

Flu is a viral infection caused by various strains of influenza viruses. Whilst it can be caught at any time of year, it is most common in winter. Winter Flu causes minor illness in the majority of cases; however it can cause severe illness or even death among certain more vulnerable groups such as older people, pregnant women, people with an underlying health condition (such as diabetes) and young children.

The winter flu programme has been established for many years to save lives and deliver a cost-effective programme along with reducing pressures on NHS services during the winter (NHS Digital).

Why is this important?



Winter Flu can cause severe illness or even death among vulnerable groups such as older people, pregnant women, people with an underlying health condition and young children.

What is the local context?



Vaccination rates are broadly in line with national and regional rates. Admissions to hospital with influenza are above the England average.

What should we do?



Vaccination is our best protection against flu! Encourage more individuals from vulnerable groups to become vaccinated.

Symptoms – Unlike a cold, flu symptoms come on very rapidly. Symptoms can include:

- a sudden fever – temperature of 38°C or above
- aching body
- feeling tired or exhausted
- dry, chesty cough
- sore throat
- headache
- difficulty sleeping
- loss of appetite
- diarrhoea or tummy pain
- nausea and being sick

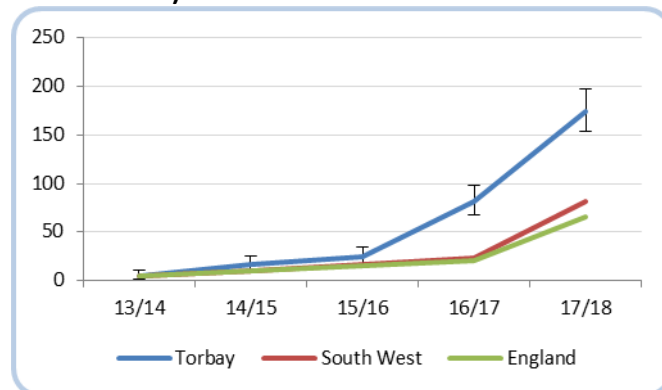
The symptoms are similar for children, but they can also get pain in their ear and appear less active.

Those at greatest risk – Seasonal influenza is a very common infection among infants and children. Healthy children under 5 years of age have the highest influenza hospital admission rates compared to other age-groups.

There is good evidence that pregnant women are at increased risk from complications if they contract flu. In addition, there is evidence that having flu during pregnancy may be associated with premature birth and smaller birth size and weight (Department of Health, 2018).

Numbers contracting flu – There has been a significant rise nationwide in the number of people admitted to hospital with a diagnosis that includes influenza, with a very large rise in 2017/18. The rate in Torbay has been rising quicker than the national rate, even allowing for our age profile. Admissions in Torbay have risen from 7 in 13/14 to 124 in 16/17 and 278 in 17/18 (Fig 1).

Fig 1: Rate per 100,000 emergency admissions to hospital for those who have influenza (Age Standardised)



Source: HES

Deaths – The number of deaths within Torbay rose significantly during 2018. The level of rise within Torbay is similar to Plymouth. It should be noted that 2018 data only includes data up to July 2018. The majority of the rise for Torbay has been in the 75+ age bracket which is similar to Plymouth, The majority of the rise for Devon is in relation to the 0 to 74 age bracket.

Fig 2: Number of deaths (2014 to July 2018)

LA	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Torbay	0	< 5	< 5	7	22
Devon	< 5	11	11	20	37
Plymouth	0	5	< 5	< 5	13

Source: PCMD

Prevention – Vaccinations, hand hygiene.

Vaccinations – All eligible children are offered a live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV), administered as a nasal spray. Vaccinating children each year means that not only does it help protect the children

themselves but there will be reduced transmission across all age groups, lessening levels of flu overall and reducing the burden of flu across the population.

Those eligible for the 2018/19 vaccination program include:

- all children aged between two to nine on 31 August 2018
- those aged six months to under 65 years in clinical risk groups (hyperlink)
- pregnant women
- those aged 65 years and over
- those in long-stay residential care homes
- carers
- health and social care workers (including hospice) in contact with vulnerable clients
- Frontline healthcare workers

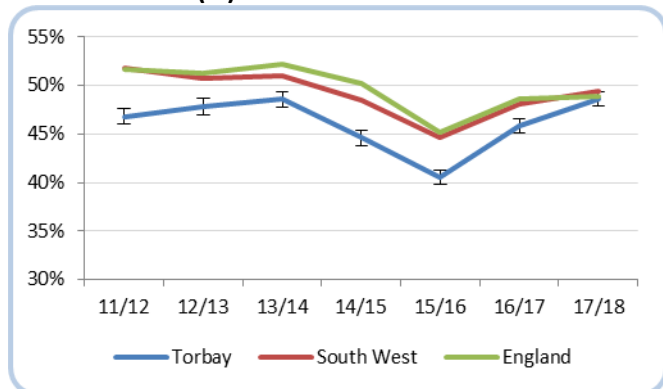
Eligible adults will be offered a flu injection via their GP, community pharmacist or employer. Those not eligible for a free vaccination can access a vaccination through pharmacies at a cost of around £10.

Ideally, vaccination should be by the end of November 2018 but people can receive the vaccine until the end of the influenza season in March 2019.

Currently vaccination rates in Torbay are lower than the target. Only 48.6% of eligible at risk individuals received a flu vaccination in 2017/18 which is in line with the 48.9% vaccinated across England but far below the target of 55% coverage. For those aged 65+ 71.2% were vaccinated in Torbay compared to 72.6% in England. Both of these are below the 75% coverage target (PHE, 2018).

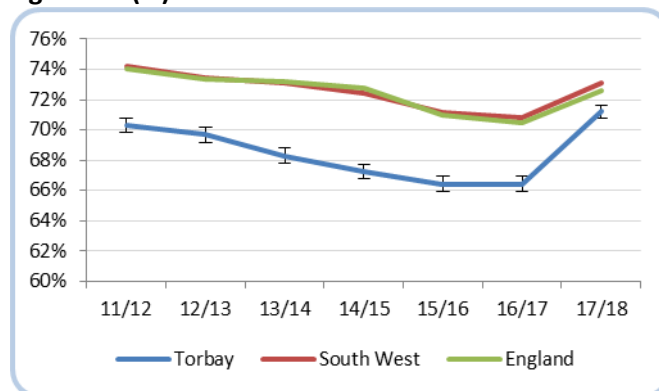
National research indicates that vaccination uptake amongst those aged 2 to 9 is significantly lower in areas with the greatest levels of deprivation.

Fig 3: Population vaccination coverage for Flu – At risk individuals (%)



Source: Public Health Outcomes Framework

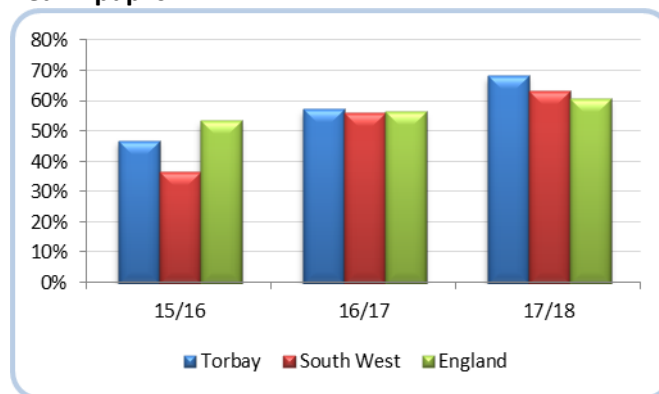
Fig 4: Population vaccination coverage for Flu – Aged 65+ (%)



Source: Public Health Outcomes Framework

Following the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, a phased paediatric influenza vaccination programme was introduced. This is being phased in by age group, we currently have three years of data for Year 1 and Year 2 pupils. By 2017/18, vaccination rates for Torbay were higher than the English average. Year 3 pupils were phased in during 2016/17, Year 4 and Reception during 2017/18. Year 5 pupils will be added for 2018/19.

Fig 5: Estimated Vaccination rates for Year 1 and Year 2 pupils



Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/vaccine-uptake>

References and further information:

Torbay JSNA www.southdevonandtorbay.info

Department of Health (2018) The national flu immunisation programme 2018/19 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/694779/Annual_national_flu_programme_2018-2019.pdf

Public Health England (2018) Seasonal flu vaccine uptake in GP patients: winter 2017 to 2018 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seasonal-flu-vaccine-uptake-in-gp-patients-winter-2017-to-2018>