**Black healthcare professionals urge members of the community to get their flu vaccine**

* Black African and Caribbeans have the lowest uptake rates of the flu vaccination of all ethnic groups.
* Public Health England (PHE) research suggests that people infected with both flu and COVID-19 are more at risk of severe illness and death.

Black healthcare professionals are urging members of the community to get their flu vaccine, as new data shows Black Africans and Caribbeans have the lowest uptake of all ethnic groups.

For the first time, Public Health England (PHE) has released data on flu vaccination uptake which is broken down by ethnicity for pregnant women and those that are in clinical risk group(s). The data from September to end of October this year shows that uptake in Black Africans and Caribbeans with long-term health conditions was only 21.8% and 19.3% respectively, compared to 32.3% in the overall at-risk population¹.

Research from PHE this year has also suggested that the risk of death more than doubled for people who tested positive for both flu and COVID-19 at the same time, compared to those with COVID-19 alone². Since the significant impact of COVID-19, notably on Black people, Black healthcare professionals are stepping forward to encourage Black African and Caribbean people to take up the flu vaccination.

**London based, Senior Practice Nurse at Gillian House Surgery, Maureen James, said:** “It has been devastating to see the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the Black community this year. That’s why it’s imperative we are raising awareness and protecting ourselves from any further threats like the flu virus. The flu virus is serious, although many people think it’s just a bad cold. By not protecting ourselves by getting the vaccine, which is the best protection, we are unnecessarily putting ourselves at risk of severe health complications that could lead to hospitalisation and even death.

“The flu vaccine has been used for many years, so I would urge those that are eligible for the free flu vaccine to take it up this year – please protect yourselves and your loved ones.”

There is strong evidence that pregnant women have a higher risk of serious illness if they are to get the flu compared with the general population. The risks are also highest in the last three months of pregnancy.

The free flu vaccine is the best protection for pregnant women and their unborn baby, particularly as any flu antibodies, produced as a result of having had the vaccine, that are produced by the mother are transferred through to the placenta to the baby. This gives the baby some protection against flu for the first few months of life.

People will long-term health conditions are eligible for the free flu vaccine as they are at high risk of health complications if they get the flu. As an example, people with a chronic kidney disease are nineteen times more likely to die from flu, than people without a serious health condition.

This year the flu vaccine programme has also been extended out to offer the vaccine to anyone aged 50 and over – as the risk of hospitalisation from COVID increases from this age onwards. Those who live with someone who’s at high risk from coronavirus (on the NHS shielded patient list) are also eligible for the free flu vaccine this year.

**Dr Bola Owolabi, National Specialty Advisor for Older People and Integrated, Person Centred Care at NHS England and Improvement said:** “Families from Black and Ethnic Minority background will often support older and younger generations within the same household. There is an increased risk of virus spread as sometimes this means more people living close to one another. Flu can be serious and even deadly for older adults, and people with long-term health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and kidney disease.

“The flu vaccine is the best protection we have against what is a very serious virus. So, if you’re in an eligible group – please make sure you get vaccinated. It’s not too late to do so and it’s more important this year than ever whilst there will be both the flu virus and coronavirus circulating at the same time.”

Those who are eligible for a free flu vaccine should contact their GP, pharmacist, or midwife to protect themselves and their families this winter.

To find out more information visit [www.nhs.co.uk/fluvaccine](http://www.nhs.co.uk/fluvaccine)