

REPORT TO: Health and Wellbeing Board
DATE: 12 October 2022
REPORTING OFFICER: Director of Public Health
PORTFOLIO: Public Health
SUBJECT: Planning for Winter 2022/23
WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report presents an overview of the planning taking place to prepare for winter to protect our population from challenges in the 2022/23 season. It includes a summary of the flu and winter vaccination programme, system pressure planning and the links with measures required to support our communities during the current cost of living crisis.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

- i) **the Board note the content and process of planning for winter to protect our population against additional threats that the season brings; and**
- ii) **each individual agency note their requirements in relation to the programme and use all opportunities to promote positive prevention messages and community support as widely as possible .**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Background

Winter is always a challenging time for organisations who are working to protect our populations and deliver health and social care services to meet the needs of our residents. Additional challenges from increased circulation of some diseases, extreme weather conditions and added pressures on health and social care services all contribute to winter pressures.

This winter could be a particularly difficult one with the potential for more circulation of respiratory and other viruses than previous years, the ongoing transmission of COVID-19 and the additional difficulties that households may be facing as a result of the cost of living increases.

The balance between maintaining planned care and managing elevated urgent and emergency care is a challenge every winter. The local authority are

working across departments and the wider Integrated Care System to ensure that the whole system is planning and preparing to mitigate these challenges and is able to maintain and scale up services as required, as well as increasing opportunities to prevent additional pressures.

This paper will touch on the planning that is taking place specifically around:

- Flu
- Covid
- System pressures
- Supporting people and households

3.2 **Flu**

Flu tends to circulate during the months of December to March with the vaccination programme starting at the end of September to ensure people are vaccinated prior to the start of flu season. Flu adds to the increased burden of illness that challenges the health and social care system every year.

3.2.1 **Flu Vaccination**

The national flu immunisation programme aims to provide direct protection to people who are at higher risk of becoming more seriously ill or suffer complications if they catch flu. Groups eligible for flu vaccination are based on the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

3.2.2 **Eligibility**

People eligible for flu vaccination for the 2022/2023 flu season are:

Initially

- those aged 65 years and over
- those aged six months to under 65 years in clinical risk groups (as defined by the influenza chapter in 'Immunisation against infectious disease' (the 'Green Book')
- all children aged 2 to 10 (but not 11 years or older) on 31 August 2021 (i.e. up to school Year 6)
- pregnant women
- those in long-stay residential care homes
- carers
- close contacts of immunocompromised individuals

Additionally

- 50 to 64 year olds not in clinical risk groups (including those who turn 50 by 31 March 2023)
- Secondary school-aged children focusing on years 7, 8 and 9 and any remaining vaccine will be offered to years 10 and 11, subject to vaccine availability.

3.2.3 **Flu vaccination delivery**

NHSEI have not placed any specific uptake targets for flu vaccination this year, but there is an expectation to achieve at least the previous year's uptake rates

and deliver a 100% offer for all eligible individuals.

There are a number of routes for people to get their vaccination and we are working closely with providers across all areas and sectors to access.

Vaccine stocks have been delivered to some settings and some clinics have already started delivering the vaccine. As there are staggered deliveries some providers may receive supply later than others. All providers will have stock deliveries and begin vaccinating before the end of September.

Primary Care

All GP practices across Halton are delivering the flu vaccination at the surgery to eligible patients who are registered with them and they will be in the process of making the offers to those eligible patients by text, phone or letter as needed. Most practices will offer appointments and there are also a number offering drop-in clinics, but these vary between practices.

In Widnes, the PCN are also offering flu vaccinations on behalf of Widnes Practices, mainly out of Highfield hospital.

All pharmacies in Halton are offering the flu vaccination and many of these will have sent invites to patients who use their services. Delivery of the service varies, some pharmacies may offer actual appointment times but others offer drop in clinics. Most pharmacies can offer the flu vaccination privately for a fee to those who are not eligible under the NHS programme. It should also be noted people can have a vaccine if they are eligible, in any pharmacy across the country.

Schools and nurseries

Eligible children in school will be offered the vaccination by Bridgewater NHS Foundation Trust, who are commissioned by NHSEI to provide the childhood flu programme. The school vaccination providers have confirmed that all primary schools will have at least one visit by mid-November and some schools with the lowest uptake will receive a second visit. NHSEI have identified that children in secondary school will be offered the vaccination after January 2023 but no date has been confirmed. School vaccination providers are working closely with local authorities to help maximise uptake and provide the most effective and efficient service.

Care homes and Care Staff

Vaccinations in care homes are provided by the care homes nominated GP and many homes have already received a vaccination visit or have those dates booked in to enable all residents to receive their vaccination. Care home staff are also eligible for vaccination and can be vaccinated at the same time as residents. Any health and care worker unable to have this then, or who works in a different setting, can access their vaccination at their GP or a pharmacy.

Outreach (inequalities)

In previous years, approximately 80% of people in Halton over the age of 65

took up the offer of their flu jab, compared to 50% of those under 65 and at risk and only 31% for pregnant women. The protection that is given by the flu vaccination is not taken up equally amongst all those who are most at risk.

The public health team are working with all providers, and the Halton and Warrington Flu Group to identify and support opportunities to provide the flu vaccination in various ways, using different venues and approaches to help increase uptake. We are particularly focusing on groups of people that have the lowest uptake of flu vaccination and for groups of people who may find difficulty accessing other services.

3.2.4 **Oversight**

Halton and Warrington have held a joint flu planning and oversight group for a number of years. The group meets monthly throughout the flu season to oversee the planning of the seasonal flu programme, ensuring that relevant and robust procedures are in place to invite and vaccinate the eligible population. The group works in partnership to improve the uptake of influenza vaccination. It prepares and plans for outbreaks across the population of Halton and Warrington footprint and provides support to GP practices throughout the flu season. Membership includes: Halton and Warrington Borough Councils, Local place based ICS leads, Warrington and Halton Foundation Hospital Trust, Community Infection Prevention and Control team, Local pharmaceutical committee, and community NHS trusts.

3.3 **Covid Vaccination**

The Covid vaccination which began in December 2020 continues to be expanded on the basis of JCVI guidance and assessment of populations' risk. Throughout the pandemic, coronavirus (COVID-19) has disproportionately affected those in older age groups, residents in care homes for older adults, and those with certain underlying health conditions, particularly those who are immunosuppressed. For this reason, these groups have been prioritised for vaccination across all of JCVI's advice so far.

The Covid vaccination is still available to anyone who has not received it. There are still approximately 30% of people in Halton (around 41,000 people) who have not yet had a Covid vaccine. We know that people in some ethnic minority groups and people from the lowest economic groups are less likely to have been protected against Covid.

3.3.1 **Autumn Boosters eligibility**

JCVI has recommended an additional booster dose of vaccine this autumn for those most at risk from more severe effects from Covid and in settings where Covid could spread most rapidly. These include:

- People aged 50 years and older,
- residents in care homes for older people,
- those aged 5 years and over in a clinical risk group
- health and social care staff

The autumn booster programme has started and people who are eligible and had their previous booster at least 3 months ago will be offered an appointment between September and December 2022.

It is possible to receive the flu and the Covid vaccination at the same time however, as there are fewer venues able to provide the Covid vaccination, this will not be possible in all settings.

3.3.2 Covid Vaccination Delivery

Primary Care

The autumn booster vaccination will be by offer only and patients may be invited to make an appointment by their GP, pharmacy or sometimes by other NHS services they are in contact with. Most local GPs are offering the vaccination for the eligible patients. In Widnes the PCN are coordinating some vaccine clinics on behalf of practices and these are currently being offered by appointment at Highfield Hospital.

There are a number of pharmacies across Widnes and Runcorn who have been commissioned by NHSEI to provide the Covid vaccination. Supply varies influencing clinics timings, so people seeking to make an appointment are best doing so either in response to a direct link sent from their GP or pharmacy, or by visiting the “Grab a Jab” website to make an appointment at the nearest centre offering appointments at that time.
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/find-a-walk-in-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccination-site/>

Local practices and PCN are undertaking visits to care homes to offer the Covid vaccination to residents and staff.

Outreach

NHSEI have commissioned Cheshire and Wirral Partnership (CWP) to offer an outreach vaccination bus that is available for 1 day per week across Halton. The bus is able to visit areas of low uptake, or areas where some populations may have more difficulty accessing other vaccination services. Halton Public Health team are working closely with CWP to help identify the most effective locations for the bus to increase uptake and reduce inequalities.

Widnes PCN are also working with the Public Health team to identify opportunities for other types of outreach sessions to reach more people in difficult to reach areas. These plans are in development.

3.4

Winter Pressures

Winter takes its toll for a number of reasons on the NHS and other health and care setting. Often this can be as a result of, increased circulation of respiratory and other diseases, leading to increase demand and also staff illness, increased accidents and illnesses caused by cold weather and poor conditions

and more people who are vulnerable needing additional care and support. Hospital capacity can reach critical levels but so too can social care settings, this leads to difficulties discharging people from hospitals to other care settings and supported environments.

Winter pressures and planning is a key issue for the acute, mental health, community and ambulance service trusts that NHS Providers represents.

3.4.1 **Integrated Care Board Planning**

Local Place Integrated Care Boards are currently in the process of developing meetings and plans with partners to help address the variety of potential pressures that could challenge the health and care systems during the winter. Identifying where pressure points may be and developing plans to mitigate the causes and relieve the issues should they arise.

The local ICS leads are currently coordinating action planning with partners across the health and care sectors to address the wider health and social care factors that add to the winter pressures, these include actions around:

- Infection control guidance and support to mitigate outbreaks
- Workforce management to mitigate absences, increase capacity etc.
- Increase uptake of winter vaccinations to reduce burden of respiratory viruses
- Encourage staff uptake of flu and Covid vaccinations
- Increase awareness and compliance of good hygiene principles
- Safe discharge and preventing avoidable admissions
- Intermediate care and care system capacity
- Expanding social prescribing and social/third sector support
- Coordination, reporting and oversight systems

The public health team is working with system partners to help identify prevention plans to best protect people from requiring additional care this winter, this will include plans for flu and covid vaccination, increasing uptake of pneumococcal and other vaccinations for specific groups and advice and guidance on cold homes and cold weather.

3.5 **Supporting People and Families**

Fuel costs, the cost of heating a home and general household spends have increased significantly this winter leaving many households and families in a difficult financial situation which can limit their ability to manage changes in temperature and live a healthy, safe lifestyle. This is affecting all generations and is likely to impact on other factors such as social isolation, increasing levels of digital poverty, increasing demand on foodbanks, as well as increasing demand on Council services and community, voluntary and faith organisations.

As a result of predicted difficulties that many families will be facing this winter, the council alongside partners are working to help identify households and families most at risk and provide easier access to help and support that may be in more demand this winter.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 Vaccination programmes are a national requirement, monitored through monthly returns to NHS England. Planning for and protecting people against harms and threats is a key element to a number of policy areas.

5.0 **OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There will be financial impacts in the implementation of the national programmes – vaccinations within primary care and to risk groups is covered through national arrangements and financial agreements. Individual employer organisations of health and social care staff are required to resource arrangements for the provision of vaccination. Resource is required to promote vaccination uptake amongst all eligible groups and maximise the programmes impact.

Annual challenges on the health and social care system are responsible for a large proportion of excess winter deaths. Cases of flu pose a significant burden on primary and secondary health care systems, as does Covid. Outbreaks amongst vulnerable groups are common in unprotected communities and can be difficult to manage and control. Flu is preventable and inequities in uptake across the Borough, within higher risk populations and staffing groups can put the most vulnerable people at greater risk. People in vulnerable households and with inadequate housing conditions, income, additional health needs etc. are more vulnerable to the effects of cold and of additional cost of living impacts which will challenge local communities and local services more significantly this year.

The additional consequence of flu alongside the current threat that COVID-19 outbreaks may result in an undue financial burden to localities.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

Children represent one of the key sources of carriage of flu virus in the community, ensuring high uptake amongst children is one of the best ways to ensure we limit the spread of flu in our communities and protect our most vulnerable children and members of the community from a preventable illness.

Signs and symptoms of flu are similar to Covid, it will be difficult to identify early on if we have a cluster of disease if it is Covid or flu and both may have different implications for school closures etc.

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

Maximising vaccine uptake amongst eligible groups will protect members of our communities, facilitating people to maintain good health through the winter period will maximise employment and learning opportunities and limit absence from school and workplaces.

Ensuring people can access help and support to sustain their employment, maximise opportunities and aspirations is key to developing resilient households more able to withstand the impact of some financial and social changes.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Flu and Covid are largely preventable illnesses. Ensuring good uptake of vaccination for risk groups and health and social care staff, will prevent illness and death within Halton.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Keeping Halton's population safe from all threats is a key consideration and more important currently with the added difficulties posed by the pandemic.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None specified

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 *Failing to adequately implement the national flu plan and protect our community from additional seasonal threats and harms puts the population at significant risk of outbreaks, increased burden of illness and ill-health and challenges local households and communities. Failure to plan and mitigate against identifiable risks is a corporate and an integrated health and care system risk.*

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 *All plans are developed with the basis of reducing inequalities in mind and are developed in line with all equality and diversity issues within Halton taking into account the implications for, and impact upon, individuals with protected characteristics.*

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None within the meaning of the Act.