Dear Mr Alexander,

Thank you for your email of 13 July 2018 to Public Health England (PHE).

**1)   What causes bad reactions to flu vaccine?**

The seasonal influenza vaccine is a very safe vaccine, and severe adverse reactions are rare. The most common side effect people may experience is some pain, swelling or tenderness at the injection site, which usually resolves after a few days. Some people may experience mild flu-like symptoms for a few days following vaccination. These symptoms are due to your immune system responding to the vaccine, and preparing your body to fight off any future contact with the flu virus.

People tend to be vaccinated in Autumn or early Winter, which is a time when colds and other respiratory viruses are circulating. It is likely that some people develop a cold, or other respiratory virus at the same time as they are vaccinated. It may be that their symptoms are due to this virus rather than a reaction to the vaccination itself.

**3)  What is long term WHO strategy in relation to flu and how does this impact on the work of PHE**

The WHO Global Influenza Programme (GIP) provides Member States with strategic guidance, technical support and coordination of activities essential to make their health systems better prepared against seasonal, zoonotic and pandemic influenza threats to populations and individuals. WHO co-ordinate national surveillance of seasonal influenza, and PHE contributes to this surveillance programme, submitting both epidemiological surveillance data on the actual prevalence of influenza in England, and virological information on circulating virus strains and genetic sequences. This surveillance data informs the decisions that WHO make each year about the recommended vaccine strains for the seasonal vaccination programme. WHO has a long-term strategy to increase seasonal influenza vaccine use, to improve the availability of influenza vaccine globally, and to support research and development into new and improved vaccines.

**4) Is a long term flu vaccine being developed?**

It is recommended people receive a seasonal influenza vaccination every year. Annual vaccination is recommended for two key reasons:

* the immunity provided by the vaccine declines over time, particularly around six months after vaccination.
* the circulating strains of influenza evolve and change over time, and annual vaccination ensures protection against the most recent circulating strains.

There is considerable work going on within pharmaceutical companies and academic institutions across the world to develop improved vaccines for influenza. Amongst the possible developments is work towards a ‘Universal’ influenza vaccine. The hope is that a universal influenza vaccine could be developed which is broadly effective against many, or all strains of influenza. If a broadly protective vaccine became available, then it may not be necessary for people to be vaccinated every year. However, this research is in the very early stages, and although there are already some trials taking place, if successful it will be several years before any product is available.

**5)   Does non-vaccine flu treatment work?**

Influenza is caused by a virus, and therefore antibiotics are ineffective in treating flu. There are a class of medicines known as antivirals which are considered by NICE to be effective at treating influenza. The antivirals most commonly used as treatment for influenza are zanamivir and oseltamivir (Tamiflu). These medicines are prescription only medicines, and can help to shorten the duration of illness. They are most effective if prescribed within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms.

Over the counter remedies such as paracetamol or ibuprofen can be used to treat the symptoms of flu such as fever and myalgia, but do not fight the virus itself. However, vaccination is the best way for people to protect themselves against influenza.

**6) What has PHE done to challenge the widespread disappointment amongst NHS staff with last winter's flu vaccine? (I have heard PHE severely criticised for undermining the credibility of the 2017/18 vaccine).**

We are not aware of the criticism being referred to here, so cannot comment directly on this. As NHS trusts are responsible for providing the vaccine to their staff, they are best placed to promote and address specific concerns from healthcare staff.

However, at a national level PHE works in partnership with the NHS to promote the benefits of vaccination through various routes including social media, and provides resources and guidance to NHS trusts to increase uptake. Each season NHS Employers run a national ‘Flu Fighter’ campaign, and PHE runs national promotional campaign linked to the ‘Stay Well This Winter’ campaign.

Yours sincerely,

Nirina Kjellgren

Correspondence and Public Enquiries Officer

Public Health England

**FROM HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONS COUNCIL**

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| **Duty of Care during epidemics - Standards of conduct, performance and ethics** |  |

19 Jul 2018

Dear Mr Alexander

Thank you for your email and for raising your concerns with us.

You have specifically referenced the low level of vaccination against influenza amongst paramedics and registrants’ responsibilities under the Standards of conduct, performance and ethics (SCPE).

We believe it is important to raise awareness of these issues across all of the 16 professions we regulate. Last year, we issued communications to all our registrants encouraging them to consider getting a flu jab to protect themselves and their service users from infection.

In this communication we referenced the importance of identifying and minimising risk to service users and their responsibilities set out in the SCPE. We also signposted to other sources of information and advice, for example Public Health England, NHS Scotland, Public Health Wales and Flu Aware Northern Ireland as well as their employer. We will continue to do this.

I do hope this answers your query. Please let me know if you need any further information on this issue.

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| **Flu vaccinations – Guidance to Registered Professions from the HCPC** |

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| Flu can be a serious illness, particularly for vulnerable people, so it is worth considering getting a flu jab not only to protect yourself but also your service users from infection. Our Standards of conduct, performance and ethics, explain that it is important you identify and minimise risk to your service users.  For more information, ask your employer for advice or visit:  • [Public Health England’s annual flu programme](https://hcpc-uk.email/t/2NJF-LMTG-1EW-BHDNP-1/c.aspx)  • [NHS Health Scotland’s flu section](https://hcpc-uk.email/t/2NJF-LMTG-1EW-BHDNQ-1/c.aspx)  • [Public Health Wales flu information](https://hcpc-uk.email/t/2NJF-LMTG-1EW-BHDNR-1/c.aspx)  • [Flu Aware NI’s FAQ’s for healthcare workers](https://hcpc-uk.email/t/2NJF-LMTG-1EW-BHDNS-1/c.aspx) |

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