

Position Statement

Flu vaccination



THE ROYAL
COLLEGE OF
MIDWIVES

Promoting • Supporting • Influencing

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Key messages

- The RCM is aware of the strong reasons for encouraging staff to be immunised against flu and of the need to improve the uptake of the vaccine in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Flu immunisation is essential to protecting high risk people, including pregnant women and supporting the resilience of the health system
- A small proportion of the population have compromised immune systems and other valid reasons for declining the flu vaccine. Accordingly, the RCM cautions against applying pressure, coercion or any formal measures on staff by employers
- Paid work time should be agreed for all staff attending appointments to be vaccinated, including their journeys to and from the point of administration
- The RCM will work with the Department of Health and Social Care and partner organisations to promote and disseminate relevant information to members, with early messaging likely to be the most effective in achieving positive behaviour change



Background and context

The impact of flu on the NHS is significant, causing an increase in the number of patients requiring treatment, while putting affected staff out of action.

The vaccination programme is being extended this year, with an ambition and the stocks ready to increase uptake across all eligible groups. According to Public Health England, just 74.3% of healthcare workers involved in direct patient care received the flu vaccine last winter¹. The 2020-2021 offer to NHS staff is 100%.

As flu and COVID-19 will be co-circulating and co-infecting this winter², all frontline healthcare workers involved in direct patient care are strongly advised to receive seasonal influenza vaccination to protect themselves and their patients from influenza. This vaccine should be provided by the employer.

Midwives have an important role in explaining the value of the flu vaccination for pregnant women, with some tasked with administering vaccines to the women in their care. Appropriate training must be provided for all staff involved.

Vaccination is a vital part of infection control, which also includes handwashing, provision of adequate supplies of appropriate PPE and restricting access to patients by affected staff and visitors. The responsible management of staff sickness absence must take account of the fact that preventative measures, including vaccination programmes, are not failsafe.

References

1. Seasonal flu vaccine uptake in healthcare workers 2019 to 2020. Public Health England https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/894751/Seasonal_influenza_vaccine_uptake_in_healthcare_workers__HCWs__in_Englan....pdf
2. Grech, V. Borg, M. 2020. Influenza vaccination in the COVID-19 era. Early Human Development. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0378378220303455>