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**PRESS RELEASE**

**30 December 2019**

**Local NHS bust flu myths as number of cases set to rise this winter**

With the cold weather taking hold, it's time to get a flu jab if you haven’t already done so.

Every year, millions of people are struck down by the flu - something that can easily be prevented by getting the vaccination. For the over 65s, under 5s, pregnant women or people with a long term condition such as asthma or diabetes, getting struck down with flu can be serious, with added complications.

Hundreds of thousands could see their holiday plans turn to misery if flu levels rise as expected in late December and early January.

Data from Public Health England shows that GP consultations for flu-like illnesses rose by 24% in recent weeks, while the impact of flu on hospitals is increasing.

Dr Fahad Rizvi, a Leicestershire GP said: “We’re urging anyone who is eligible to receive a flu jab to get booked in with their GP practice or community pharmacy to keep themselves safe and healthy as the temperature continues to drop.

"The best thing you can do to protect yourself, and your loved ones, from the flu this winter is to get vaccinated. It's a quick and easy process that will make a big difference to your health.

"Even if you've had the flu jab before, you need to get a new one every year, as the dominant strain of flu will change."

There are plenty of myths surrounding the flu jab, with many thinking it can even give them flu (this is completely wrong), so healthcare professionals across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland have got together to bust some of the most commonly believed myths about the jab.

**Myth 1: Flu is just like a bad cold**

Flu can be much worse than a heavy cold. Symptoms often come on suddenly and can be severe, including fever, chills, headaches and aching muscles, as well as a cough and sore throat. Flu can even leave you bedridden for two or three days while your body fights the virus. If you get complications caused by flu, you could become seriously ill and have to go to hospital.

**Myth 2: The flu vaccine can give you flu**

The flu vaccine given to adults contains inactivated flu viruses, so it cannot give you flu. After your injection your arm could feel a bit sore and some people can get a slight temperature and aching muscles for a few days afterwards, but this is not flu. The children's nasal spray flu vaccine contains live, but weakened, flu viruses, but they have been weakened enough that they will not give your child flu.

**Myth 3: I had the vaccine last year so don't need it this year**

The viruses that cause flu can change every year, so you need a vaccination that matches the new viruses each year. The vaccine usually provides protection for the duration of that year's flu season only.

**Myth 4: Children don't need the vaccination**

The nasal spray flu vaccine is recommended on the NHS for all healthy two and three-year-olds, plus children in primary school. In addition, children "at risk" of serious illness if they catch flu are eligible for a flu vaccine on the NHS. This includes children with a pre-existing illness, such as a respiratory or neurological condition, and children who are having treatment that weakens their immune system, such as chemotherapy.

The flu vaccine is generally given as an injection to children aged 6 months to 2 years and as a nasal spray to children aged 2 to 17 years who have a long-term health condition.

**Myth 5: I'm pregnant, so shouldn't have the flu jab**

You should have the vaccine no matter what stage of pregnancy you're at. If you're pregnant, you could get very ill if you get flu, which could also be bad for your baby.

Having the vaccine can also protect your baby against flu after they're born and during the early months of life.

**Myth 6: December is too late to have the vaccine**

Even in December, it is not too late to have the flu vaccine. Bosses at the NHS say you should take up the offer of the flu vaccine when it becomes available.

The local NHS also have a message to anyone who has not yet opted to have a flu jab. Dr Rizvi continues: “It’s really important that as many people as possible get a flu jab because it protects more than just you. It also reduces the risk for your family, friends, colleagues, and everyone else around you.

“When lots of people in an area are vaccinated, fewer people get sick. As a result of this, fewer germs are around to spread from person to person. This is called herd immunity, or community immunity. So, even if you don’t think that flu poses a serious risk to you, if you come down with flu you could still be posing a significant risk to vulnerable people around you.”

For more information, visit the local NHS winter website: [www.bettercareleicester.nhs.uk/help-us-help-you/winter-flu](http://www.bettercareleicester.nhs.uk/help-us-help-you/winter-flu)



[Video: Flu vaccine and pharmacist advice](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bZZIKHWETQ)

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**Notes to editors:**

* This year NHS England and Public Health England (PHE) have brought flu messaging into a wider winter campaign, under the brand ‘Help Us Help You’, which brings together a family of campaigns incorporating messages about flu, staying well in winter, NHS 111, pharmacy and extended GP hours. 1 in 3 people are eligible for a free flu vaccination, including adults 65 and over, people with certain long term conditions, pregnant women, children aged 2 and 3, children in reception class and school years 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.