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Dear GP, Practice Nurse & Practice Manager Colleagues,

Flu Vaccination: Supporting People who live with a Learning Disability & their Carers

As we are all aware, with COVID-19 still in circulation, this year's flu campaign is particularly vital to protect the most vulnerable. This includes people with a learning disability, a group already hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unfortunately we know that people living with a learning disability and indeed their carers often miss out on flu vaccination completely.

This is despite all patients with a Learning Disability being eligible for a flu vaccination as per the [Green Book Chapter 19 Table 19.4](#). They may equally fit into additional clinical risk groups such as respiratory disease, obesity or diabetes based on presenting medical conditions.

A recent survey of GPs in England found that 73% said they did not provide free flu vaccinations for people with learning disabilities, as they were perceived to be in a clinical risk groups. Many surgeries suggested that anyone with learning disabilities wanting a flu vaccination should go to a pharmacy and pay for it. This lack of awareness of the guidance is concerning, and it is reflected in the low uptake rates for flu vaccination by younger adults and children with learning disabilities, often as low as 20% of the eligible cohort being vaccinated from a typical GP list.

We know that flu is a very unpleasant illness for anyone, but for those with a learning disability who are often more vulnerable, particularly from respiratory problems, it can also lead to more serious complications and people die earlier than the rest of the population.

Carers of anyone with a learning disability should also get the free vaccine from their GP.

People living with a learning disability should also be offered **pneumococcal vaccination**. If they are living in shared/residential accommodation they should be offered **Hepatitis B** vaccination.

We have a legal obligation to make '**reasonable adjustments**' to ensure that people with learning disabilities have equal access to health care including seasonal vaccination programmes. Information and invites must also be given in accessible ways.

What GP surgeries can do:

1. GP surgeries should give a clear message that people with learning disabilities, their **family carers** and **paid supporters** are **entitled to a free flu vaccination**.
2. People on the learning disability register should have it **recorded in their notes** that



they “need a flu immunisation” - there is a specific Read code for this.

3. Talk to people at their annual health check about **why it is important** that they have a flu vaccination. Consideration should be given when planning **annual health checks across the flu vaccination period**, with the opportunity taken to maximise the consultation and complete the annual health check and flu vaccination within one appointment where appropriate.
4. **Put reasonable adjustments in place** to help people with learning disabilities have flu injections:
 - Please find attached with this letter a **template for inviting people with learning disabilities for their flu vaccination**.
 - Consider use of the **nasal spray flu vaccine** as a reasonable adjustment. *[Guidance for healthcare workers](#) says that medical practitioners can choose to use the nasal spray “off-label” and that this can be for “patients with learning difficulties who become seriously distressed with needles”. PHE has agreed that the national stock of the nasal spray flu can be used for this purpose but it needs to be individually prescribed using a Patient Specific Direction (PSD).*
 - Make sure that people know (and are reassured) about how vaccinations will be different this year, with the use of PPE etc.
 - You can also contact the [Community Learning Disability Team](#) if you need more detailed advice on reasonable adjustments.
5. The person seeing the patient may need to **assess the patient’s capacity** to decide to have the flu injection. If they do not have capacity for this decision, then this should not be a barrier to the flu injection being given; there would need to be a decision taken by the health professional that this is in their best interests.

Please also see below some links which give helpful information on leaflets/posters in Easy Read format, legal obligations around reasonable adjustments, and Easy Read information about why health workers will need to wear PPE this year.

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flu-vaccinations-for-people-with-learning-disabilities/flu-vaccinations-supporting-people-with-learning-disabilities>
- https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/637939/PHE_Flu_easy_read_adult_flu_leaflet.pdf
- This [Youtube](#) clip is also useful.
- <https://www.mencap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-04/Why%20we%20wear%20PPE.pdf>

So, please check your LD & associated Carers Register; please target this group; please invite them in a variety of innovative ways; please don’t give up on them!

Thank you.

Steve



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Clinical Director
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