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The Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP
Chair, Science and Technology Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Norman,

Thank you for your letter of the 5th February 2019, following the Government’s response to the Science and Technology Committee’s Flu Vaccination Programme in England Report, in addition to two Written Parliamentary Questions (WPQs 211142 and 211143).

In addition to the previous responses available on Hansard, you have asked that I provide further information on a number of matters you raise in your letter. My response addresses these issues in turn.

*Frontline Healthcare Worker Flu Uptake*


Both provisional and final data is published by NHS England Regions and Local Teams, Trusts and staff groups with direct patient contact. This includes breakdowns by role, including all Trust doctors, GPs, qualified nurses, midwives and health visitors (excluding GP Practice Nurses), GP practice nurses, all other professionally qualified clinical staff, support to clinical staff, support to GP staff). The final data will be published in due course.
**Ambitions for a 100% vaccine uptake rate**

Your second query related to our aims with regard to flu vaccination in social care workers, and whether this would be set to a 100% uptake rate, to reflect our aim for vaccinating HCWs.

As has been mentioned in previous responses, collecting flu vaccination uptake data from the social care sector at a national level is extremely challenging. With the known difficulties in accurately defining and quantifying the baseline of eligible social care and hospice workers; the employers occupational health responsibilities for vaccination; and the current absence of effective data collection, setting a 100% ambition at this stage is not feasible. Ambitions for uptake rates in social care will, however, continue to be considered.

Though I understand this may be frustrating, I would like to reiterate that health and social care worker flu vaccination remains a priority. As such, the NHS is supporting colleagues in social care to achieve maximum flu vaccination uptake by offering the vaccine to care staff for free, and it is available through community pharmacy or their registered General Practice. This scheme is intended to complement, rather than replace, any established occupational health schemes that employers already have in place to offer flu vaccination to their workforce. In 2019/20, the NHS will continue to support the vaccination of social care and hospice workers.

**Data collection systems**

Thirdly, you asked for further detail with regards to establishing a data collection system for flu vaccination rates among social care workers. Most social care organisations do not have systems in place to collect uptake information. It is a diverse sector with a large number of organisations, including many in the independent sector providing care. It is therefore difficult to accurately define and quantify the baseline of eligible social care workers.

As described in a previous WPQ, for the 2018/19 season NHS England is collecting data on the number of social care workers that access vaccination through the scheme they fund. This includes the numbers of social care workers vaccinated through its flu programme in GP practices and community pharmacy. However, this does not include those vaccinated through employer occupational health schemes, or social care workers vaccinated because they are also eligible for individual reasons (e.g. they are aged 65 or over, or are in a clinical at-risk group).
From 2019/20, the established Immform data collection system used by Public Health England to extract vaccination data from GP clinical systems will include social care workers for the first time. As this will be newly developed data, it will not cover the whole social care sector in 2019/20, but could be developed further in future years.

New vaccines

Finally, you ask if the UK plans to support and invest in the development of new and more effective vaccines. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) keeps the flu vaccine programme under constant review and assesses new flu vaccines ahead of licensure. This is to ensure that improved products can be brought rapidly to the UK population. Based on the JCVI advice, NHS England then advises doctors on when to use these newer flu vaccines.

Recently, this has included the introduction of newly licenced vaccines, based on evidence of their improved effectiveness:

- For the current 2018/19 season, those aged 65 and above were offered adjuvanted trivalent flu vaccine (aTIV) which offers greater protection than the vaccines offered previously to this age group.
- Next season, the cell cultured quadrivalent flu vaccine (QIVc) has been recommended as equally suitable to the current vaccine for those aged 9 to 64 in clinical ‘at risk’ groups, frontline healthcare workers, and social care workers and those aged over 65.

The JCVI meet regularly, and will continue to keep their advice on new and more effective vaccines under review.

I hope you find this information useful.

Yours ever,

MATT HANCOCK