

PRESS RELEASE**22nd October, 2009.****Health chief urges staff and at risk patients to have the swine flu vaccine**

NHS organisations and local authorities across Stoke and North Staffordshire are set to start their programme of vaccinating frontline health and social care workers - and people with existing health problems - against swine flu next week.

This follows the successful licensing of the swine flu vaccines and the news that the vast majority of people will only need one dose.

Targeting health and social care workers will help the NHS workforce to remain resilient and be able to treat sick patients. This will be very important if we do get very large number of people being affected by swine flu.

Patients with the following characteristics are priority over the next 12 weeks:

- People aged over six months and under 65 years in current seasonal flu vaccine clinical at risk groups
- All pregnant women
- Household contacts of people with compromised immune systems e.g. people in regular close contact with patients on treatment for cancer
- People aged 65 and over in the current seasonal flu vaccine clinical at risk groups

All patients will be contacted by their GPs – by letter – over the next few weeks if they fall into one of the at risk categories and called for vaccination.

Speaking on behalf of all local NHS organisations, Director of Public Health for NHS Stoke on Trent Dr Giri Rajaratnam said: “It seems to be the case that for most people, the effects of swine flu are mild.

“However, what we have seen in recent months is that although thankfully rare, the virus can cause a potentially dangerous illness in anyone who catches it and sadly some people have died. So, our best line of defence against swine flu is the H1N1 vaccine.

“This is the first pandemic for which we have had vaccine to protect people and we are one of the first countries in the world to start vaccinating against this virus.

“I urge all frontline staff and everyone in the priority groups to have the vaccine – it will help prevent people from getting swine flu and the complications that may arise from it.

“For the clinicians working for the NHS taking up the offer of the vaccine will help us

to fulfill our fundamental purpose which is to ensure that we can provide high quality care for our patients whatever the circumstance."

A decision on vaccinating the wider healthy population will depend on how the pandemic spreads. The Department of Health has placed orders for sufficient H1N1 swine flu vaccine for the UK population and will provide further advice to the NHS and the public on vaccination of the whole population.

ENDS.