Age UK London Urges Older Londoners to get their Flu Jab as Hospital Admissions Rise

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Age UK London is urging Londoners of all ages to get their flu jab as soon as possible, after admissions to intensive care for flu in London increased by 20 per cent in the first week of January.[1]

With London lagging behind the rate of vaccination advocated by the World Health Organisation (WHO)[2], Age UK London is concerned by the large number of older Londoners who are currently vulnerable to the flu virus.

Although coronavirus is currently dominating the headlines, the flu virus is currently a far bigger risk to the health of older people. Accordingly, Age UK London is calling on all older Londoners who haven't had their flu jab to visit their GP or Pharmacist as soon as possible to ensure they're protected from the flu virus.

Age UK London's "It's Never Too Late!" campaign aims to increase uptake of the free flu jab amongst older Londoners by publicising the vaccine and busting myths about the flu virus. Age UK London is also encouraging organisations that work with older Londoners to contact the charity to receive tools to help them spread the word - including leaflets, posters, and "Flu Fighter" toolkits.

Flu vaccination is the best defence against the flu and is free if you are:

• 65 years or over

• Living in a residential or nursing home

• A carer of an older or disabled person

• A frontline care worker

• An NHS worker

• Living with a long term health condition

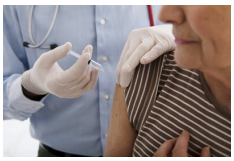
• Living with a weakened immune system

Even though the flu jab is free for those over the age of 65, London lags behind the national average for flu vaccination in this age group.[3] This is especially concerning as UK national average is actually lower than the WHO recommended figure of 75%. There were also 16,133 more hospital admissions for flu & pneumonia for people aged 50+ during winter 2018/19, than the previous year.

Only 15% of Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) met the 75% recommended target rate for vaccines for older people in 2018-19 and Greater London holds eighteen of the twenty CCG areas with the lowest flu vaccine uptake. More worrying still, last winter, flu vaccine uptake in London actually decreased on the previous year.[4]

Contrary to popular belief, the flu is far more than just a heavy cold; symptoms can include fever, chills, headaches and aching muscles. The virus can also lead to serious health complications, resulting in hospital visits and even death. Older people, as well as those living with long-term health conditions or

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weakened immune systems are especially vulnerable to the effects of flu in a city as busy as London.

Kathleen Egan, Campaigns Manager, Age UK London said:

“While coronavirus is hitting the headlines it’s vital we don’t lose sight of the fact that ordinary run of the mill winter flu poses by far the greater risk to older Londoners’ health at the moment. The flu season can last right through to April, so it really is never too late to get your jab done - all you have to do is ask your GP or Pharmacist for your flu jab today!”

“Any organisations working with older Londoners should get in touch with Age UK London so we can help them to spread the word – not the flu!"

To find out more about Age UK London’s “It’s Never Too Late!” Campaign, head to: www.ageuk.org.uk/london/flu

-Ends-

Notes to editors:

- Age UK London is the regional Age UK for London, which campaigns to make London an Age-friendly City.
    - www.ageuk.org.uk/london
    - www.twitter.com/ageuklondon
    - www.facebook.com/ageuklondon

- Age UK London has launched the "It's Never Too Late!" campaign, a focused promotion of the flu vaccine across London. The campaign will place addition focus on targeting the boroughs in north and northwest London, which have the lowest levels of take up in the country.

- For further information on Age UK London’s “It’s Never Too Late!” campaign, please contact Sharon Tynan:
    - stynan@ageuklondon.org.uk
    - 02078206776

Footnotes:

[1] https://www.england.nhs.uk/london/2020/01/13/london-doctors-urge-flu-vaccine-for-toddlers-as-hospital-admissions-increase-overall/
[2] England uptake by CCGs – p5

[3] Regional statistics – sheet LA Main GP
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seasonal-flu-vaccine-uptake-in-gp-patients-winter-2018-to-2019
London Uptake
London reasons for low uptake
A survey of older people in the south London area showed the reasons for not having the flu vaccination as; believing the flu vaccination had made them ill, that they thought were not vulnerable to flu, that they didn’t need it because of other health reasons or under-lying beliefs and finally that they thought GP waiting lists being too long.
http://www.healthwatchbexley.co.uk/sites/default/files/flu_vaccination_final_2.pdf
[4] England uptake by CCGs – p5

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