Agenda Item No: 6

Flu Update

To:	Adults and Health Committee
Meeting Date:	9 December 2025
From:	Director of Public Health
Electoral division(s):	All
Key decision:	No
Forward Plan ref:	N/A
Executive Summary:	This is an update about seasonal flu (influenza) activity as we head into winter. This paper includes: • National and local data on current flu rates (and other winter infections) • Current impacts on the local health and care system • Progress on flu vaccination this season • Advice and key messages about flu vaccination
Recommendation/s:	The Adults and Health Committee is recommended to review and note this update.

Officer contact:
Name: Sally Cartwright
Post: Director of Public Health
Email: sallye.cartwright@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

1. Creating a greener, fairer and more caring Cambridgeshire

1.1 This update supports Cambridgeshire County Council's ambitions that people enjoy healthy, safe and independent lives (ambition four) and that health inequalities are reduced (ambition three).

1.2 This update also reflects the Director of Public Health's statutory duties relating to health protection.

2. Background

2.1 The 2024-25 influenza season had a significant impact on the health and social care system, largely due to the sharp rise in Influenza A cases from late November 2024, and a longer, slower decline in cases after the peak (see Fig.1.), partly due to a rise in Influenza B cases at the same time.

2.2 GP consultations, hospitalisation rates and intensive care admission rates were all higher in 2024-2025 than the previous two winter seasons; however, excess mortality was lower than during the 2022-23 season.

2.3 September 2024 saw the introduction of the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) vaccine, which was made available to older adults and pregnant women. A 30% reduction in RSV-associated hospitalisation in older adults eligible for the vaccine was found in comparison with those not eligible, with an uptake of around 40%. As of September 2025, the overall coverage in eligible older people reached 61.8%.

2.3 The 2025-26 influenza season has seen activity rise earlier than usual nationally, with a large proportion of cases in children and young adults. The predominant flu strain varies year on year. This year, a particular strain of influenza, influenza A(H3N2) genetic subclade J.2.4.1 (now known as K) is currently the predominant cause of infection. Previous years when A(H3N2) has been the dominant strain have resulted in higher rates or morbidity and mortality.

2.4 There had been some concern that the predominance of a genetically drifted strain of flu such as 'K' might lower the effectiveness of this year's influenza vaccination. However, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) preliminary studies have shown that vaccine effectiveness against hospital attendance and admission in the early season currently remains within a typical range at 70 to 75% in children and 30 to 40% in adults. Therefore, achieving high rates of vaccinations remains just as important this season.

2.5 Nationally, cases of influenza have been rising. However, to date the East of England has had comparatively lower rates. We do expect cases to rise, but it is too early to project the full course of the season. Therefore, it is important that we use this period to prepare the local system as much as possible.

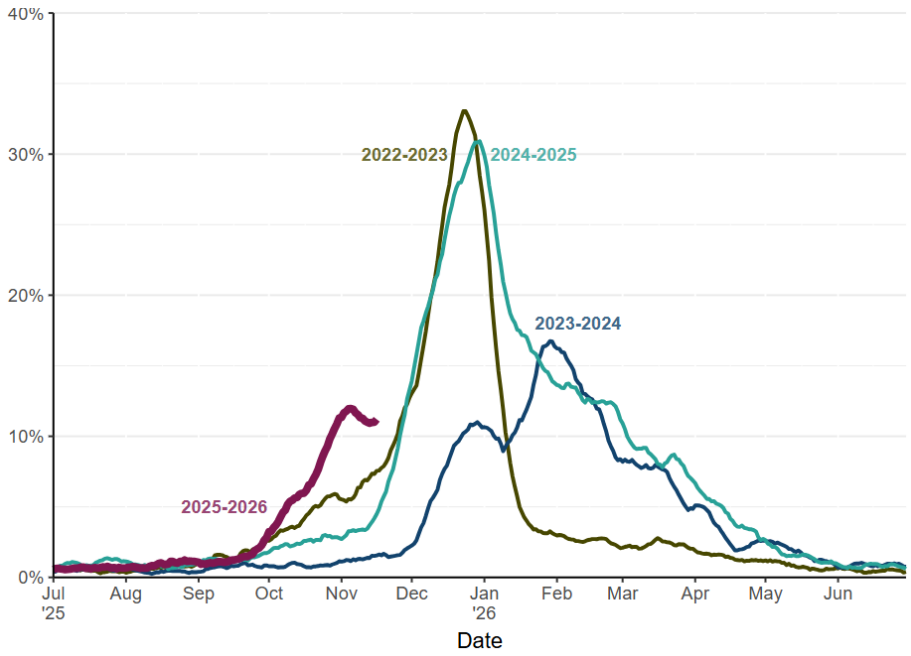

Fig.1. The daily percentage of tests positive for influenza among all influenza tests (7-day rolling average), England. Source: national flu and COVID-19 surveillance report 20th November 2025.

3. Main Issues

3.1 National, regional and local position

Data for the national and regional position are taken from the national flu and COVID-19 surveillance report from the 20th November 2025. This report is published weekly each Thursday during the influenza season.

3.1.2 Influenza - regional picture

- The number of reported influenza A cases remains low but is slightly above the 2024-25 baseline. Case numbers are less prominent in the East of England than the national picture.
- The number of reported influenza B cases remains low and similar to the same period of 2024-25.
- Influenza positivity (the proportion of tests for influenza returning a positive result) has slightly increased from the previous week and is above the 2024-25 baseline, but below the England average.
- The number of Emergency Department (ED) attendances for influenza-like illness has slightly increased and remains above baseline.
- The rate of hospital admissions with influenza has decreased slightly but remains above the 2024-25 baseline. However, the rate remains within what would be termed ‘low’.
- The rate of intensive care admissions remains low and below the 'baseline' threshold.
- Cases will likely increase over the next few weeks.

3.1.3 COVID-19 - regional picture

- The rate of COVID-19 infections in the East of England continues to decrease and is below the 2024-25 baseline and the England average.

- The number of ED attendances for potential COVID-19 infection continues to decrease in line with the national picture.
- The rate of hospital admissions with confirmed COVID-19 infection has decreased slightly and remains below baseline.
- The rate of intensive care admissions has decreased slightly and is below baseline.

3.1.4 Local position in Cambridgeshire

- **Infections**: Cases of most acute respiratory infections (ARIs) have reduced in the last couple of weeks, except for respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) which has increased, but remains lower than this time last year. Cases of rhinovirus (common cold) have reduced but are still high compared to this time last year.

- **Local Hospital Trusts:** (Position as at 21st November 2025) No intensive care beds are currently being used for ARI admissions. Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust currently has one closed bay (not a full ward) due to respiratory viruses, with no closed beds (i.e. no empty beds in the closed bay that cannot be used by others).

- **Care Homes:** No outbreaks of seasonal infections have been reported in November so far; two were reported in October – only one of which was an acute respiratory infection.

3.2 Local vaccination position

3.2.1 Flu vaccination

Most eligible cohorts within Cambridgeshire have reached the same level of vaccine uptake as last year or have exceeded this. Weekly meetings are held between Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council's Public Health teams and NHS Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care Board (ICB), and this opportunity is used to interrogate the data and discuss issues faced by the hospital Trusts. Overall, uptake is higher in most cohorts than last year, which is particularly promising as the vaccination programme does not end until March 2026. However, vaccination rates for some cohorts remain low (similar to national trends) and inequalities in uptake are seen.

3.2.2 CCC staff vaccination offer

The CCC staff vaccination offer consists of a free voucher scheme for any frontline staff who have contact with vulnerable groups. Staff can download a voucher to be used to book a free flu vaccine at a range of community pharmacies. This offer was released and cascaded through line managers in October, with promotional articles on the Council's staff intranet (including FAQs) on two occasions, as well as promotion via staff screens at CCC sites. The number of vouchers redeemed to date is higher than last year, but still much lower than is ideal. However, many staff are already eligible for free vaccination as a member of an eligible group, and a survey has shown that many will have received their vaccination through the NHS via their GP or pharmacy instead.

3.2.3 Communications campaigns

CCC feeds into the system-wide winter vaccination comms group led by NHS England. Comms assets from the local ICB and NHS England are shared on our channels, and there

was a co-ordinated push last weekend for the national 'Big Weekend' campaign to promote flu vaccination ahead of the festive season. The CCC Public Health team have communicated with schools, early years settings and care homes regarding eligibility for both staff and adults/children, and the continued importance of getting the flu vaccine each year. Care homes were also engaged with at the most recent care home provider forum.

3.3 Key messaging on vaccination

It is important that all those who are eligible for flu vaccination due to being in a priority group (see below) are encouraged to get vaccinated. Vaccination is available through GPs, pharmacies, schools and some work settings. Individuals should be encouraged to take up vaccination offers available to them to help reduce the spread in the community.

The following groups are eligible for a free flu vaccine on the NHS:

- everyone aged 65 years and over
- everyone under 65 years of age who has certain medical conditions
- all pregnant women, at any stage of pregnancy
- children and babies over 6 months of age in clinical risk groups
- all children aged 2 and 3 years (on 31st August, before autumn flu vaccinations start)
- all children in primary school
- some secondary school-aged children (Years 7 to 11)
- everyone living in a residential or nursing home
- everyone who receives a carer's allowance, or is 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

Immunity to flu wanes and dominant flu strains change regularly, so it is important to have a flu vaccination every year. The influenza vaccine cannot give you flu. The flu vaccine takes approximately 14 days to give full protection.

4. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

4.1 Whilst the flu season has started early this year, and there is some uncertainty on the impact of the drifted flu strain K, all indications are that the current vaccine will continue to protect key cohorts from severe disease. The East of England is not seeing the increased numbers of cases observed elsewhere in England so far; however, numbers are likely to increase, and the local situation will be closely monitored by the CCC Public Health team.

4.2 Flu vaccination rates amongst most cohorts are level with, if not better than, last year. This winter will also see the second year that RSV vaccination has been available – a vaccine shown to have significantly reduced hospital admissions in older adults last year.

4.3 The CCC Public Health team will continue to work closely with the ICB and NHS England on monitoring the vaccination programme and improving its reach to underserved populations. However, it is worth noting that there are expected to be disruptions within the system due to the ICB restructure over the coming months, which will affect both the infection prevention and control (IPC) team and the vaccination team within the ICB.

4.4 The CCC Public Health team is also in regular contact with, and receives verbal/written updates from, the regional UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) Health Protection Team as well as the infection prevention teams locally within the ICB and regionally within NHS England. As has been the case during previous winters, we will continue to support our system partners as and when needed.

5. Significant Implications

5.1 Finance Implications

There are no significant finance implications. The work of the Council's Public Health team is funded by the public health grant.

5.2 Legal Implications

There are no significant legal implications.

5.3 Risk Implications

There are no significant risk implications.

5.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant equality and diversity implications. This update notes that inequalities exist between population groups in terms of vaccine uptake, and work is ongoing with the NHS and system partners to address these inequalities.

6. Source Documents

6.1 National flu and COVID-19 surveillance reports: 2025 to 2026 season - GOV.UK
RSV vaccine coverage report in older adults in England: September 2025 - GOV.UK
Your guide to who's eligible for the autumn 2025 flu vaccine – UK Health Security Agency
Flu vaccination: who should have it this winter and why - GOV.UK