

15 December 2003

Flu Levels Fall Slightly, But It's Too Early To Predict What Could Happen In The Weeks Ahead

The number of people consulting GPs about influenza and flu-like illness has dropped slightly in the past two or three weeks, according to Influenza Bulletins published by the Health Protection Agency – North West.

However, flu levels remain normal for the time of year and Regional Epidemiologist Professor Martyn Regan says it is not possible to confidently predict what may happen over the next few weeks.

Professor Regan says that any Primary Care Trusts that have not already done so, should ensure that arrangements are in place for the timely prescribing of antiviral drugs to “at risk people” as set out in the Chief Medical Officer’s letter of 5 November.

Professor Regan added: “Primary Care Trusts throughout the region should be congratulated on the success of the immunisation programme – with good uptake amongst older people and others who are at risk from flu as a result of illness or treatment.

“However, I would stress that it’s not too late for people who haven’t been immunised to arrange to have a flu jab. This is particularly important for NHS staff and other healthcare workers at the frontline of dealing with patients with the infection.

“Staff owe it to themselves, their families and the service as a whole to keep fit, well and healthy as we approach Christmas and what is traditionally a busy time for NHS services.”

Note to editors

1. The latest bulletin issued by the Health Protection Agency North West on Friday 12 December (Bulletin 10) is available on the website www.hpa-nw.org.uk
2. It shows that in the previous week (to 5 December) 80 GP Practices across the region reported 252 consultations – a rate of 41.4 per 100,000 of population. This was down on the previous week’s figure of 84 Practices reporting 303 consultations – a rate of 46.5 per 100,000 of population.

3. For a full breakdown of the regional figures by age range and the figures for the counties of Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire and Merseyside, access the HPA - North West website or contact Hugh Lamont on 07764-906508 or pager 08700-555500, asking for NWR130.
4. Flu vaccination is available free on the NHS to:
 - People aged 65 and over
 - People of all ages residing in nursing or residential homes
 - NHS staff
 - People of all ages, including children aged over six months, who have chronic heart disease, chronic respiratory problems such as asthma, chronic kidney failure, diabetes or lowered immunity as a result of treatment or disease.
5. Aspirin should never be given to children aged under 16 years.