VACCINATION

Nurses urged to get the flu jab

Staff are shown the importance of vaccine

The annual drive urging nurses and other healthcare staff to have their free flu vaccination is underway, following a fall in numbers last year.

As the vaccination is not compulsory, it is up to campaigns and employers to convince staff of its benefits, and many NHS trusts are encouraging immunisation to protect vulnerable patients.

Some employers are trying to inject a bit of humour into campaigns. The NHS in Merseyside has posters saying ‘Get your flu jab (because we’re sick of producing these posters every year)’, and staff in Hartlepool have recorded a song, 5,000 Jabs, to represent their 5,000 employees.

NHS Employers (NHSE) works with Public Health England, supported by the Department of Health, to run the annual ‘flu fighter’ campaign. In 2010-11, the year before the campaign was launched, staff vaccination rates in England were at 35%. This rose to a high of 55% in 2014-15, but dropped to 51% last year, so further efforts are needed to convince some nurses to receive the vaccine.

Myth-busting

Last year, the lowest uptake among NHS staff groups was 45% for nurses (not including GP practice nurses), while the highest came from GP practice nurses at 65%.

NHSE director of development and employment Sue Covill says: ‘Nurses in GP practices have easy access to the vaccine, so it’s no surprise they are the most vaccinated staff group. It’s vital we help community nurses and others get the same access and that we continue to dispel myths surrounding the vaccine.’

This means highlighting the fact that there is only a one in a million chance of an adverse reaction to a virus, according to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency.

RCN professional lead for public health nursing Helen Donovan says:

‘Trusts need to make the vaccine as easy for staff to access as possible’

Helen Donovan

‘Most healthcare staff are reasonably young and fit and, if they get ill, it will not mean they are hospitalised, but this isn’t true for all of
45% of nurses (excluding GP practice nurses) in England were immunised in 2015-16, the lowest uptake among staff groups. The figure for GP practice nurses was 65%.

51% of front-line healthcare workers were immunised against flu in 2015-16, compared with 55% in 2014-15.

Effective message
A hard-hitting campaign this year has led to more than four in ten nurses, midwives and health visitors already receiving their flu vaccine at South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

The organisation’s poster and social media campaign features photographs of real-life patients, including a woman wearing an oxygen mask, with the slogan ‘I already have one fight on my hands. I’m relying on YOU to fight the flu’.

Another, featuring neonate baby Jude, reads ‘I am fighting to get well. Please don’t make me fight the flu too’.

In a film for the campaign, surgical sister and flu champion Jo Trattles says: ‘It’s important that everyone has the flu jab so we have herd immunity, in the hope that we don’t pass it on to our relatives, loved ones, work colleagues and especially our patients.’

To read Nursing Standard’s Twitter chat on flu vaccinations go to storify.com/NScomment

their patients. Trusts need to make the vaccine as easy to access as possible, across various sites, and close to where staff are working.

Trusts in Northern Ireland are trying new approaches to meet their uptake target of 40%. Last year, 25% of health workers were immunised, a 2% rise on the previous year. Initiatives have included Belfast Health and Social Care Trust using peer vaccinators.

Last year, Wales came the closest it ever has towards reaching its target of 50% when 47% of front-line NHS staff were vaccinated.

Nursing and midwifery staff were slightly above the target at 50%.

Public Health Wales lead flu nurse Nicola Meredith says: ‘We’re pleased there’s been a year-on-year increase in staff getting vaccinated in Wales. Misconceptions about the vaccine are still around, and we try to counter that with an evidence base via our campaign for staff and patients at www.beatflu.org.’

One third of health and social care staff in Scotland received vaccinations last year – 17% below the target. The figure for the previous year was 36.3%.

Tim George