

T: 0300 244 4000
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

To:

- Chief Executives, NHS Boards
- Chief Executives, Local Authorities
- Chief Executives, Health & Social Care Partnerships
- Social Care Providers
- Chief Executive, Public Health Scotland
- Chief Executive, Scottish Care
- Chief Executive, Coalition of Care and Support providers Scotland
- Chief Executive, Care Inspectorate
- Chief Executive, COSLA

2025-26 WINTER FLU VACCINATIONS FOR HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE STAFF

10 November 2025

Dear Chief Executives & Social Care Providers,

Winter can be a challenging time for Scotland's health and social care services and we are aware of the incredible work that you and your staff do on a daily basis. We want to thank you and your teams for your ongoing dedication.

This year, we are writing to you at the midway point of the winter vaccination programme to ask for your continued assistance in promoting the offer of the free flu vaccine to your staff. As you will know, it is important that everyone eligible receives their flu vaccination in advance of increasing circulation of the virus, to allow them time to build up their immunity from disease.

Flu disease surveillance

PHS data from end-October 2025 indicate an unusually early start to the influenza season. Overall activity remains at baseline levels, but four of our Health Boards rose from baseline to low activity level in [ISO week 44 \(27 October – 02 November\)](#). In that week the 5-14 age group increased from baseline to low activity level for the first time this season. Hospital admissions also increased from 94 to 108.

The situation in Scotland is similar to that of Asia-pacific and other countries in the northern hemisphere, including England, of early and unusually high flu activity, especially among school-age children.

Last winter, we saw extremely high rates of flu cases compared to previous years, which subsequently led to record numbers of flu-related hospitalisations and deaths. Flu infections peaked in week 52 of 2024. Around the same time, we saw emergency hospitalisations due to flu increase significantly, with more than 6,500 adults admitted to hospital because of flu.

This is why it is so important to get as many staff vaccinated as quickly as possible. Staff are more likely to be exposed to the flu virus through work and vaccination helps protect the staff

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

member, prevents onward transmission to patients / clients and colleagues, and helps to protect their families at home. All of this also helps to reduce staff flu-related absence, and contributes to better service resilience during the busy winter period.

Staff flu vaccination uptake & changes in COVID-19 vaccine eligibility

As you will be aware, this winter, on the [2024 advice](#) of the Joint Committee on Vaccination & Immunisation (JCVI), the frontline health and social care worker (HSCW) group has been removed from the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

This decision was driven by the fact that over the last 4 years, population immunity to COVID-19 has been increasing due to a combination of naturally acquired immunity following recovery from infection and vaccine-derived immunity. COVID-19 is now a relatively mild disease for most people, though it can still be unpleasant, with rates of hospitalisation and death from COVID-19 having reduced significantly since it first emerged.

Previously, the key rationale for offering HSCWs the COVID-19 vaccine was to prevent onward transmission to others, most notably the clinically vulnerable patients they care for. The current COVID-19 vaccines provide moderate protection against severe COVID-19 for a few months, but duration of protection against mild symptomatic infection is much more limited both in terms of peak protection and duration of protection. It is also expected that their protection against onward transmission is extremely limited, so the indirect benefits of vaccinating staff to reduce the risk of severe disease in patients are less evident.

This change in COVID-19 eligibility has allowed Public Health Scotland (PHS) and health and social care providers to focus their messaging and promotion on flu, relaying the many benefits of vaccination, and risks related to the virus. It has also allowed Health Boards to expand levels of peer to peer vaccination in NHS settings, as many of them did, pre-pandemic. We are hopeful that this renewed focus on flu will help us to improve uptake.

Public data on uptake for this winter's programme can be found at: [PHS Vaccination Surveillance](#) and is updated weekly. Health Board-level staff uptake management information (MI) is also available via the Discovery Dashboard, and allows Health Boards to identify gaps or areas of low uptake, in order to tailor their approaches.

At this mid-programme point, as of 2 November, we are sitting at 23.1% uptake for healthcare workers and 8.7% for social care staff.

Winter	End of season % uptake for all healthcare workers	End of season % uptake for all social care workers
2023/24	42.2%	25.9%
2024/25	35.9%	17.2%

Communications resources

Tailored resources have been designed by PHS and can be found at [Public Health Scotland News](#) for you and your teams to use in disseminating and supporting this offer. There is a toolkit for health and social care workers, as well as a dedicated toolkit for social care, that includes unpaid carer resources.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE
We invest in people Silver



In addition, to help raise awareness, share the facts and provide practical information, a staff session hosted by PHS was recorded and the [video is now available](#) as a tool to share on internal channels. The video could be hosted on your intranet or shared via email.

NHS Education for Scotland (NES) has produced a resource called '[Seasonal Flu Vaccination for Health and Social Care Workers](#)' that aims to improve knowledge about flu and the benefits of flu vaccination amongst the health and social care workforce.

NES have also developed a range of [resources](#) aimed at supporting practitioners to understand the importance of flu vaccination in clinical risk groups. These not only support staff to have conversations with patients, but may also be of interest to staff themselves, if they happen to have any of these conditions.

For action

We know that our Health Board Immunisation Teams have worked hard throughout the programme planning stage to make vaccination as easy and accessible as possible for both health and social care staff, based on local intelligence and need. We now ask that you support these efforts and use your leadership positions to champion staff flu vaccination, by increasing awareness of the resources available and by taking forward other practical delivery approaches to increase staff uptake.

Examples of what you can do to achieve this, if not already in place in your area, include:

- Adapting services to staff needs, e.g. peer to peer delivery / roving teams in acute sites where practicable; later night drop-in vaccination clinics at hospital settings; staff lanes at drop-ins for speed of turnaround; community pharmacy usage
- Nominating/identifying senior advocates and champions who are trusted individuals
- Change in graphics on work log-in screens to show drop-in clinics and venues
- Briefing for new starts and promotion of vaccination to resident student nurses
- Highlight access options and vaccine uptake at all senior management meetings
- Further communication of vaccination opportunities to staff. In addition to the health and social care worker-specific assets linked above, PHS has also developed campaign videos which can be used to promote winter vaccines across all eligible cohorts: [Campaign assets | Public Health Scotland News](#)

We are grateful for your continued efforts in promoting the benefits of vaccination and supporting your staff to get their vaccines quickly and easily.

Yours sincerely,



Neil Gray MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care



Professor Sir Gregor Smith
Chief Medical Officer

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™
We invest in people Silver

