

From the Chief Medical Officer  
Dr Michael McBride



Department of  
**Health**

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

[www.health-ni.gov.uk](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk)

## **HSS(MD) 22/2017**

### **For Action:**

Chief Executives of HSC Trusts  
GP Medical Advisers, Health and Social Care Board  
All General Practitioners and GP Locums (*for onward distribution to practice staff*)  
Director of Pharmacy and Medicines Management,  
Health and Social Care Board  
Directors of Children's Services/Social Services  
All General Dental Practitioners (*for onward distribution to practice staff*)

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Our Ref: HSS(MD) 22/2017  
Date: 6 October 2017

Dear Colleague

### **FLU VACCINATION FOR STAFF**

Seasonal Influenza is a key factor in causing winter pressures in the health service. It impacts on those who fall ill, the health services that provide direct care, and on the wider health and social care system that supports people in at-risk groups.

Experience of previous flu seasons has shown the unpredictable nature of influenza viruses, and highlights the need to ensure that we are as well prepared as possible to avoid increasing pressure on health and social care services. While seasonal flu is an annual occurrence, the exact timing, severity and extent of spread can vary from year to year and for this reason, plans to manage flu should include a range of scenarios and form part of wider planning for the winter months. In recent weeks there has been some media speculation that, based on the flu season experienced in the Southern Hemisphere over their winter months, this year's flu season could be quite severe, although the PHA have advised that it's too early to know which will be the dominant strains of flu to circulate in Northern Ireland.

The annual seasonal flu immunisation programme is a critical element of the system-wide approach for delivering robust and resilient health and social

care services throughout the year, helping to reduce unplanned hospital admissions and pressure on ED.

**The influenza immunisation of staff acts as an adjunct to good infection control procedures by reducing the risk to the patient of infection as well as by reducing the risk of infection among staff and thereby reducing staff sickness absence.**

Vaccination policy is based on the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisations (JCVI), an independent expert committee. JCVI continues to recommend that all front line health and social care workers should receive the seasonal flu vaccine as the best and most effective way of protecting not just themselves but also their patients.

As healthcare professionals we each have a duty of care to our patients. This is highlighted in Annex 4 of the HSS (MD) 14/2017 letter (see attached link <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/hss-md-14-2017.pdf>)

It is therefore important that health and social care professionals protect themselves and their patients by receiving the influenza vaccine. **We would encourage and support all health and social care professionals to get the Flu vaccine.**

During the 2016/17 season uptake of frontline Health Care Workers was 29% from all five Health and Social Care Trusts, which is a slight increase compared to the previous year (24.6%). While this increase is very welcomed the uptake rate remains unacceptably low when compared to other jurisdictions. This year a minimum uptake target of 40% has been set across all Trusts.

It is essential that lessons from previous vaccination programmes are learnt, and are used to drive seasonal flu vaccination uptake levels much higher in health and social care workers. Responsibility for achieving high uptake by HSC staff lies with the Trusts. This year the Public Health Agency has commissioned NHS Employers to deliver their flu fighters campaign, which will provide guidance and support to Trust flu teams in the delivery of their local campaigns.

*Community Pharmacists, Staff Involved in Supplying Medication, Dental staff, Private Nursing and Residential Home Staff*

It should be noted that in an arrangement unique to Northern Ireland, Community Pharmacists, those staff involved in supplying medicines, dental staff, frontline private nursing and residential home staff can also receive the vaccine via the Occupational Health Service in their local Trust. The PHA

have already provided details of the available clinics.  
<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/2570.htm>

## Conclusion

We are asking you to take personal ownership of this issue, and ensure every effort is made to actively encourage and enable colleagues across the service, Nurses, Midwives, Doctors, GPs, Pharmacists, Dentists and private nursing and residential home staff to get the vaccination this autumn in advance of the flu season.

Yours sincerely



**Dr Michael McBride**  
Chief Medical Officer



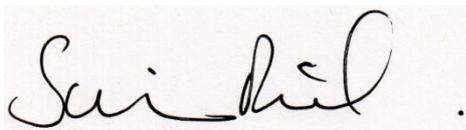
**Professor C McArdle**  
Chief Nursing Officer



**Dr Mark Timoney**  
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer



**Mr Sean Holland**  
Chief Social Work  
Officer/Deputy Secretary



**Simon Reid**  
Chief Dental Officer

## Circulation List

Director of Public Health/Executive Medical Director, Public Health Agency (*for onward distribution to all relevant health protection staff*)  
Assistant Director Public Health (Health Protection), Public Health Agency  
Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency  
Assistant Director of Pharmacy and Medicines Management, Health and Social Care Board (*for onward distribution to Community Pharmacies*)

