



Department
of Health

From Jane Ellison MP
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22 October 2014

Dear Health and Wellbeing Board Chairs,

Getting Ready for Winter

I am writing to make you aware of the 'Get Ready for Winter' campaign which was launched on Wednesday, 22nd October 2014. This campaign has cross-government input and is hosted by the Met Office. Other key elements of winter preparedness for the health and care system are:

Influenza – 'Flu'

Flu is an unpredictable but recurring pressure that the NHS, the social care system and the public face each winter. For most healthy people, it is an unpleasant but usually self-limiting disease with recovery generally within a week but for at-risk groups it is much more serious.

Effective local flu planning is an integral part of wider winter planning and the annual flu immunisation programme is a critical element of the system-wide approach for delivering robust and resilient health and care services. I urge everyone to continue to support delivery of the Annual Flu Plan (accessible here https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/306638/FluPlan2014_accessible.pdf), published on 28 April 2014, with as much energy as possible.

Flu immunisation really is crucial in protecting those at risk and GPs will as you know, offer free flu vaccinations to:

- people aged 65 years and over
- clinical at-risk groups
- pregnant women
- carers and Health and social care workers *and*
- residents in long-stay care homes

Uptake of the vaccine in some of these groups remains disappointingly low and we hope that, with your support, we can help to encourage individuals eligible for free vaccinations to take them up.

Key actions are:

- Encourage flu vaccination in at-risk groups and ensure that staff in contact with vulnerable individuals have access to flu vaccination (particularly social care and NHS staff).
- Encourage good hand hygiene, to reduce the spread of flu and other infections in all settings e.g. “catch it, bin it, kill it” campaign.
- Information about the annual flu programme and resources can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/annual-flu-programme> and if you would like further information please email immunisation@phe.gov.uk.

Norovirus

Norovirus is the most common cause of infectious gastroenteritis (diarrhoea and vomiting) in England and outbreaks occur regularly each winter with disruptions to the provision of public services such as closures of hospital wards or schools. It is generally mild and people usually recover fully within 2-3 days but it can be dangerous for the very young and elderly.

The most effective control measures are:

- attention to good infection control practice, including hand washing with soap and water (not relying on alcohol gels as these do not kill the virus);
- prompt segregation of affected patients, *and*
- good communication with staff, patients, visitors and other local organisations.

Guidance on norovirus, including management in community health and social care settings and a poster for winter can be found here

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/norovirus-guidance-data-and-analysis>

Health and Social Care integration

Actions to reduce winter mortality, and morbidity, and winter pressures on the NHS and social care system provide opportunities for greater integration of health and care commissioning.

PHE has recently published tools that:

- forecast total non-elective and avoidable emergency admissions. Local area can use this data to confirm that their Better Care Fund (BCF) plans address any adverse trends identified by the tool (accessible here

<http://www.yhpho.org.uk/default.aspx?RID=203927>).

- give local areas access to indicators related to the BCF and enables comparison with other local authority areas and to the national average. For access to the site and feedback please contact Justin Robinson at justin.robinson@phe.gov.uk

Cold Weather Plan

The Cold Weather Plan for England launched on 21st October is operationally led by Public Health England, NHS England and the Local Government Association. The Plan focuses on reducing harm to health in winter and unnecessary hospital visits and should be considered by all organisations, including Health and Wellbeing Boards. The 2014/15 edition and its associated documents are available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cold-weather-plan-for-england-2014>.

I know that for many, local authorities winter plans are well developed and I am sure that as the clocks go back this weekend, many people will be encouraged to prepare for the winter ahead. As ever, I would like to thank you for the work that you do to promote the health of your communities.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Ellison". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

JANE ELLISON