# Flu vaccine uptake among NHS staff falls to record low amid winter crisis



Hospitals faced severe challenges this winter due to a significant decline in flu vaccination rates among frontline NHS workers. Reports indicate that fewer than four in ten staff—only 37 per cent—received the flu vaccine, a stark drop compared to previous years. In some areas, this figure plummeted to as low as 8.8 per cent. With patient groups expressing concern over the ramifications of such low uptake, many have labelled the situation as 'shocking', citing potential risks to vulnerable patients who could be exposed to flu by unvaccinated healthcare workers.

The recent data, revealed in a report by the Liberal Democrats, shows an alarming trend in vaccine uptake among NHS healthcare professionals. When the data collection began in the 2016/17 winter season, 64 per cent of NHS staff participated in the flu vaccination programme, peaking at 76 per cent during the 2020/21 season. This decline of over 26 percentage points to the current record low raises serious questions about safeguarding patient health, particularly as flu cases surged and hospitals declared 'critical incidents' due to overwhelming demand for care.

Professor Sir Stephen Powis, the former national medical director of NHS England, emphasised the importance of vaccination as a protective measure. He noted that the flu vaccine is not only vital for individual health but also essential for reducing the pressure on hospitals during peak winter months. His comments came amidst a backdrop of rising flu cases, which were compounded by unprecedented hospital bed occupancy rates this winter.

Dennis Reed, director of the campaign group Silver Voices, has called for flu vaccination to be made a condition of employment for frontline NHS staff, suggesting that current levels of uptake reflect a troubling level of disregard for patient safety. He asserted that while many NHS staff might personally recover from flu, their patients—especially the elderly and immunocompromised—may not be so fortunate.

Interestingly, the levels of flu vaccine uptake varied widely across different NHS Trusts. For instance, Camden and Islington NHS Trust recorded the lowest uptake, with just 8.8 per cent of its healthcare staff vaccinated. Following closely were Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health Trust and Central and North West London Trust with 9.5 per cent and 15.5 per cent respectively. In fact, 62 of the 184 NHS Trusts that reported data noted that less than a third of their staff opted for the vaccine, highlighting a concerning lack of uniformity in vaccination efforts across the health sector.

The ramifications of this decline are stark, with hospital bed occupancy soaring to 96 per cent at times this year—well above the ‘safe’ threshold of 85 per cent. This spike was partly driven by the number of flu patients occupying hospital beds, further exacerbated by a lack of available community care options. As Helen Morgan, the health and social care spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats, stated, many Accident & Emergency departments were overwhelmed, likening the scene to a 'war zone'.

Efforts to increase vaccination rates are underway, with NHS England reiterating the call for all eligible health and social care workers to prioritise their vaccinations. The health service is ramping up its awareness campaigns to enhance participation in the flu vaccination programme. This is critical, not only for the health and well-being of healthcare workers but also for ensuring the capacity to provide care to patients.

The decline in flu vaccination rates among NHS staff is not an isolated issue, as national reports indicate a persistent downward trend in vaccine uptake across various demographics, including high-risk groups. This pattern underscores the urgent need for comprehensive strategies aimed at bolstering vaccination efforts, especially as the NHS braces for what is likely to be another challenging winter season.

With several initiatives in the pipeline to improve vaccine coverage, the onus is now on both individual healthcare workers and health authorities to reverse this concerning trend. As thickened winter clouds approach, the ability of the NHS to withstand flu season may very much depend on the collective commitment to preventive healthcare measures.

### Reference Map

* Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14719577/record-NHS-staff-shunned-flu-vaccine.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14719577/record-NHS-staff-shunned-flu-vaccine.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-healthcare-workers-winter-season-2023-to-2024/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-in-england-winter-season-2023-to-2024)
* Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14719577/record-NHS-staff-shunned-flu-vaccine.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](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 4: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14719577/record-NHS-staff-shunned-flu-vaccine.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/sep/30/nhs-warns-of-18000-flu-deaths-since-2022-as-it-urges-vaccination-uptake)
* Paragraph 5: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14719577/record-NHS-staff-shunned-flu-vaccine.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.publichealthwales.nhs.wales/topics/immunisation-and-vaccines/fluvaccine/annual-influenza-surveillance-and-influenza-vaccination-uptake-reports/)
* Paragraph 6: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14719577/record-NHS-staff-shunned-flu-vaccine.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.hsj.co.uk/workforce/revealed-300000-more-nhs-staff-missing-out-on-flu-jab/7036503.article)
* Paragraph 7: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14719577/record-NHS-staff-shunned-flu-vaccine.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-68946335)
* Paragraph 8: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14719577/record-NHS-staff-shunned-flu-vaccine.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-healthcare-workers-winter-season-2023-to-2024/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-in-england-winter-season-2023-to-2024)
* Paragraph 9: [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/sep/30/nhs-warns-of-18000-flu-deaths-since-2022-as-it-urges-vaccination-uptake), [[2]](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)
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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14719577/record-NHS-staff-shunned-flu-vaccine.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - 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-2022-to-2023/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-in-england-winter-season-2022-to-2023> - This UK government report details the seasonal influenza vaccine uptake among frontline healthcare workers in England for the 2022-2023 winter season. It highlights a decrease in vaccination rates, with 49.4% of frontline healthcare workers receiving the flu vaccine, down from 60.5% in the previous season. The report also discusses variations in uptake across different NHS trusts and staff groups, emphasizing the need for improved vaccination efforts to protect both healthcare workers and patients.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-healthcare-workers-winter-season-2023-to-2024/seasonal-influenza-vaccine-uptake-in-frontline-healthcare-workers-in-england-winter-season-2023-to-2024> - This UK government report presents data on the seasonal influenza vaccine uptake among frontline healthcare workers in England for the 2023-2024 winter season. It reports a further decline in vaccination rates, with 42.8% of frontline healthcare workers in NHS trusts receiving the flu vaccine, compared to 49.9% in the previous season. The report highlights regional variations and underscores the importance of targeted initiatives to boost vaccine uptake among healthcare staff.
4. <https://www.publichealthwales.nhs.wales/topics/immunisation-and-vaccines/fluvaccine/annual-influenza-surveillance-and-influenza-vaccination-uptake-reports/> - Public Health Wales provides annual reports on influenza surveillance and vaccination uptake. The 2023/24 report indicates that 40.8% of health board and NHS staff received the influenza vaccine, with 40.5% uptake among staff with direct patient contact. The report also presents data on vaccination rates among different age groups and clinical risk categories, highlighting areas for improvement in vaccination coverage.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-68946335> - This BBC News article discusses the decline in flu vaccine uptake among NHS workers at Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust in Nottinghamshire. It attributes the drop to 'vaccine fatigue,' with fewer than 59% of healthcare staff receiving the jab, down from 62% in 2023. Health bosses note that staff having already had multiple jabs is one of the main reasons for the decrease.
6. <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 compared to 2019 and 2020. The analysis highlights significant variations in uptake among different trusts, emphasizing the need for targeted efforts to increase vaccination rates among healthcare workers.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/sep/30/nhs-warns-of-18000-flu-deaths-since-2022-as-it-urges-vaccination-uptake> - The Guardian reports on NHS warnings of nearly 20,000 flu-related deaths since 2022, urging increased vaccination uptake. The article highlights a decline in flu vaccine uptake across all eligible groups, including frontline healthcare workers, and emphasizes the importance of vaccination in protecting vulnerable populations and reducing NHS pressures during winter.