# NHS extends free flu vaccination campaign to combat looming winter surge



As the flu season approaches, public health experts and NHS officials are urging everyone, particularly eligible groups, to get their flu jab promptly to reduce the risk of serious illness. The NHS has extended the availability of free flu vaccinations until the end of March 2026 for various groups, including children, pregnant women, the elderly, and those with underlying health conditions. Medical professionals stress that early vaccination is crucial to ensure protection before the flu virus becomes widespread.

Dr Jeff Foster, medical director at Manual.co, highlights two key reasons for receiving the jab early. Firstly, vaccination provides individual immunity sooner, reducing the likelihood of contracting the flu during the peak season. Secondly, it contributes to herd immunity, making it harder for the virus to circulate and thereby protecting vulnerable people who may not be able to receive the vaccine themselves.

NHS England facilitates easy access to flu vaccinations through multiple channels. Individuals aged 65 and over can book their free flu jab by phone, through their GP surgery, or by arranging an appointment at a local pharmacy via the NHS App or online portals. Pharmacies further enhance convenience by offering walk-in flu vaccinations during the season, starting from 1 October 2025, which supports increased uptake.

The NHS has also ramped up efforts to encourage vaccination among children and pregnant women. Community drop-in clinics and school immunisation teams provide flu jabs to young children, including those aged 2 to 3 years in nurseries, ensuring early protection in these groups. These initiatives reflect a broader strategy to reduce winter illnesses and prevent complications such as pneumonia, which can follow flu infections.

According to official UK government guidance on the national flu immunisation programme for the 2025 to 2026 season, the vaccine eligibility criteria encompass a wide range of individuals: pregnant women, children from 2 years old, school-aged children, older adults, and those in clinical risk groups. The government also emphasizes that the vaccine rollout is designed to provide maximum coverage before flu season intensifies.

Additionally, Healthwatch Westminster advises that carers, care home residents, and people with long-term health conditions should prioritise vaccination. The goal is to minimise flu-related hospitalisations and deaths by vaccinating those most at risk early and effectively.

Overall, the collective message from health authorities and medical experts is clear: getting the flu jab early not only protects individuals but also helps mitigate the spread of the virus in the community. With the NHS making vaccines readily accessible through various convenient options, the hope is to achieve high vaccination rates and reduce the burden of flu and related illnesses over the coming winter months.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/finance/personalfinance/2119086/NHS-flu-jab-pneumonia), [[6]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-flu-immunisation-programme-plan-2025-to-2026/national-flu-immunisation-programme-2025-to-2026-letter)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/finance/personalfinance/2119086/NHS-flu-jab-pneumonia), [[4]](https://www.england.nhs.uk/2025/09/nhs-kicks-off-winter-vaccine-roll-out-with-flu-jabs-for-children-and-pregnant-women/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/booking-your-nhs-winter-flu-vaccination/), [[3]](https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/pharmacies/find-a-pharmacy-that-offers-free-flu-vaccination/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.england.nhs.uk/2025/09/nhs-kicks-off-winter-vaccine-roll-out-with-flu-jabs-for-children-and-pregnant-women/), [[6]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-flu-immunisation-programme-plan-2025-to-2026/national-flu-immunisation-programme-2025-to-2026-letter)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-flu-immunisation-programme-plan-2025-to-2026/national-flu-immunisation-programme-2025-to-2026-letter), [[5]](https://www.healthwatchwestminster.org.uk/advice-and-information/2025-09-11/uk-autumn-vaccine-rollout)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/finance/personalfinance/2119086/NHS-flu-jab-pneumonia), [[5]](https://www.healthwatchwestminster.org.uk/advice-and-information/2025-09-11/uk-autumn-vaccine-rollout)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/finance/personalfinance/2119086/NHS-flu-jab-pneumonia> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/booking-your-nhs-winter-flu-vaccination/> - This NHS England page provides information on booking your NHS winter flu vaccination. It details how individuals aged 65 or over can book a free flu jab through various methods, including by phone, contacting their GP surgery, or booking a pharmacy appointment via the NHS App or online. The page emphasizes the importance of getting vaccinated early to ensure protection before the flu season peaks. It also offers support in multiple languages and formats for those who need assistance.
3. <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/pharmacies/find-a-pharmacy-that-offers-free-flu-vaccination/> - The NHS website offers a service to find pharmacies that provide free flu vaccinations for children aged 2 to 3 years and adults aged 18 or over. It explains the eligibility criteria for free flu vaccinations and provides information on how to book an appointment online. The page also mentions that pharmacies will offer walk-in services from 1 October 2025, making it more convenient for individuals to receive their flu jab.
4. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2025/09/nhs-kicks-off-winter-vaccine-roll-out-with-flu-jabs-for-children-and-pregnant-women/> - This NHS England article announces the commencement of the winter vaccine rollout, starting with flu jabs for children and pregnant women. It highlights the NHS's efforts to make vaccinations accessible, including family drop-in clinics in the community. The article also mentions that school immunisation teams will offer flu vaccines to 2- to 3-year-olds in nurseries, with plans to expand this initiative. It underscores the importance of vaccination in preventing serious illness during the winter months.
5. <https://www.healthwatchwestminster.org.uk/advice-and-information/2025-09-11/uk-autumn-vaccine-rollout> - Healthwatch Westminster provides guidance on the UK's autumn vaccine rollout, detailing the groups eligible for free flu vaccinations. It lists individuals aged 65 or over, those with certain long-term health conditions, pregnant women, care home residents, carers, and close contacts of immunocompromised individuals. The article also outlines how and where to get vaccinated, including GP surgeries and pharmacies, and emphasizes the importance of early vaccination to protect against flu-related illnesses.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-flu-immunisation-programme-plan-2025-to-2026/national-flu-immunisation-programme-2025-to-2026-letter> - The UK government's letter outlines the national flu immunisation programme for the 2025 to 2026 season. It specifies the eligible cohorts for flu vaccination, including pregnant women, children aged 2 or 3 years, primary and secondary school-aged children, and those in clinical risk groups. The letter also details the start dates for different groups and provides guidance for healthcare providers on implementing the vaccination programme.
7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flu-vaccination-programme-information-for-healthcare-practitioners/flu-vaccination-programme-2023-to-2024-information-for-healthcare-practitioners> - This government publication provides information for healthcare practitioners regarding the flu vaccination programme for the 2023 to 2024 season. It includes a summary of eligible groups for flu vaccination, such as pregnant women, children aged 2 or 3 years, primary and secondary school-aged children, and those in clinical risk groups. The document also offers guidance on the administration of the vaccine and addresses considerations for patients not in a risk group but for whom vaccination may be beneficial.