

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 most cases but 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.

[National Flu Immunisation Programme Plan 2024 to 2025.](#)

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 and admissions to hospital with influenza are now broadly in line with the South West and England.

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.

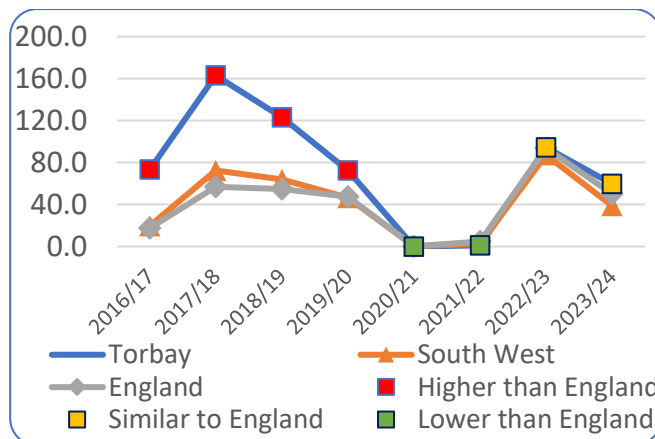
Those at greatest risk – Seasonal influenza is a very common infection among infants and children. Healthy children under 5 years of age have the highest influenza hospital admission rates compared to other age-groups ([UKHSA](#)).

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 – Before the Covid-19 pandemic, Torbay had significantly more emergency hospital admissions for flu than both the South West and England (264 emergency admissions in 2017/18). Admissions are now broadly similar to England (Fig 1).

Fig 1: Emergency hospital admissions for influenza (Directly Age Standardised Rate per 100,000 population)



Source: HES

Torbay’s emergency hospital admissions for influenza usually peak between December and February.

Deaths – Torbay usually has less than 5 deaths per winter with an underlying cause of flu. During the 2017/18 season 24 residents died and during 2022/23 8 residents died. The 2020/21 and 2021/22 seasons had no deaths.

Death certificates often include risk factors such as COPD, cardiovascular diseases, frailty / old age, kidney disease, diabetes, cancer etc.

Prevention – Vaccinations and 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.

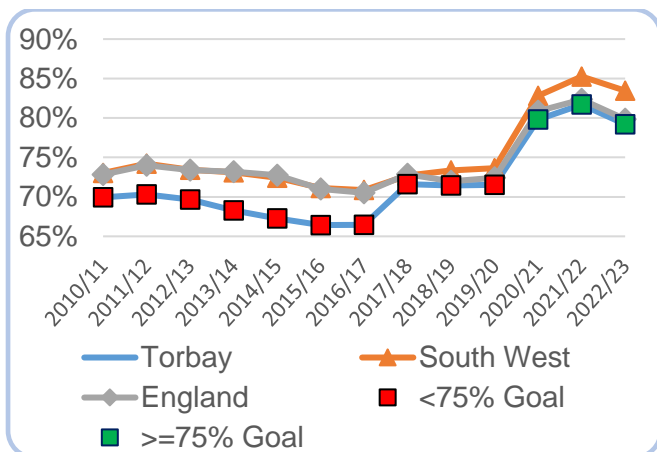
WINTER FLU IN TORBAY (2024)

Those eligible for flu vaccinations include:

- everyone aged 65 years and over
- everyone under 65 years of age in [clinical risk groups](#) including children over 6 months
- all [pregnant women](#) at any stage of pregnancy
- all [children](#) aged 2 or 3 years (on 31st August)
- all [children](#) in primary school
- some secondary school children (years 7 to 11)
- everyone living in a residential or nursing home
- everyone who receives a carer's allowance or are the main carer for an older or disabled person
- all those living with someone who has lowered immunity due to disease or treatment
- all frontline health and social care workers.

For ages 65+, all upper-tier councils in the South West exceeded the 75% target. Torbay was 79.2% (Fig 2).

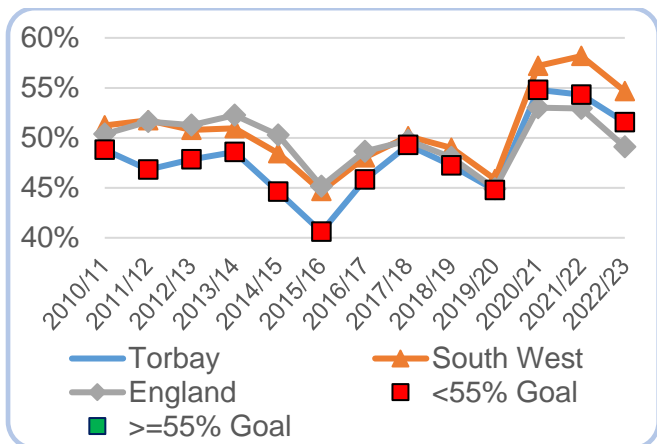
Fig 2: Population vaccination coverage for Flu - Aged 65+ (%)



Source: OHID Fingertips

For at-risk individuals, Torbay vaccination coverage was 51.6%, higher than England, but below the 55% target (Fig 3 below). Devon was 56.4%

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

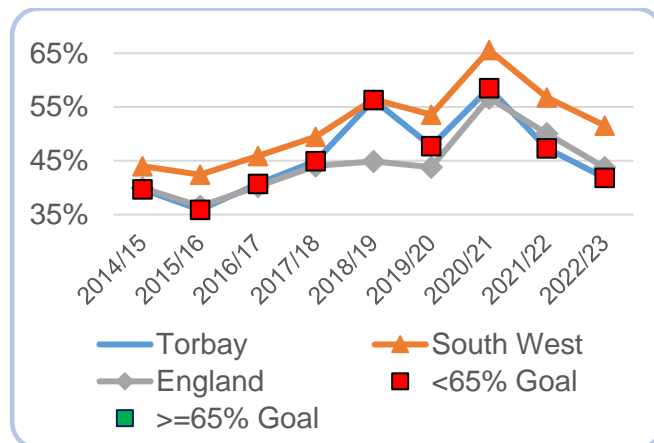


Source: OHID Fingertips

For pregnant women, Torbay's uptake was 36.7%. England was 35.0% and Devon was 43.0%.

For children aged 2 or 3 years, all other South West upper tier councils had higher uptake (Fig 4 below). Torbay was 41.8% and Devon 56.0%. The target is 65%.

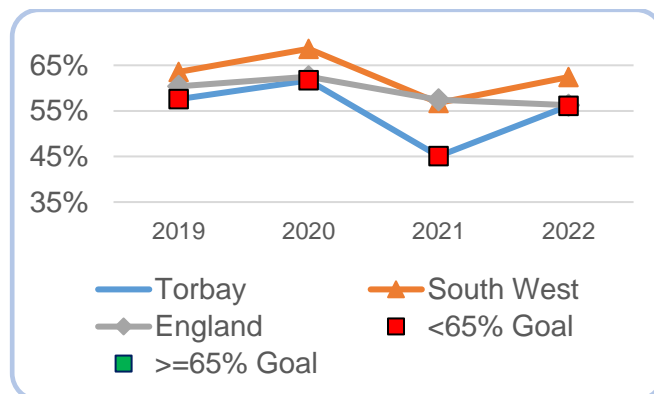
Fig 4: Vaccination coverage for Flu - 2-3yrs old (%)



Source: OHID Fingertips

For children aged 4 to 11 years (Fig 5 below), Torbay was 56.1% and Devon 62.4%. The target is 65%.

Fig 5: Vaccination coverage for Flu - 4-11yrs old (%)



Source: OHID Fingertips

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.

Vaccination rates are generally lower in more deprived communities, particularly in relation to children.

Data Sources:

- Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), NHS Digital.
- Office for National Statistics (ONS) population estimates.
- Primary Care Mortality Database (PCMD), NHS Digital.
- OHID [Fingertips](#).
- [UK Health Security Agency](#).