

Press release – 2nd October, 2017

South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS staff join forces in fight against flu

Frontline NHS health staff in South Tyneside and Sunderland are urging members of the public who are at risk from flu to take up their offer of a free NHS vaccine as soon as possible.

Both South Tyneside and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trusts have now launched their annual staff vaccination programmes which will see over 10,000 local NHS staff being offered the free vaccine to help protect patients in their care.

Flu is highly infectious and spreads easily from person to person. It can be particularly dangerous for patients who are already in hospital and other care settings and who are much more vulnerable to infection and its severe effects. With winter on its way, the message is a simple one from NHS medical and nursing leaders and that is for all those who are eligible, staff and patients, to get protected as soon as possible.

Occupational health teams will be administering the vaccine to staff in hospitals in both areas, and in community health venues in South Tyneside, Sunderland and Gateshead, in the coming weeks. Last year, about 2,600 South Tyneside staff and about 3,300 Sunderland staff were vaccinated and both Trusts are aiming for a much higher uptake this year as the region's NHS braces itself for an extremely busy winter.

South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust Medical Director Dr Shaz Wahid: "Every year, we offer the flu vaccine to our staff as a way of reducing the risk of them contracting the virus and transmitting it to their patients or families at home. It is extremely important in the interests of patient care that our frontline healthcare workers such as doctors, midwives and nurses, who are more likely to be exposed to the influenza virus through their caring role, have the vaccination. By protecting themselves and their vulnerable

patients, they are also protecting their colleagues and their own families and they keep themselves healthy during the winter when NHS services, particularly urgent and emergency care, come under great pressure.”

The Trusts, which are working together through the South Tyneside and Sunderland Healthcare Group, are also encouraging all staff to have the immunisation to help reduce sickness absence so that everyone can play their part in the delivery of services, ensuring that patients continue to receive the best possible care throughout the winter.

With the NHS braced for a pressurised flu season this winter, Public Health England has stressed the importance of being vaccinated against flu. It has estimated that an average of 8,000 people die from flu in England each year. Some years that figure reaches 14,000.

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Notes to editors

- Whilst flu can be unpleasant, if you are otherwise healthy it will usually clear up on its own within a week. However, it can be more severe in certain at risk groups such as anyone aged 65 and over, pregnant women, children and adults with an underlying health condition (particularly long-term heart or respiratory disease) and children and adults with weakened immune systems. A flu vaccine is available for free on the NHS for:
 - anyone over the age of 65
 - pregnant women
 - children and adults with an underlying health condition (particularly long-term heart or lung disease)
 - children and adults with weakened immune systems
- NHS Employers works in partnership with Public Health England, supported by the Department of Health, to deliver the national seasonal flu campaign for NHS staff.

- South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust have been working together as part of a strategic alliance known as the South Tyneside and Sunderland Healthcare Group since March 2016. A joint executive management team has been in place since November 2016 and is working towards a shared vision to develop high quality healthcare services that will benefit local communities for many years to come. Detailed work is currently taking place through the 'Path to Excellence' programme (www.pathtoexcellence.org.uk) to discuss how both Trusts can work better together to improve quality of care and address the challenges and pressures facing the whole NHS.

Issued on behalf of South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust and City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust by **Kay Jordan**

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