

Now more than ever, get your autumn boosters!



Information pack for older Londoners

Contents

1. What are autumn boosters?
2. Why the free autumn boosters are so important this year
3. Who is eligible for the free autumn boosters and how will they know?
4. Myth busters & Frequently Asked Questions
5. Targeting communities at particular risk - including older BAMER Londoners and those with long-term health conditions
6. Running an autumn booster information session
7. Resources and contacts

What do we mean by autumn boosters?

Vaccines

Vaccines are the most effective way to prevent infectious diseases as they teach our immune system how to recognise and fight viruses. During the coming winter, the NHS is concerned about the spread of flu as well as COVID-19 and we have vaccines for both of these dangerous viruses.

We are all aware of the dangers of COVID-19 but we must not forget that flu is also a dangerous virus that kills thousands of people a year and complications from flu can include pneumonia, inflammation of the heart, brain or muscle tissues, as well as multi-organ failure.

Being vaccinated against both viruses will not only help you to protect yourself and those around you from flu and COVID-19, but will help protect everyone from a potentially devastating double threat this winter.

Flu vaccine

You need to have a flu vaccination every year as the antibodies that protect you from flu decline over time, and flu strains may change from year to year. **It can take up to two weeks for your immunity to build up fully after you have had your autumn boosters.** Therefore, you are not protected immediately and should continue to be careful following your jabs.

Booster COVID-19

An autumn booster vaccine is recommended in order to give longer-lasting protection. This will help to ensure that people at higher risk from COVID-19, who were prioritised at the start of the vaccine programme, have enough protection going into winter. It may also offer extra protection against variants that have resistance to existing vaccines.

The flu jab and COVID-19 booster vaccine can be offered at the same appointment, depending on when you had your last COVID-19 vaccine. You can get a booster dose from 3 months after your previous vaccination whether it is a primary, secondary or booster.

Most adults can have the autumn boosters but if you suffer from allergic reactions please do inform your GP or pharmacist before taking up the offer.

Why the free autumn boosters are so important this year

Catching flu and COVID-19 - risks

Flu viruses as well as the virus that causes COVID-19 will both be circulating this winter. Catching flu and COVID-19 seriously increases the risk of being hospitalised, ending up in intensive care or even dying. This is particularly the case for those with long-term conditions and older Londoners from BAMER (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and Refugee) communities - who experienced worse health outcomes from COVID-19. If you get flu and COVID-19 at the same time, research shows you're more likely to be seriously ill. Taking up the offer of the free autumn boosters will protect you and those around you and ensure immunity for those most at risk.

There are concerns that flu levels could be high this winter. Thanks to social distancing and other measures taken to stop the spread of COVID-19, flu levels were low last winter. As a result, it is expected people will have a lower level of immunity against the flu this winter.

Vaccines have been shown to reduce the risk of illness, hospitalisation, and death. They are also an important preventative tool for people with chronic health conditions. Getting your autumn boosters can prevent thousands of doctor's visits and save healthcare resources for the care of patients with other critical illnesses.

Vaccines work

Over the last 2 years, through a combination of vaccine-induced immunity and immunity generated following natural infection, large proportions of the UK population have developed at least partial immunity against COVID-19. As we transition from a period of pandemic emergency response to pandemic recovery, the focus will increasingly be on protecting those in society who continue to be more at risk of severe COVID-19. To achieve this, a planned and targeted autumn vaccination programme is now more appropriate.

Symptoms

The viruses that cause both the seasonal flu and COVID-19 **spread in similar ways**, mainly from person to person through respiratory droplets. Symptoms such as fever and body aches are similar in both COVID-19 and the seasonal flu. Hence taking both vaccines is vital.

Who is eligible and how will they know?

Eligibility

Everyone aged 50 years and over will be offered a COVID-19 booster and a flu jab this autumn to increase protection against respiratory viruses ahead of winter.

Flu vaccine	COVID-19 booster
<p>The flu vaccine will be given free on the NHS to people who are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aged 50 years and over• Those in clinical risk groups	<p>Those eligible for a further dose are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All adults aged 50 years and over• Residents in a care home for older adults and staff working in care homes for older adults• Frontline health and social care workers• Those in a clinical risk group

COVID-19 booster vaccine

The NHS is prioritising protection of those at greatest risk – starting with people in the older age groups or who are clinically more vulnerable, and then inviting people in the other eligible groups. You will receive a letter, email or text from the NHS when it is your turn to come forward for the COVID-19 vaccine.

Once you have received your invitation, people can book their autumn booster dose online using the National Booking Service or by calling 119, or can find a convenient local vaccination walk-in site. If you have not had a COVID-19 booster (or your first dose) yet, you're still eligible for a vaccination and can book anytime. If you are eligible for the autumn booster but think you have missed a previous booster you should still go ahead.

How to book your vaccines

You should be offered an appointment between September and December, with those at highest risk being called in first. You should have your booster **at least 3 months after** your last dose of vaccine. To make an appointment for your COVID-19 vaccination online visit

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination/>

Who is eligible and how will they know?

COVID-19

You do not need to be registered with a GP or have an NHS number to get a COVID-19 vaccine. If you do not have a GP however, you cannot use the standard online national booking system and will need to attend a walk-in service. **You cannot be refused a vaccine if you are not registered with a GP.** Registering with a GP is an important thing to do as it allows you access healthcare services, but you should not be turned away from a walk-in site. Around 26 million people across England will be eligible for an autumn booster in line with guidance set out by the JCVI. Thousands of sites across the country are expected to be part of the rollout, including GP practices and community pharmacies, with new walk in sites joining the programme all of the time.

You can book online here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination/>

You can find a walk in centre here

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/find-a-walk-in-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccination-site/>

Flu Vaccines

Eligible individuals may be offered the flu and COVID jab at the same time, with the doses approved to be co-administered. Please don't wait to get the vaccines at the same time, get whichever one you can first, you can catch up with the other vaccine later. You may be offered an appointment at your GP surgery or at your local pharmacy or at a community venue in your area. You can go into your local pharmacy and book the flu vaccine yourself. You can find your local pharmacist using this [website](#).

<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/prescriptions-and-pharmacies/pharmacy-nhs-flu-vaccine-service/>

Please note that people who are aged 50-64 who are not in a clinical risk group will be able to get their free flu vaccine slightly later in the season, around October.

Mythbusters – Flu & COVID-19 vaccines

Myth 1 Flu is just a bad cold

A bad bout of flu is much worse than a heavy cold. If you get complications caused by flu, you could become seriously ill, have to go to hospital, and may get pneumonia, organ failure or it could lead to death.

Myth 2 you can catch the flu or COVID-19 from the vaccines

Neither of the injected vaccines given to adults contain active viruses so they cannot transmit infection and so **it cannot give you flu or COVID-19**. Your arm may feel a bit sore where you were injected, and some people get a slight temperature and aching muscles for a couple of days afterwards. More serious reactions are rare.

Myth 3 Flu can be treated with antibiotics

Viruses cause flu. Antibiotics only work against bacteria. A bacterial infection may occur because of having the flu, and you may be given antibiotics to treat that infection, this will not protect against the flu.

Myth 4 you do not need to get the flu jab every year

The viruses that cause flu changes (mutates), so you need a vaccination that matches the new viruses each year.

Myth 5 I have had the flu so it is too late to be vaccinated

Flu is caused by several viruses, the immunity you naturally develop will only protect you against one virus. You could catch another strain.

Myth 6 Healthy people do not need to be vaccinated

While it is especially important for people who have a long-term condition or chronic illness to get the flu jab, everyone benefits from vaccination. In addition, it is free if you are 50 years and over, and as we age our natural immunity weakens increasing vulnerability to viruses.

Myth 7 getting the flu jab is all you need to protect yourself

Do not forget to wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and try to avoid contact with people who have the flu. This is particularly important in the context of COVID-19

Mythbusters – Flu & COVID-19 vaccines

Myth 8 I don't have any symptoms, so even if I have COVID-19 I won't give it to anyone else. Wrong. People who never get symptoms from COVID-19 may be less infectious than people who get symptoms, but they can still pass on the virus. In addition, the highest rate of infection transmission from those who do develop symptoms is the day or two before they start feeling ill.

Myth 9 I won't pick up/transmit COVID-19 virus because I'm vaccinated This is not true. The COVID-19 vaccines are between 65-95% effective at preventing symptomatic disease from COVID-19 with higher levels of protection against hospitalisation and death. This means that some people who are vaccinated may still catch COVID-19. While the vast majority will not need hospitalisation, some people may still feel very unwell. Vaccination helps prevent infection and reduces transmission, but no vaccine is 100% effective and it's important you continue practicing good hand hygiene.

Myth 10 I have had COVID-19 already, so I do not need the vaccine. Having had COVID-19 does give you some protection from being infected again, but it may not last as long the protection you get from being vaccinated. We know protection from vaccination lasts around six months and is more robust to new variants. If you have already had COVID-19 then vaccination gives your existing immunity an extra strong boost. The best immunity we see now is in people who are fully vaccinated after having had COVID-19.

Myth 11 I have a good immune system so I do not need the vaccine. Previously healthy people can still get very sick with COVID-19, including ending up in hospital and dying. We also know that a small number of people end up with long COVID-19, even with a mild initial illness. In addition, it is not just about you, we can all come into contact with vulnerable people, friends and family, in the supermarket, on public transport, visiting family or at the pub. We owe it to them to try to avoid being infected ourselves.

Frequently Asked Questions

Are the autumn boosters safe?

Yes - the flu vaccine and the COVID-19 booster are safe and have been approved by the independent Medicines & Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) in the UK. You cannot get coronavirus or flu from autumn boosters.

How well does the flu vaccine work?

Usually flu vaccination reduces the risk of flu illness by up to 60%. The flu vaccine is never 100% effective in preventing flu. However, it drastically reduce your chances of getting it (and passing it on to others), and it can lessen the severity of symptoms if you are infected with the virus.

Where can I get my vaccinations?

At a GP surgery, pharmacy or vaccination centre in the community. Health professionals may vaccinate care home staff and residents on-site. See Section 3, 'Who is eligible, where and when'.

Do the autumn boosters cause serious side effects?

Mild side effects, such as soreness and aching muscles are not uncommon, but these are far less serious than the effects of contracting flu or COVID-19.

Can I just walk into a pharmacy and ask for my free autumn boosters?

If you are eligible, you can walk in to pharmacies and get the flu vaccine. It is advised that you book an appointment for your COVID-19 booster, as there must be a 3-month gap between your last dose and your booster shot.

Do I have to have a flu vaccine every year?

Each year, public health experts research which flu strains are most likely to be circulating. The strains that make up the annual flu vaccine each year may change. In addition, studies have shown that the body's ability to fight off the flu after a vaccine wanes over time, so that is another reason why you need a vaccine each year.

What if you have put off the flu vaccine until December, or even later?

It is never too late to get the vaccine to protect yourself and those around you, but the earlier you get your flu vaccine the better protected you will be as we go in to winter so book or visit your GP or pharmacist as soon as you can.

Why do we need to target particular communities?

Research has shown evidence of low uptake of both the free flu vaccine and the COVID-19 vaccine in some ethnic groups in the UK. There is also a growing body of evidence showing that the pandemic has not affected all communities equally, with some communities being more affected.

Older adults with long-term conditions from BAMER (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and Refugee) communities have been hit particularly hard. Hence, we need to ensure that they have information and access to the free vaccination program in the context of the heightened risk and impact of COVID-19.

Getting the message out

Many older adults are not online and rely on their community groups, health groups and faith groups for support/advice. By working with trusted voices within targeted communities, it is possible to get the message out and encourage people to take up autumn boosters. E.g.

- Information on autumn boosters in a range of community languages.
- It is important to develop a respectful partnership, as many small community groups are volunteer-led and run and will not have much resources or time to help promote the autumn boosters.
- Offer to write an autumn booster article for a community newsletter.
- Offer to speak at a community event on the benefits of vaccinations, e.g. community centres, pensioner's forums, Ethnic Elders groups, local faith and interfaith groups, diabetes groups, MS Societies.
- Offer to provide marketing materials, i.e. posters.
- Offer to send autumn booster toolkits to community leaders.
- Work with a community organisation to put a case study together.

Running a local autumn booster information session

Below is a suggested format for running a local information session to promote the autumn boosters.

Introduction (5 minutes) - see toolkit

- COVID-19 and flu are serious health hazards especially for people with long- term conditions and can affect you and those around you.
- It is likely that both the flu virus and the COVID-19 virus will both be circulating. Both of these viruses have **similar symptoms** and they also spread in a **similar way** through respiratory droplets.
- London has the lowest flu vaccine and COVID-19 vaccine uptake across the country.

Icebreaker (10–15 minutes) depending on numbers

- Who do you think is eligible to get a free autumn booster?
- Refer to the toolkit and expansion of the flu vaccine program as well as the COVID-19 vaccine booster program.
- Have a virtual show of hands for who has already had their autumn boosters?
- Discuss apprehension of those that shielded in 2020/1.
- Discussion on above – build on positive stories from participants.

Background to winter viruses and autumn boosters (15 minutes)

- What are the autumn boosters? Refer to sections in the toolkit.
- Benefits of the autumn boosters especially during COVID-19 – refer to sections in the toolkit.
- Myth busters re flu and Covid and the vaccines – raise each myth and discuss.

Resources (5-10 minutes)

- Refer to sections of the toolkit and the poster from Age UK London.

Next steps (5-10 minutes)

- Ask participants how they can promote the free autumn boosters through their communities and networks.

Holding an online event

Before the event

- Have a simple programme/agenda so everyone knows what to expect
- Email this to participants.
- Give clear guidance on how to join the online meeting.
- Ask each attendee if they have any accessibility needs.
- Think about timing of the event and the length of the event – more than 1.5 hours is too much.

Content of the event

- Use the autumn booster toolkit to devise a simple programme.
- Share web links to the autumn booster toolkit and have copies available online and also available to post out to attendees.
- Explain where all the web links are on the Age UK London website so they can be shared.
- Demonstrate & discuss marketing materials e.g. posters, social media.
- Follow up the online session with a thank you email enclosing all links.
- Email attendees a list of evaluation questions that they can easily reply to. Do not send a word document that cannot be edited or reformatted. Ask questions such as :
 - Was the information useful?
 - How will they share the information in their communities & networks?
 - What other actions can they take to promote autumn boosters?

Getting people to come along

- Use Age UK London autumn booster poster that can be emailed and/or put up in the community e.g. local community centres, community noticeboards, surgeries, places of worship.
- Set up an event page on Facebook or use Eventbrite to send out invitations via email.
- Do not forget to provide contact details so people can ask for more information.

After the event

- Ask attendees to follow Age UK London on social media so we can share your story and good practice with others across London.

Resources and contacts

- [Age UK London autumn boosters campaign](#) - toolkit and press pack
- NHS flu [web page](#)
- [Find my local GP](#) - enter a postcode to find nearest GP service check
- [Find my local pharmacist](#) - enter a postcode to search for your nearest pharmacist check
- [Find my local Age UK](#) - enter a postcode to search for your local London borough Age UK
- [Age UK 'Keep Well in Winter' pages](#) - advice and information on looking after your health, keeping your spirits up, managing your money and much more check
- [NHS 111](#) website can help if you have an urgent medical problem or alternatively you can dial 111 (available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)
If you have difficulties communicating or hearing, the NHS 111 British Sign Language (BSL) is available [interpreter service](#)

For more information on Age UK London's autumn booster campaign, contact Kathleen Egan at kegan@ageuklondon.org.uk