

# Flu vaccination programme to be expanded

by Kirstie Topp Local Democracy Reporter

**The Scottish Government's free seasonal flu vaccine programme is set to be extended to protect those most at risk during the coronavirus pandemic.**

Those who will become eligible for the vaccine will be social care workers, people aged 55 years and over, and household members of those who are shielding.

The programme may also be extended to those aged between 50-54 if there is enough supplies.

The vaccine will still be available to those aged 65 and over, those with underlying health conditions, pregnant women, children aged two to five years, primary school children, health care workers and unpaid carers.

Health Secretary Jeane Freeman said: "The seasonal flu vaccination programme helps to protect the most vulnerable and alleviate pressure on the NHS. This will be more important than ever this year, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"That's why this flu season, we are extending free eligibility to social care workers who provide direct care, household members of individuals who are shielding, all those aged 55 and over, and those aged 50-54 if vaccine supplies allow.

"We want to reassure those who may now feel anxious about leaving home to get vaccinated. Getting the seasonal flu

vaccine, especially when you have free eligibility, is one of the ways that you can support the NHS whilst protecting yourself and others this winter.

“If you think you are eligible for the vaccine, please visit NHS Inform, and if you receive a letter inviting you to get a vaccine, please follow the instructions.”

Interim Chief Medical Officer Gregor Smith added: “Social care workers often come into contact with those most vulnerable to the seasonal flu, and vaccinating them will help to protect them whilst also providing indirect protection to the people they care for.

“Individuals who are shielding have already been identified as being at a high risk from Covid-19, and this risk is heightened should they contract the virus and seasonal flu at the same time.

“Similarly, vaccinating 55-64 year olds – as well as those aged 50-54 if vaccine supplies allow – will help to protect an age group who are vulnerable to both Covid-19 and the seasonal flu, helping to lower the risk of people getting concurrent cases of both viruses.”

*The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) is a public service news agency : funded by the BBC, provided by the local news sector, and used by qualifying partners. Local Democracy Reporters cover top-tier local authorities and other public service organisations.*