



NHS South East Essex  
and NHS South West Essex

## Get the jab that could save your life

Despite the unexpected good weather that we enjoyed last week, it is the time of the year when we see many people suffering from “flu like illness”. Like every winter the Flu viruses, including Swine Flu virus (H1N1) have begun circulating amongst us and is attacking people with weak immune system and those suffering from other long term conditions like asthma and diabetes.

Nationally, during 2009 winter season more people died from influenza and pneumonia than those who died with breast or prostate cancer. The NHS in south Essex is today urging people at risk of flu to get protected and have the vaccine.

Four groups have been identified as being most at risk:

- Pregnant women
- People with long term conditions and serious illness that make their immune system weak for example cancer, asthma, diabetes , heart disease and neurological illnesses.
- Carers who look after vulnerable people, and
- People over 65 years

Margaret Gray, Head of Public Health for NHS South East Essex, said: “Flu is different to getting a cold and the effects of seasonal flu are often underestimated. Some people are more at risk from flu and need the vaccine because they are not able to fight off flu as easily as others. It can often result in more serious complications which require hospital treatment - and the figures from last winter show that sometimes there can be devastating consequences of death.

“This can be prevented by having the vaccine, which is being provided free to eligible people at GP surgeries across south Essex for people with long term conditions, carers, those over 65 and pregnant women.”

Dr Arun Patel, Associate Director of Public Health at NHS South West Essex, says: “Flu is a highly infectious illness caused by viruses. We now have a safe effective vaccine for the viruses that will circulate this winter. It is important that those at risk protect themselves every year. Getting the free jab helps protect them and their loved ones.”

There are additional ways people can protect themselves and those around them. Good hand hygiene - the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' technique - reduces the spread of germs. This means carrying tissues, covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue, disposing of the tissue after one use, and cleaning hands as soon as possible with soap and water or an alcohol hand gel.

People in the at-risk groups can get their free flu vaccination by contacting their GP practice. For more information visit: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk).