

September 2024

Over 1 million parents and carers of 2 and 3-year-olds will be urged to book their children in for a flu vaccine, as the NHS ramps up its preparations for winter.

The NHS is sending invitations to the group from Tuesday (17 September), after the job offer for pregnant women and school children kicked off earlier this month (1 September). The flu vaccination campaign is launched on the 1st of September, with appointments running across autumn and winter, provides vital protection to prevent people from developing serious illnesses and ending up in hospital during the busy winter months. The flu vaccine is usually given to children as a quick and painless spray up the nose – without the need for an injection – unless your child cannot have porcine gelatine in medical products, in which case an injected flu vaccine is available as an alternative. Flu season usually peaks in December and January, so starting vaccinations in autumn will ensure those most at risk are protected during the colder months when people gather indoors, and viruses spread. Last year, during the peak of winter flu cases, data showed there were 2,478 patients in hospital with flu each day – 2.5 times higher than compared to the year previous (2,478 week ending 4 February 2024 versus 961 in the same week of 2023). While Australia’s flu season this year – which is normally a good predictor for how seasonal viruses will play out in the English winter – saw health services manage a big wave of COVID-19 infections alongside a rise in influenza and other winter illnesses. Other eligible groups will soon be able to get their flu and COVID-19 jabs from 3 October, with online bookings opening on 23 September. This month, for the first time ever, the NHS is also offering the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccine to pregnant women from 28 weeks and older adults aged 75 to 79. Pregnant women are encouraged to book their vaccine via their maternity service or GP practice and older adults should wait to be invited by the NHS. **Steve Russell, NHS National Director for Vaccinations and Screening said:** “The flu vaccine is our best defence against these winter viruses, as well as helping to reduce pressure in hospitals over the winter period as demand increases. “The flu virus puts thousands of people in hospital each year and vaccinations help us to keep more people well – so I would urge everyone eligible to book their jabs when they become available, to protect themselves and people around them”.

Maternity research praised for role in study into new treatment affecting some pregnant women

An NHS maternity research team has been praised for the lead role it has played in finding a treatment for a condition affecting pregnant women. The team at North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust was visited by Professor Andrew Weeks who highlighted the service's role in a national research study he is leading. The research and maternity team are part of a trial to test the effectiveness of two different medications in treating women who experience excessive bleeding after childbirth. The trust has been one of the leading performers in the COPE study over the last few months – helping recruit the third highest number of women to the trial nationally. In a visit to the delivery suite at the University Hospital of North Tees, Professor Weeks told staff: “You have been one of the lead sites throughout this study – the work you have done is fantastic. “You have been there right from the very start of this study. It is very difficult to recruit to research trials, so what you have done is deserving of recognition.”

Excessive bleeding after childbirth – a condition known as postpartum haemorrhage (PPH) – affects more than one in 20 women. The COPE Study is comparing two drugs currently used to treat PPH, to decide which is better.

Speaking during the visit, Atul Nalawade, consultant in obstetrics and gynaecology and principal investigator for the trial at the trust, said: “Our maternity research team have always been here to support staff with this study and our team here have continuously focused on recruiting too. It is thanks to the work they have done that research has become part of the culture in our service. I also want to thank our maternity staff and clinicians for their hard work as a team to embed research and for their dedication to this study.”

The blinded study is aiming to recruit 2,000 women from NHS hospitals across the country with 21 already recruiting and other hospitals starting soon. One group of these women will receive oxytocin or a placebo (dummy drug) and the other will receive Carboprost or a placebo.

Sharon Gowans, lead research midwife for the study site at the trust, said: “I not only want to thank all of the staff who have helped make our involvement in this study a success but also thank the women who have agreed to be part of it. These women have taken the time to have that conversation with us and allow us to talk to them about the benefits of research. Without their involvement we wouldn't be able to make a difference to how we treat health issues like this.”