

News release

Monday October 10, 2011
For immediate release

Helping you to stay out of hospital

Last winter people with health problems were 11 times more likely to die from seasonal flu than fit and well people.

The NHS in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland is urging more people with a long-term condition such as asthma, heart disease or multiple sclerosis to get the flu jab.

Each winter East Midlands Ambulance Service experiences an increase in the number emergency 999 calls received and many calls for help are from people suffering from flu.

Ivan Browne, public health consultant speaking on behalf of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland PCT Cluster, said: "People with long-term conditions are used to managing their health and taking precautions, however many do not consider flu to be a risk. Getting flu when you already have a long-term condition can lead to serious complications and tragically in some cases even death, but problems can be prevented by having the free vaccine.

"Unlike other medication for long-term conditions, the flu jab is an annual one-off vaccine. There is a new vaccine each year to fight the flu virus which changes every year. So please don't underestimate flu. Take time to get the free jab at your local GP surgery and help protect yourself."

Louise De Groot, clinical quality manager and paramedic for the Leicestershire and Rutland division of East Midlands Ambulance Service, said: "Getting flu when you already have a long-term condition can be devastating. Unlike people with no underlying health conditions who can treat themselves at home, often people suffering from flu with a long-term condition may be far more unwell, potentially resulting in admission to hospital for treatment. This can be very upsetting for the patient and their loved ones because these patients may have already spent a great deal of time in a health setting. I urge anyone with a long-term health condition to get the flu jab to reduce the risk of them being admitted to hospital."

There are additional ways people can protect themselves and those around them. Good hand hygiene - the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' technique – reduces the spread of germs. This means carrying tissues, covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue, disposing of the tissue after one use, and cleaning hands as soon as possible with soap and water or an alcohol hand gel.

The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland PCT Cluster launched a campaign in the middle of September as part of a national drive to encourage people at risk of flu to get protected and have the vaccine.

There are four groups of people most at risk from flu – pregnant women; people with long-term conditions; carers; and people over 65.

Posters and information leaflets designed to bust flu myths and help educate people on the importance of getting the jab will be available at local GP surgeries, hospitals and clinics. Copies will also be available on the websites of University Hospitals of Leicester, NHS Leicester City, NHS Leicestershire County and Rutland, Leicestershire Partnership Trust and East Midlands Ambulance Service.

ENDS

For interviews or more information please contact media officer Liz Thomas on 0116 295 7677 or liz.thomas@leicestercity.nhs.uk or senior media officer Caroline Higgs on 0116 295 7663 or caroline.higgs@lcr.nhs.uk

Notes to editor:

In October 2010 NHS Leicester City and NHS Leicestershire County and Rutland joined forces to form a 'cluster', in line with the requirements of the Department of Health. Although we share one Cluster Board and our staff work across the city and county boundaries, we have not legally merged, and retain our separate statutory duties. Together we serve a population of more than a million people. Cluster formation is an interim stage in the reform of the NHS, involving ongoing transfer of most local commissioning functions to GP-led clinical commissioning groups, in line with the Health and Social Care Bill, now before Parliament and the House of Lords.