

PRESS RELEASE – 11 January, 2018

New flu test is speeding up diagnosis at South Tyneside Hospital

A simple, 30-minute flu test is helping staff at South Tyneside District Hospital to diagnose patients much faster and is freeing up much needed beds.

With the NHS nationally dealing with high numbers of flu cases, which is adding to winter pressures, the hospital has introduced a new 'point-of-care' testing kit which enables staff to determine the best treatment for patients within minutes.

Dr Mickey Jachuck, Clinical Director for Emergency Care and Medicine at South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust, said: "Over the past few weeks, we have started to see many more people becoming seriously unwell with seasonal flu, many of whom have required emergency hospital admission and help with their breathing, with some patients even requiring ventilation.

"Thanks to the advice of our lead microbiologist Dr Richard Ellis and the support of our pathology team, we have recently been able to invest in a new point-of-care testing kit for the seasonal flu virus which has really transformed how quickly we can diagnose and begin treating patients."

Previously, a lab test to diagnose seasonal flu would take around five hours to receive a result. With the new technology, which is in the emergency department, the process takes less than half an hour.

Dr Jachuck added: "The benefits mean we can begin treatment for patients much sooner and, importantly, it also means we can isolate any patients who may be carrying the flu virus into appropriate side rooms so that we prevent the virus from spreading to other vulnerable patients.

“It is also helping to speed up the flow of patients through the emergency department at this incredibly busy time of year. Through our joint working with City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust, we have been able to install the new point-of-care testing kit in Sunderland Royal Hospital’s emergency department, too, meaning patients and staff in Sunderland are also seeing the benefits.

“Whilst seasonal flu can be unpleasant, if you are otherwise fit and healthy it will usually clear up on its own with good self-care and over-the-counter medication from your pharmacist and by getting plenty of rest and fluids and keeping yourself warm. For those people who are at more serious risk, the flu vaccine is the best protection we have and I would strongly urge them to get their free flu vaccine from their GP as soon as possible.”

Those in the ‘at risk’ groups for its severe effects who can get the flu vaccine for free on the NHS include:

- 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

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