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|  | News Release |

WEDNESDAY 16 OCTOBER 2024

**UKHSA urges eligible West Midlands people celebrating Diwali to prioritise flu and COVID-19 vaccination**

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is urging all eligible people West Midlands people preparing for Diwali to get their flu and COVID-19 vaccination, to ensure a safe and healthy celebration. The vaccines take up to two weeks to build immunity for maximum protection, so getting vaccinated early will help lower the risk of severe illness in time for Diwali.

**Jasvir Kaur Bal, Health Protection Practitioner with UKHSA West Midlands, said:** “The Diwali season is a time when Hindus, Sikhs and Jains come together with family and friends to celebrate over five days, with feasting and exchanging of gifts. As Diwali occurs in October or November, this coincides with the winter sickness season – when we typically see cases of flu and COVID-19 increasing. That’s why we’re urging everyone celebrating Diwali who is eligible for their flu and Covid vaccines to prioritise their health and *‘get winter strong’*.

“People over 65 years, pregnant women, those with certain health conditions, those who are carers or living with immunocompromised people, and children are all eligible to get the flu vaccine.

"Every winter, thousands of children are hospitalised due to flu, but this is easily prevented by a painless nasal spray vaccination. Younger children aged two and three years can get this vaccine from their GP, and school-aged children can get it at school with parental consent. The vaccine helps protect your child from flu as well as stopping them spreading the virus to those more vulnerable around them, like grandparents. Children who cannot have the nasal spray for medical or faith reasons should request an injected flu vaccine instead. Make sure you and your loved ones have a blessed, healthy and prosperous Diwali by getting your winter vaccines.”

Flu and COVID-19 spread more easily indoors and in the winter months when we socialise more inside, we see cases increase. Getting your flu and COVID-19 jabs as soon as possible will help keep your Diwali celebrations on track, whether you're sharing meals, exchanging gifts or lighting lamps with friends and family.

While you may still get a bout of flu or COVID, the vaccines provide the best protection, making the illness less severe and reducing the risk of having to be hospitalised. In addition, they will also help reduce the chances of spreading these infections to those around you.

Those aged 65 and over, pregnant women, and people with certain long-term health conditions, conditions like diabetes or cardiovascular disease are eligible for both vaccines free from the NHS.

Pregnant women and older people aged 75-79 are also eligible for a [RSV vaccination](https://www.nhs.uk/vaccinations/rsv-vaccine/) for the first time this year, with the maternal vaccine not only protecting the mother but passing protection through the placenta for newborns in their first few months, when they are most at risk of severe illness from RSV.

Each winter, thousands of children are hospitalised, with children under the age of 5 years having one of the highest rates of hospital admissions due to flu compared to other age groups. By getting vaccinated, your child not only protects themselves, but also those more vulnerable around them, including babies, grandparents, and people with weakened immune systems.

Children are also eligible for a free flu vaccine and are advised to take up the vaccine ahead of the festivities.

Parents of school-aged children are urged to ensure their children’s school vaccination consent forms are completed, and that eligible pre-schoolers, 2-and-3-year-olds, are booked for an appointment at their GP practice. Children in Reception to Year 11 will be offered the free nasal spray flu vaccine, delivered in schools by immunisation teams up and down the country.

Children aged 2 and 3 (on or before 31 August) are eligible for the free nose spray via their GP practice. And any child aged 6 months or over who has a health condition that puts them at increased risk from flu should have a vaccine every year. Children who can’t have the nose spray for medical or faith reasons should request an injected flu vaccine instead.

**Kirit Mistry, Founder of South Asian Health Action, said:** "As we prepare to celebrate the Festival of Lights, it's important to prioritise our health and well-being, especially with the winter months ahead. Vaccination remains one of the most effective ways to stay healthy as we come together to spend time with families and friends.

"Vaccinations not only keep us safe from serious illness but also help ensure a joyful and sickness-free Diwali. Let's come together, stay healthy, and celebrate this festival of lights with peace of mind."

Anyone eligible can now book their COVID-19 and flu vaccinations via the NHS website, by downloading the NHS App, or by calling 119 for free if they can’t get online. For their RSV jab, pregnant women and older adults should speak to their maternity service or GP practice to arrange.

Every year the World Health Organization recommends which strains should be included in the flu vaccine, with the UKHSA contributing to this work. Vaccines are then developed to help fight off the types of flu viruses expected to be circulating in the coming season. As the viruses can change every year, and protection from the vaccine reduces over time, it is important those eligible get a vaccine every year.

**For more information contact UKHSA West Midlands press office on 0121 232 9223/4 Out Of Hours 07834 311 393**

**Notes to Editors**

1. **For more information on winter vaccinations and how to book:**

[www.nhs.uk/wintervaccinations](http://www.nhs.uk/wintervaccinations)

**How to book**

Anyone eligible can book their COVID-19 and flu vaccinations via the NHS website, by downloading the NHS App, or by calling 119 for free if they can’t get online.

1. **Who is eligible for COVID-19 and flu vaccine this winter:**

Based on the [latest scientific evidence](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Ftracking.vuelio.co.uk%2Ftracking%2Fclick%3Fd%3DTByJ2Zjtya9uG6tOib9zvqOvXIOUJEuqJnmjcJl1UqfKJ62D0QA1M3w_Qd18nD_2YPxrJtrcroD80C9BVclcVe9ucDRpjD6AJ1P9II-MI-7yxu1VRQUbHrOhmn7SBq7Tf-5wrpIga4Muxw5AcX7pz0DenDLOkseNiGDm5ZS-mHS6JbvaVpzvntnq8gQmrLyKHAP4B_6BvoOgRCT2gfKzjJHB1iWdnpCLkQ5z1M3GPVzeylc02FXGdJbk_zqtdVYVlEq8O6Dg9FQCKP2ihAnNNYNph5LM37c3nx051go0rFJPbzJr0x3klBSxE_SoQbzyPKqEQ086IZ23MYZNDkRhKD7li1-ncEv4RvVdEx1rHA4orvyff74zDgB_WUbBUnO8wR9YkSK82WO5MD1xSh0DrXo5tBOOEVZClK2hNUrtvlXGHnLYXXfNfFEL6ZuQp3rAVKskwLrssZggb6SFpDLZwJk4iUfSKWF5u5UR1dx1i9754yfm7NYsqj9OfhL2bR42HOhj77r82fjhKTXf7Lp38E3i8PKhh_KA7PDgQ8WabuYMn2gSWFa468aDAg63yjgFKSkWIQKQ5JiHY6vCZkc3RPb3zPqrFqG_4cDoejDRKSWrYlLp8XyNAxYfJC-xGoBP1e05ye4xaPHmtlC24ccZ8y6CSPrXlEy-zaPvk6kCGu5jsLwizCcUBpESDIy9BF41Eo2dqIJWLEsr0g1RcpFnlEbpC7fGGNnSr04oXCElaStGXcXAVwKzsLm286ED7pUpQ9ySbyF8zhcT1NzTW78NU4PDd9XG6lqjpc6YTz5BRTWDL7xYVlixloXM6ZEcQ8XziF18C1TUXDzEj4F97AqQFX4qCD0elOewV4yg67oJQmjREPtoIwrD_3lU4K5q8l_Q5TK-PnIHaR-hWnsGbHvVWOMGj7WG6qc4wk0NzuCm6qNc0&data=05%7C02%7CShaun.Whelan%40ukhsa.gov.uk%7C38588278fb064392b83408dcd980472e%7Cee4e14994a354b2ead475f3cf9de8666%7C0%7C0%7C638624392244470440%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=sgIqf2KSIa5T4Gge9s5en%2Fm6knW8poNNA4yRJdZavjg%3D&reserved=0), the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) recommended:

* adults aged 65 and over, residents in older adult care homes and those with long-term health conditions aged 6 months to 64 years will be eligible for flu and COVID-19 vaccinations.
* Pregnant women are also eligible for COVID-19 and flu vaccines.
* The flu vaccine is also offered to 2-and-3-year-olds and school children.
* The Government has also decided that, as in previous years, the COVID-19 and flu vaccines will be offered to frontline health and social care staff, with staff in older adult care homes being offered the COVID-19 vaccine.

1. **RSV vaccine – who is eligible**

The RSV vaccine is recommended for:

* Pregnant women – the vaccine is recommended during every pregnancy (from 28 weeks onwards) to help protect your baby after they're born.
* If you're aged 75 to 79 years.
* If you turned 80 on or after 1 September 2024, you're eligible for the RSV vaccine until 31 August 2025.
* Those who have already turned 80 before 1 September 2024 are not eligible. The RSV programme is offered to those most at risk when they need it. As we age our immune system does not work as well and that is why the RSV vaccine is not offered to those already 80 years of age or older.

1. **Leaflets for eligible groups available:**

**Flu:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flu-vaccination-who-should-have-it-this-winter-and-why>

**COVID-19:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-autumn-booster-resources>

**RSV Older Adults:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv-vaccination-for-older-adults>

**RSV Maternal:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/respiratory-syncytial-virus-rsv-maternal-vaccination>

1. **Data:**

**Latest data on flu vaccine uptake nationally and locally:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/vaccine-uptake#seasonal-flu-vaccine-uptake:-figures>

**Surveillance of influenza and other seasonal respiratory viruses in the UK winter 2023 to 2024:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/surveillance-of-influenza-and-other-seasonal-respiratory-viruses-in-the-uk-winter-2023-to-2024/surveillance-of-influenza-and-other-seasonal-respiratory-viruses-in-the-uk-winter-2023-to-2024>

**Surveillance of influenza and other seasonal respiratory viruses in the UK winter 2022 to 2023:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/annual-flu-reports/surveillance-of-influenza-and-other-seasonal-respiratory-viruses-in-the-uk-winter-2022-to-2023>

1. The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is responsible for protecting every member of every community from the impact of infectious diseases, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear incidents and other health threats. We provide intellectual, scientific and operational leadership at national and local level, as well as on the global stage, to make the nation’s health secure. UKHSA is an executive agency, sponsored by the [Department of Health and Social Care](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health-and-social-care).

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