# Flu vaccine uptake plummets among NHS frontline staff amid Covid vaccine fatigue



Frontline NHS staff are increasingly reluctant to receive the seasonal flu vaccine, with reports indicating that nearly nine out of ten workers at one of England's largest hospital trusts remained unvaccinated last winter. This trend is alarming, given that flu is one of the UK's leading viral killers. According to the UK Health Security Agency, the country has seen at least 18,000 deaths attributed to flu-related complications over the past two years, exacerbated by a decline in vaccination uptake within the general public.

The context for this vaccine hesitancy can be traced back to the series of contentious debates during the Covid pandemic, where the government pushed for mandatory vaccinations for all frontline healthcare workers. This initiative drew significant opposition from organisations such as the British Medical Association, leading to its eventual retraction. The aftermath of this campaign appears to have fostered an environment of what experts describe as "vaccine fatigue," which has now extended beyond Covid-19 to the flu vaccine.

Barts Health Trust, which employs over 18,750 staff across six hospitals in East London, has seen dismal figures, with only 12.9% of frontline staff opting for the flu jab. Speaking to The Times, a senior consultant at the trust expressed dismay at the low uptake, advocating for management to proactively engage with staff to understand the reasons behind their reluctance. They emphasised the need for a targeted strategy during the off-season to address concerns and improve vaccination numbers, rather than merely repeating the same approach in subsequent winters.

Government data supports these observations, with a report detailing that median flu vaccine uptake among frontline healthcare workers in England for the winter season 2023 to 2024 fell to just 43%. This represents a considerable decline from previous years, where an uptake of 49.9% was recorded for the 2022 to 2023 season. Such statistics underline the urgent need for heightened vaccination efforts within the healthcare sector, particularly given the ongoing pressures from the NHS and rising demands for care.

Further evidence of this concerning trend comes from Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust in Nottinghamshire, where fewer than three in five workers received the flu vaccine this past winter. Health officials attribute such a decline in part to staff having already been vaccinated multiple times against Covid, leading to a sense of complacency toward flu vaccinations. This phenomenon of declining engagement with vaccinations could pose significant risks, given the vulnerability of populations served by these healthcare professionals.

Outside of hospital settings, the crisis is echoed among staff in adult social care. Reports indicate that as of December 2022, less than one in five workers in older adult care homes received either the autumn booster for Covid or the flu vaccine. Such low vaccination rates are concerning, especially in light of the severe pressures faced within the NHS and growing workforce shortages within the social care sector.

As the healthcare landscape navigates these challenges, the stark decrease in flu vaccine uptake presents not only immediate health risks but also long-term implications for public health strategies and patient care. Addressing the underlying causes of vaccine hesitancy among NHS staff will be critical in ensuring a more robust response to infectious diseases in the future.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2062718/nhs-staff-shun-jabs-covid), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-in-england-winter-season-2023-to-2024/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-in-england-winter-season-2023-to-2024)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2062718/nhs-staff-shun-jabs-covid), [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-68946335), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-in-england-winter-season-2022-to-2023/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-in-england-winter-season-2022-to-2023)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-in-england-winter-season-2023-to-2024/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-in-england-winter-season-2023-to-2024), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-in-england-winter-season-2022-to-2023/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-in-england-winter-season-2022-to-2023), [[5]](https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2023/01/16/less-than-one-in-five-care-staff-vaccinated-against-flu-or-boosted-against-covid-figures-reveal/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-in-england-winter-season-2023-to-2024/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-in-england-winter-season-2023-to-2024), [[6]](https://www.imt.ie/news/uptake-of-flu-vaccine-among-hospital-healthcare-workers-falls-to-just-over-half-05-11-2024/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2023/01/16/less-than-one-in-five-care-staff-vaccinated-against-flu-or-boosted-against-covid-figures-reveal/), [[7]](https://www.hsj.co.uk/workforce/revealed-300000-more-nhs-staff-missing-out-on-flu-jab/7036503.article)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2062718/nhs-staff-shun-jabs-covid> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-in-england-winter-season-2023-to-2024/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-in-england-winter-season-2023-to-2024> - This official UK government report provides detailed statistics on the uptake of the seasonal influenza vaccine among frontline healthcare workers in England for the winter season 2023 to 2024. It highlights a decrease in vaccination rates compared to the previous season, with a median uptake of 43.0% among trusts. The report also presents data on vaccine uptake by staff group and organisation type, underscoring the need for improved vaccination efforts within the healthcare sector.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-68946335> - A BBC News article discusses the decline in flu vaccine uptake among NHS staff at Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust in Nottinghamshire. The report attributes the drop to 'vaccine fatigue,' with fewer than three in five workers receiving the flu vaccine during the winter season. Health bosses suggest that staff having already had multiple jabs is one of the main reasons for the decrease, highlighting a national trend of declining vaccination rates.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-in-england-winter-season-2022-to-2023/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-in-england-winter-season-2022-to-2023> - This UK government report presents statistics on the uptake of the seasonal influenza vaccine among frontline healthcare workers in England for the winter season 2022 to 2023. It reports a vaccine uptake of 49.9% among trusts, a decrease from 60.5% in the previous season. The report also provides data on vaccine uptake by staff group and organisation type, indicating a need for targeted interventions to improve vaccination rates within the healthcare workforce.
5. <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2023/01/16/less-than-one-in-five-care-staff-vaccinated-against-flu-or-boosted-against-covid-figures-reveal/> - An article from Community Care highlights concerning figures regarding vaccination rates among adult social care staff. As of December 2022, less than one in five staff in older adult care homes had received an autumn booster for Covid-19, and only 13.8% had had a flu vaccine for the 2022-23 winter season. The article discusses the implications of these low vaccination rates amid severe pressures on the NHS and significant workforce shortages in social care.
6. <https://www.imt.ie/news/uptake-of-flu-vaccine-among-hospital-healthcare-workers-falls-to-just-over-half-05-11-2024/> - This article reports on a survey revealing that the uptake of the influenza vaccine among hospital healthcare workers fell to just 50.3% in the 2023/24 winter season, down from 54.2% the previous year and 64% in winter 2021/22. The Health Protection Surveillance Centre notes that this decline is part of a downward trend observed since the 2020/2021 season, emphasizing the need for concerted efforts to improve vaccination rates among healthcare workers.
7. <https://www.hsj.co.uk/workforce/revealed-300000-more-nhs-staff-missing-out-on-flu-jab/7036503.article> - An article from the Health Service Journal reveals that approximately 300,000 fewer frontline NHS staff received the winter flu vaccine in the 2023/24 season compared to 2019 and 2020. The analysis highlights significant variations in uptake among different trusts, indicating a concerning trend in declining vaccination rates among NHS staff.