



Guidance for personal care assistants

Free flu vaccination

Flu is a serious illness that can cause severe complications and death. Vaccination helps prevent individuals from getting flu or from spreading it to patients and people who receive care and support. The flu vaccination – protects you, your family and the people you care for.

All health and adult social care workers – as key workers – should therefore be vaccinated against flu if they are directly involved in caring for patients and people who receive care and support. This includes **all personal care assistants (frequently called personal assistants (PAs))**.

All PAs are now eligible for a free flu vaccination from their GP or a local community pharmacy.

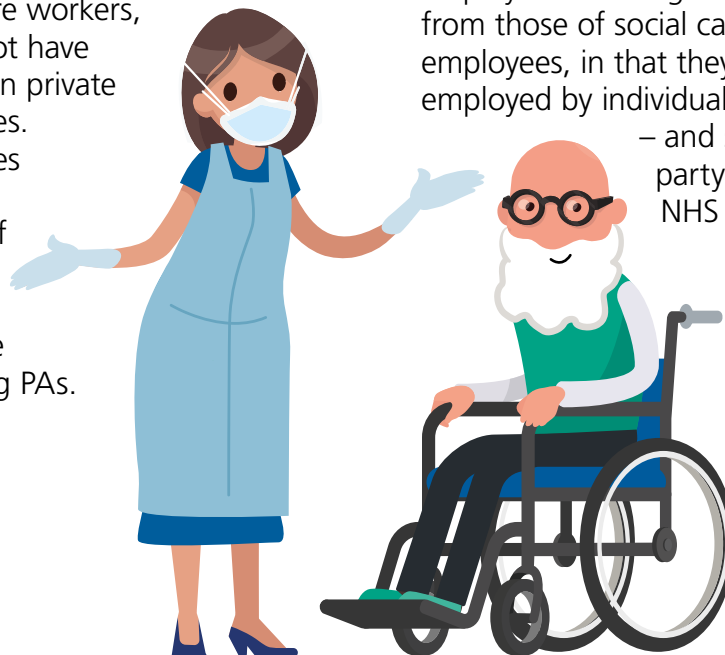
The NHS provides this free vaccination scheme to many front-line social care workers, if employers¹ do not have the resources to run private vaccination schemes. GPs and pharmacies can administer the vaccinations free of charge and then they claim back payments from the NHS for vaccinating PAs.

Other social care workers may receive vaccinations through employer-provided schemes.

However, as this is not possible for direct payment holders, all PAs can use the free vaccination scheme.

A PA is anybody who is employed via an individual's personal budget (including those who self-fund) or personal health budget to provide the individual with ongoing care and support.

Employment arrangements for PAs differ from those of social care workers or NHS employees, in that they are often directly employed by individuals via a direct payment – and sometimes by a third party independent of the NHS and social care system.



[1] If the employer is a direct payment holder, they are not expected to have the resources to run private vaccination schemes, so personal care assistants employed through a social care direct payment or personal health budget, are entitled to the NHS scheme like other front line workers.

Direct payment holders (i.e. the individual who receives care and support) and third-party employers should ensure that the PAs they employ are aware of the free flu vaccination and have the opportunity to access it. However, direct payment holders do not have to pay for flu vaccinations for PAs they employ, on the basis that the funding allocated to them is to pay for their own health or social care package.

Direct payment holders can protect themselves from the flu by making PAs they employ aware of the vaccination, and by ensuring they receive the letter of entitlement (found at the end of this guidance) to prove their identity to make it easier to access the vaccination for free.

Achieving high uptake of vaccination will keep services running and reduce the burden on the NHS and social care systems during winter, which is why CCGs, Local Authorities and direct payment holders are asked to encourage PAs they either directly employ, or fund via personal budgets or personal health budgets, to be vaccinated.

For PAs

Why should I get a flu vaccination?

Getting the vaccine will help to protect you, your family, and the people you provide care and support for, from getting the flu.

For people in at-risk groups, such as those aged 65 or over or with an underlying health condition, flu can be a serious disease and can cause death.

As a PA, you may well be caring for people in these at-risk groups. Getting the vaccine will mean you are much less likely to catch the flu and spread the flu to them, helping to protect them and yourself this winter.

Vaccination reduces the spread of flu among staff and people receiving care and support, keeping health and social care services running and reducing the burden on the NHS and social care systems during the winter. This is true every year, but it is particularly important this year, as COVID-19 is still in circulation.

As the symptoms for flu and COVID are very similar, widespread vaccination against flu will make it easier for us to target COVID testing and avoid disruption to care services.

Is there anybody who shouldn't get a flu vaccine?

Most adults can have the injected flu vaccine, but you should avoid it if you have had a serious allergic reaction to a flu vaccine in the past. If you are uncertain whether you should avoid it due to a medical condition, you should speak to your GP. You may be at risk of an allergic reaction to the flu vaccine injection if you have an egg allergy. This is because some flu vaccines are made using eggs. Ask a GP or pharmacist for a low-egg or egg-free vaccine. If you're ill with a high temperature, it's best to wait until you're better before having the flu vaccine.

As a PA, how can I get a flu vaccination?

The NHS provides a vaccination scheme that provides free flu vaccinations to some health and social care workers, including PAs. Some health and social care organisations, such as large care homes, may run their own vaccination schemes, but this is unlikely to apply to PAs.

To access the scheme, you simply need to attend a GP surgery or community pharmacy and identify yourself as a PA. However, we are aware that individuals have been asked to provide proof in the past and we have therefore provided a letter that can be used to identify you as a PA:

1. In the annex of this guidance, you will find a letter that you will need to print off.
2. The direct payment holder, as employer, will fill out this letter, to prove they employ you as a PA. Once you as a PA have this, this will act as your 'letter of entitlement' to the vaccination.
3. You will then need to visit your local GP or community pharmacist, who will be able to give you the flu vaccination. If you need to prove your entitlement, you can use your letter of entitlement and a copy of this guidance.
4. The vaccination will then be given to you, free of charge.

When should I get the flu vaccine?

You can get the flu vaccine throughout October, November and December.

This year the demand for the flu vaccine has been higher than usual. This has meant that while a lot of people have been able to get vaccinated, some people have not been able to get vaccinated straight away as some GP practices and pharmacies have used their early supplies of flu vaccine, due to the level of demand.

Overall there is enough flu vaccine for everyone who is eligible to get vaccinated. If you are eligible and are asked to wait, there is still time before flu season starts, which is normally in December.

Is the flu vaccination safe?

The flu vaccines used in the national NHS programme have a good safety record. The vaccines are thoroughly tested before they are made available in England.

You may have a mild fever and aching muscles a few days after having the vaccine and your arm may be sore at the injection site. You can read more about possible side effects at www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/flu-influenza-vaccine.

How effective is the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine is the best protection we have against flu, which can cause serious illness and death in at-risk groups.

Studies have shown that the flu vaccine will help prevent you from getting flu.

Flu is caused by a number of different strains of the flu virus and the vaccine only protects against those that are most likely to cause flu during this year's flu season. As a result, there's not a 100% guarantee that you won't get flu if you've been vaccinated.

However, even if you do get flu after being vaccinated, studies have shown that you're likely to have a much milder and shorter illness.

You cannot catch flu from the flu vaccine because there are no live viruses in the vaccine given to adults.

I had the flu vaccine last year. Do I need to get it again this year?

Yes. The strains of flu in circulation change every year, so the protection from the vaccine you had last year will decrease over time.

New flu vaccines are produced every year to protect against the strains most likely to be in circulation, which is why people are advised to be vaccinated every year.

Can I refuse to be vaccinated?

Yes. It's important that as many PAs as possible get the vaccine – it protects you, your family, and the people you provide care and support for, from the flu – but if you don't want to have the vaccine for whatever reason you don't have to have it.

For direct payment holders, third party employers and self-funders who employ PAs

What is my role?

If you employ PAs, we are asking for your support to ensure your PAs are aware of the availability of the free flu vaccination, and are able to access it through a letter proving their entitlement. There is no central list of all PAs – that is why we are asking for your help. Please download the letter of entitlement at the end of this guidance, one for each PA, as soon as you can. You will need to fill the letter out, and give this to your PA(s). Your PA(s) will then be able to use this as a letter of entitlement to access the vaccination, from September.

Is there a cost to me or my PAs?

There will be no cost to you as a direct payment holder or self-funder, or to your PAs. The vaccination will be paid for by the NHS.

Annex A

Letter of entitlement to a free winter flu vaccination for PAs employed by individuals



HM Government

Telephone: [\(insert number\)](#)

Email: [\(insert email\)](#)

To whom it may concern,

Confirmation of employment and entitlement for a free winter flu vaccination for 2020/21.

This letter is to verify that [\(insert name\)](#) is employed as a Personal Care Assistant (PA).

On 24 July 2020 the Government announced plans to extend the flu programme this winter. This included plans to ensure that health and social care workers employed through direct payments (personal budgets) and/or personal health budgets, such as Personal Care Assistants, to deliver care and support to individuals in the community are able to access free flu vaccinations. Official guidance on this has been published at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/907149/Letter_annualflu_2020_to_2021_update.pdf.

Given many Personal Care Assistants are directly employed by individuals, rather than directly by the CCG or Local Authority themselves, they will not have an employer-issued staff ID. This letter therefore acts as a letter of entitlement for a free flu vaccination. You are asked to provide the vaccination free of charge and retain this document in order to reclaim costs via the NHS through the complementary scheme.

If you require further verification of the employment of [\(insert name\)](#) please contact me on the number above.

Yours sincerely

[\(insert name\)](#)