

Flu Vaccination

Research into County Durham residents' views of the flu vaccine, the barriers to, and perceptions of, getting vaccinated



September 2019

Contents

Healthwatch County Durham.....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
Background to this work.....	8
What we did.....	8
Who we spoke to and what said.....	9
Observations and considerations.....	12
Thank you.....	15
Appendices.....	16

Healthwatch County Durham

Healthwatch County Durham is the county's consumer champion for health and social care, representing the voices of current and future users to decision makers.



We listen

We listen to patients of health services and users of social care services, along with their family members or carers, to find out what they think of the services they receive.



We advise

We advise people how to get the best health and social care for themselves and their family. We provide help and information about all aspects of health and social care provided in County Durham.



We speak up

We make sure that consumers views are heard by those who provide health and social care. Wherever possible we try to work in partnership with providers to influence how they make improvements.

Executive summary

In 2019 Healthwatch County Durham (HWCD) was approached by Durham County Council's Public Health team to gather feedback on what people think about the NHS flu vaccination. The aim was to find out what discourages eligible people from getting their free NHS flu vaccination and find out what would encourage more people to get vaccinated. One of the priorities of the Council's Director of Public Health is to increase NHS flu vaccination rates in the at-risk groups in County Durham. The NHS at-risk groups include:

- Children aged 2-10 years.
- Those aged 6 months - under 65 years in clinical risk groups (e.g. diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and chronic heart disease).
- Pregnant women.
- Those aged 65 years and over.
- Those in long-stay residential care homes.
- Carers.
- Front line social care workers.

The views collected will be fed back to the Council's Director of Public Health in order to inform the local flu campaign for 2019/20.

To collect the public's views on the vaccination we developed a survey and utilized a mixed model of engagement to get feedback from the public. We received 300 completed surveys. In addition to the online survey we talked to members of Options, a group for adults with learning and physical disabilities. We also talked to approx. 50 people who attended HWCD's Annual Event in June.

What People Told Us

When we asked those people who are eligible for a free NHS flu vaccination why they don't take up the offer, the most cited reason (24.07%) was that they were worried about the side effects and being ill afterwards.

We produced 5 statements that might that might persuade people to take up the offer. The statement that was deemed as most important (63.22%) was:

Flu is a serious disease, and is much worse than a heavy cold an average of 8000 people die from flu-related complications in England each year.

When asked if there is anything else that would persuade respondents to take up the offer of a free NHS flu vaccination a range of suggestions were made, with ease of

access to the vaccine, including offering it in the work place and out of hours the most common suggestions. In addition availability of the vaccine was also commented on, with some surgeries and pharmacies having access to the vaccine earlier than others. It should be noted that at the time of publishing this report, October 2019, some surgeries across the County had the vaccine in stock for the at-risk groups, but others didn't.

We asked those people who take up the offer of a free NHS flu vaccination if they could tell us why they do. The most cited reason was to prevent themselves from getting flu as well as protecting others.

We asked all respondents, whether or not they get vaccinated, if they agreed with any of the following statements:

- *I think the vaccination might make me or my child unwell*
- *I don't think that the vaccination is effective at preventing flu*
- *I have a fear of needles*

Of those who answered this question 53.13% respondents agreed with the first statement.

We asked why people felt it was important to be vaccinated against flu. Over 200 people responded to the question, with the majority of people stating that prevention and protection were the main reasons.

Ten adults from the Options group, who took part in a discussion led by HWCD staff, felt that being vaccinated was a 'good thing' and that it stopped them getting the flu. All of the 10 adults who participated had the vaccination.

A range of views was expressed by people attending our Annual Event, including the concerns about side effects, a duty of care to protect all, myths around the vaccine and the need to incentivise having the vaccine.

Observations and Considerations

From the information provided in our survey and conversations with the public, we have made the following observations for Durham County Council's Public Health team to consider:

Many of the people we talked to were unsure which groups were considered to be 'at risk'. Could this information be highlighted to make the public and health and social care staff aware of who is entitled to a free NHS flu vaccine? Equally, is there more that could be done to identify people in at-risk groups earlier via health and social care workers?

There is a genuine concern amongst the public that they will get flu or suffer side effects if they have the vaccine. This was stated as a concern by those who take up the offer of a free flu vaccine as well as those who don't. Could a County-wide awareness campaign be developed to address this concern whilst stressing the benefits of the vaccine?

The statement that might persuade respondents to take up the offer of a free flu vaccination focused on the serious nature of the disease, that it is much worse than a heavy cold and that an average of 8000 people die from flu-related complications in England each year. Could this be an important message in a County-wide campaign to increase the uptake of the vaccine? It should be noted however that some people have made a life-style choice not to be vaccinated, or have very strong views against vaccinations, and they are unlikely to be persuaded by any message.

Respondents who don't take up the offer of a free flu vaccination may be persuaded to change their minds if they could access the vaccine more easily. Could appointments be more readily available eg out of hours appointments at GP surgeries and pharmacies, walk-in clinics, other venues offering the vaccine eg the work place. Could larger employers across the County be approached to provide opportunities to offer the vaccine in the work place? Could these opportunities be incentivised to encourage employees to take-up the offer of a free vaccine? In addition, it would be more helpful if all GP surgeries across the County received the vaccine on the same date to avoid confusion in relation to vaccine availability.

Could the Carers Card model i.e. the card can be presented at most pharmacies in County Durham to enable Carers to receive the vaccination free of charge at a time convenient to them, be adopted for other groups eg front line social care workers?

The key reason why respondents took up the offer of a free flu vaccination was to prevent and protect both themselves and others from getting flu. Could 'prevention' and 'protection' form the basis of a County-wide awareness campaign?

From face to face conversations it would appear that those people with additional needs who were supported by family members to have the vaccine did so. Could a reminder via text message to parents/support workers/adults with additional needs be sent to ensure that this practice continues? Two of the group members were scared of needles. Could alternative delivery methods be highlighted?

From the comments made by those attending our Annual Event further information to dispel myths surrounding the vaccine was seen as important as was evidence to show the effectiveness of the vaccine. Could this be incorporated into a County-wide awareness campaign?

There is some evidence that where specific groups have been advised by a health care worker eg midwives, this advice has been acted upon. Could other at-risk groups be targeted by a health care worker eg in clinics, when visiting the GP or pharmacy, to provide similar advice? This approach could also be taken by the Third Sector who specifically work with the at-risk groups to increase awareness.

Using social media, text messaging and telephoning people to remind them to get vaccinated was seen as important in supporting the uptake of the vaccine. Could this be taken further and an appointment given to the patient or details of where and when the vaccine is available?

Background to this work

In 2019 Healthwatch County Durham (HWCD) was approached by Durham County Council's Public Health team to gather feedback on what people think about the flu vaccination. This would build on the work that was carried out by the Public Health team in summer 2018, whereby key messages were distributed to health care professionals to use in their communications to the public in order to convey the importance of the annual flu immunization. The results would go on to inform the main messages of the local flu campaign for 2019-20.

Why this work was necessary?

One of the priorities of the Council's Director of Public Health is to increase NHS flu vaccination rates in the at-risk groups in County Durham. In 2018 there was a national target to vaccinate 75% of people aged 65 and over and 55% of people with certain medical conditions. In County Durham, the NHS vaccinated 71% of older people and 49% of people with a medical condition.

The NHS at-risk groups include:

- Children aged 2-10 years
- Those aged 6 months - under 65 years in clinical risk groups (e.g. diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and chronic heart disease)
- Pregnant women
- Those aged 65 years and over
- Those in long-stay residential care homes
- Carers
- Front line social care workers

What we did

To collect the public's views on the vaccination we utilized a mixed model of engagement to get feedback from the public. This included using social media, publicizing our survey online via our e-bulletin as well as face to face engagement. We developed the survey in partnership with Durham County Council's Public Health lead. To ensure we collected views from the at-risk groups we also shared the survey with partners/networks who have links with these groups. HWCD staff and

volunteers visited GP practices to talk to patients in 9 surgeries, which included diabetes, warfarin and baby clinics. Staff also carried out targeted engagement work with a cancer support group and parenting forums. The survey was launched in June at our Annual Event and was closed at the end of July. We received 300 completed surveys.

In addition to the online survey we talked to members of Options, a group for adults with learning and physical disabilities. We also talked to approx. 50 people who attended HWCD's Annual Event in June.

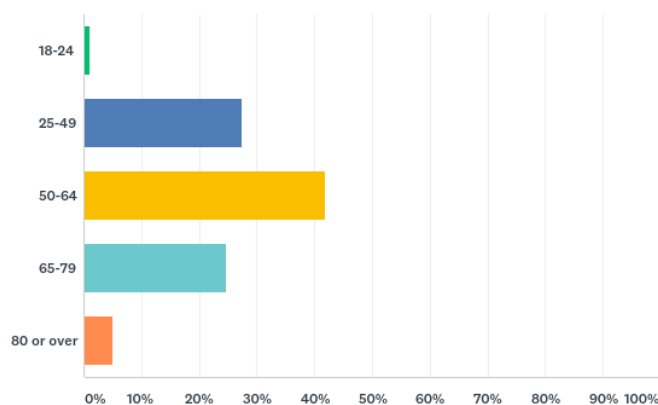
Who we spoke to and what they said

Respondents were asked to provide the first half of their postcode to enable us to identify which locales were represented. Postcode areas that were identified are:

DH 1	DH 2	DH 3	DH 4	DH 5	DH 6	DH 7	DH 8	DH 9	DH 17	DL 1	DL 2	DL 4	DL 5	DL 10	DL 12	DL 13	DL 14	DL 15	DL 16	DL 17
TS 5	TS 17	TS 19	TS 21	TS 23	TS 16	TS 28	TS 29	SR 1	SR 7	TS 20	TS 27	SR 8	NE 13	NE 17	NE 38					

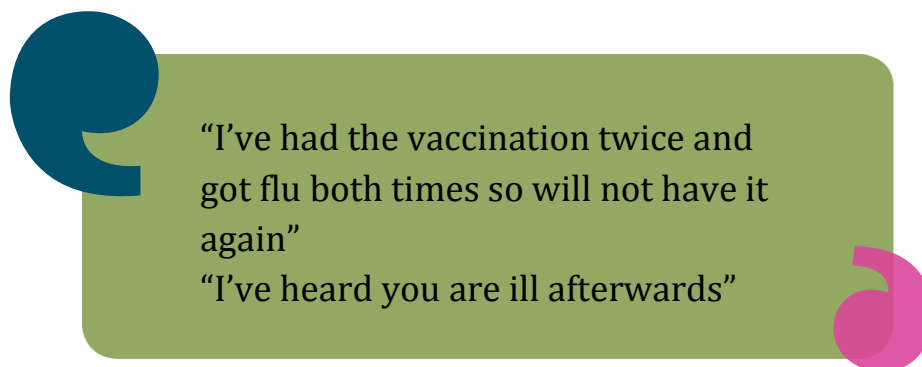
Of the 300 people who completed our survey, 296 provided us with their ages, which ranged from 18 to 80+.

Q8 What age group are you in?



In addition, 76.61% of respondents identified as females and 22.71% as males, with 0.68% preferring not to say.

When we asked those people who are eligible for a free NHS flu vaccination why they don't take up the offer, the most cited reason (24.07%) was that they were worried about the side effects and being ill afterwards.



Mixed messages in relation to availability and accessibility were also commented on:

- On ringing the surgery I was told "we don't have it in yet"; then I was told "it's for the old people first"; then "we've ran out"; then "we don't do it anymore". What's the point?

There was confusion about when the vaccine would be available, with some surgeries and pharmacies having access to the vaccine earlier than others. It should be noted that at the time of publishing this report, October 2019, some surgeries across the County had the vaccine in stock for the at-risk groups, but others didn't.

Of the 5 statements that might persuade people to take up the offer the one that was thought to be the most important (63.22%) was:

Flu is a serious disease, and is much worse than a heavy cold an average of 8000 people die from flu-related complications in England each year.

When asked if there is anything else that would persuade respondents to take up the offer of a free NHS flu vaccination a range of suggestions were made, with the most common being:

- Availability and easy access to the vaccine.
- Making sure they are available at convenient times.
- Offer it in a work place setting.

However, there were some negative responses to this question:

- No. It's hit and miss as to whether it works anyway.
- No - the vaccine covers a particular strain but another one comes along and it doesn't work.

Requests for more information about the flu vaccine's effectiveness, 'real' information as opposed to 'propaganda adverts' were asked for by some of the respondents.

We asked those people who take up the offer of a free NHS flu vaccination if they could tell us why they do. The most cited reason was to prevent themselves from getting flu as well as protecting others.

We asked all respondents, whether or not they get vaccinated, if they agreed with any of the following statements:

- *I think the vaccination might make me or my child unwell*
- *I don't think that the vaccination is effective at preventing flu*
- *I have a fear of needles*

Of those who answered this question 53.13% respondents agreed with the first statement.

We asked why people felt it was important to be vaccinated against flu. Over 200 people responded to the question, with the majority of people stating that prevention and protection were the main reasons.

Q6 If you already feel it is important to be vaccinated against flu, please tell us why (e.g. it protects you from getting flu; it stops you infecting family/friends/work colleagues with flu):

A word cloud of reasons for getting vaccinated against flu. The most prominent words are 'protects', 'prevents', 'protection', 'flu', 'important', 'people', 'work', 'vulnerable', 'family', 'infecting', 'spreading', 'infection', 'care', 'ill', 'spread', 'prevent', 'stop', 'stop', 'spread', 'work', 'colleagues', 'help', 'catching', 'health', 'avoid', 'immune', 'system', 'vaccination', 'reduce', 'vulnerable', 'people', 'go', 's', 'also', 'need', 'work', 'helps', 'stop', 'spread', 'bad', 'passing', 'children', 'Prevention', 'good', 'around', 'person', 'make', 'N', 'want', 'strain', 'stops', 'flu', 'less', 'serious', 'use', 'ill', 'spread', 'infection', 'care', 'don', 't', 'feel', 'prevents', 'spreading', 'infection', 'infecting', 'family', 'friends', 'vaccine', 'feel', 'important', 'take', 'jab', 'year', 'will', 'stops', 'spreading', 'flu', 'spreading', 'flu', 'protect', 'others', 'elderly', 'VIRUS'.

Ten adults from the Options group, who took part in a discussion led by HWCD staff, felt that being vaccinated was a 'good thing' and that it stopped them getting the flu. All of the 10 adults who participated had the vaccination.

A range of views was expressed by people attending our Annual Event, including the concerns about side effects, a duty of care to protect all, myths around the vaccine and the need to incentivise having the vaccine.

Observations and Considerations

From the information provided in our survey and conversations with the public, we have made the following observations for Durham County Council's Public Health team to consider:

Many of the people we talked to were unsure which groups were considered to be 'at risk'. Could this information be highlighted to make the public and health and social care staff aware of who is entitled to a free NHS flu vaccine? Equally, is there more that could be done to identify people in at-risk groups earlier via health and social care workers?

There is a genuine concern amongst the public that they will get flu or suffer side effects if they have the vaccine. This was stated as a concern by those who take up the offer of a free flu vaccine as well as those who don't. Could a County-wide awareness campaign be developed to address this concern whilst stressing the benefits of the vaccine?

The statement that might persuade respondents to take up the offer of a free flu vaccination focused on the serious nature of the disease, that it is much worse than a heavy cold and that an average of 8000 people die from flu-related complications in England each year. Could this be an important message in a County-wide campaign to increase the uptake of the vaccine? It should be noted however that some people have made a life-style choice not to be vaccinated, or have very strong views against vaccinations, and they are unlikely to be persuaded by any message.

Respondents who don't take up the offer of a free flu vaccination may be persuaded to change their minds if they could access the vaccine more easily. Could appointments be more readily available eg out of hours appointments at GP surgeries and pharmacies, walk-in clinics, other venues offering the vaccine eg the work place. Could larger employers across the County be approached to provide opportunities to offer the vaccine in the work place? Could these opportunities be incentivised to

encourage employees to take-up the offer of a free vaccine? In addition, it would be more helpful if all GP surgeries across the County received the vaccine on the same date to avoid confusion in relation to vaccine availability.

Could the Carers Card model i.e. the card can be presented at most pharmacies in County Durham to enable Carers to receive the vaccination free of charge at a time convenient to them, be adopted for other groups eg front line social care workers?

The key reason why respondents took up the offer of a free flu vaccination was to prevent and protect both themselves and others from getting flu. Could 'prevention' and 'protection' form the basis of a County-wide awareness campaign?

From face to face conversations it would appear that those people with additional needs who were supported by family members to have the vaccine did so. Could a reminder via text message to parents/support workers/adults with additional needs be sent to ensure that this practice continues? Two of the group members were scared of needles. Could alternative delivery methods be highlighted?

From the comments made by those attending our Annual Event further information to dispel myths surrounding the vaccine was seen as important as was evidence to show the effectiveness of the vaccine. Could this be incorporated into a County-wide awareness campaign?

There is some evidence that where specific groups have been advised by a health care worker eg midwives, this advice has been acted upon. Could other at-risk groups be targeted by a health care worker eg in clinics, when visiting the GP or pharmacy, to provide similar advice? This approach could also be taken by the Third Sector who specifically work with the at-risk groups to increase awareness.

Using social media, text messaging and telephoning people to remind them to get vaccinated was seen as important in supporting the uptake of the vaccine. Could this be taken further and an appointment given to the patient or details of where and when the vaccine is available?

In addition several themes emerged more often than others:

- Health and social care workers have a duty of care to have the vaccination to prevent spread of the disease, particularly to vulnerable people.

- Publicity in relation to surgeries running out of the vaccine and GPs offering the wrong vaccine as they are 'guessing' at which strain of flu will develop were cited as reasons as to why people don't bother to get vaccinated.
- The issues around getting a vaccine for those people who are intolerant to eggs.
- Misinformation surrounding the vaccine means that some people are not convinced about its effectiveness.

Thank You

We would like to thank everyone who took the time to complete the survey and shared their views with our staff and volunteers. We would also like to thank our volunteers for helping us gather views from the public.

Appendix 1



If you are eligible for an annual, free NHS flu vaccination then your views are important to us.

Healthwatch County Durham has been asked by Durham County Council's Public Health team to gather feedback on what people think about the flu vaccination. We want to find out what discourages eligible people from getting their free flu vaccination and find out what would encourage people to get vaccinated. We would be grateful if you could complete the questionnaire below. All responses are anonymous.

NB This survey is only open to people who are eligible for a free NHS flu vaccination.

The following are eligible for a free NHS flu vaccine:

- Children aged 2 - 10yrs on 31st August 2019
- Those aged 65 years old or over
- Pregnant women
- People with certain medical conditions, aged 6 months – 65yrs
- Those in long-stay residential care homes
- Carers
- Those in close contact with immunocompromised individuals
- Frontline health and social care workers

If you are eligible for a free NHS flu vaccination, or are a parent/carer of an eligible child, but you don't take up the offer, please tell us why:

If you are eligible for a free NHS flu vaccination but you don't take up the offer, which of the following statements might persuade you to change your mind (please rank in order of importance, 1 being high and 5 being low importance):

- Flu is a serious disease, and is much worse than a heavy cold (an average of 8000 people die from flu-related complications in England each year).

- If a person gets complications caused by flu, they could become seriously ill and have to go to hospital.
- 7 out of 10 of people who are infected with flu show no symptoms therefore can unknowingly spread flu to others.
- The flu injection contains inactivated, or killed, strains of flu virus so it's impossible to get flu from the flu vaccine.
- The side effects of flu vaccination are mild, most commonly being a sore arm and occasionally aching muscles.

Is there anything else that would persuade you to take up the offer of a free NHS flu vaccination?

If you are eligible, or are a parent/carer of an eligible child, and do take up the offer of a free NHS flu vaccination please tell us why:

Regardless of whether or not you get vaccinated against flu do you agree with any of the following statements (please tick all that apply):

- I think the vaccination might make me unwell
- I don't think that the vaccination is effective at preventing flu
- I have a fear of needles

If you already feel it is important to be vaccinated against flu, please tell us why eg it protects you from getting flu; it stops you infecting family/friends/work colleagues with flu:

First part of your postcode (e.g. DH1 or DL17. This is used to help us identify geographical trends and cannot be used to identify you):

Please circle your age group:

18 – 24 25 – 49 50 – 64 65 – 79 80+

Do you identify as (please circle):

Male Female Other Prefer not to say

Thank you