptake of flu vaccine amongst people at risk.

For otherwise healthy individuals, flu is an unpleasant but self-limiting disease with recovery usually within two to seven days. The risk of serious illness from flu and consequent hospitalisation and death is higher among those with underlying health conditions such as a suppressed immune system. The Health Protection Agency found that people with immunosuppression are approximately 47 times more likely to die if they develop flu than individuals with no underlying health conditions.

People with clinical risk factors are eligible to receive the seasonal flu vaccine free each winter, however awareness amongst these groups regarding the possible risks of flu and the benefits of getting vaccinated is often low. Last year, only 52% of people in clinical risk groups, and specifically 54.7% of people with immunosuppression, received the flu vaccine. Thanks to your efforts, this signifies a slight increase from the previous year; however, I believe that uptake rates should still be much higher.

This year, we are hoping that 70% of people with underlying health conditions will get vaccinated. Although it is still early in the flu season, we can see that so far there has been little improvement in uptake in clinical at risk groups and that we are still not on track to meet our goal of getting many more people protected. An initial lag in uptake may partly be due to some general practices facing supply problems.

However, these have now been resolved so it is very important that as many individuals as possible who have a suppressed immune system are vaccinated to ensure that they are protected against flu.

This is where I need your support again this year. I want to see more people who are vulnerable to flu receiving the vaccine so that we prevent more cases of serious illness and death. I would be very grateful if you would alert your members to the increased risk that seasonal flu poses to them and inform them about the free vaccination that is on offer.

This month we are following up NHS publicity campaigns with further reminders in the media and online for people in the clinical at risk groups to contact their GP about getting the vaccination as soon as possible. We would appreciate your support to reinforce these messages to your members.

Please do let me know if you need any further information on seasonal flu vaccination.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sally C Davies', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**PROFESSOR DAME SALLY C DAVIES  
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER  
CHIEF SCIENTIFIC ADVISER**