



Heads Up from Health Protection - September 2026

This month's edition includes:

- *Get Ahead of the Flu Season And Protect Yourself And Your Loved Ones*
- *Bowel Screening - Don't put the kit in a drawer - do it today!*
- *When Temperatures Drop: Protecting Your Health*



Q: Why do people say 'bless you' when you sneeze?

(find the answer below)

Get Ahead of the Flu Season And Protect Yourself And Your Loved Ones



Who's eligible and when

From 1st September 2026:

pregnant women

all children aged 2 or 3 years on 31st August 2026

all primary school children (Reception to Year 6)

all secondary school children (Year 7 to Year 11)

all children in clinical risk groups aged from 6 months to less than 18 years

From 1st October 2026:

those aged 65 years and over (including those who will be 65 by 31 March 2027)

are aged 18 to 64 and have certain long-term health conditions

people aged 16 years and over experiencing homelessness, defined as those who are rough sleepers and those using homeless hostels or night-shelters

those in long-stay residential care homes

carers and household contacts of immuno-compromised individuals

frontline social care workers without employer-led occupational health schemes (including personal assistants and those working in care homes, domiciliary care, or hospices)

Healthcare & Social Care Workers

All frontline health and social care workers who have contact with patients or vulnerable individuals should be offered the flu vaccine by their employer. Where this isn't possible, eligible staff may access the vaccine through the NHS National Booking Service.

Book Your Appointment Today!

The National Booking Service is now open for seasonal flu vaccination appointments starting from 1st October 2026. Booking early can help you secure an appointment at a time and location that is convenient for you.

The 2026/27 NHS Seasonal Flu Vaccination programme began 1st September for early eligible groups, with more people eligible from 1st October onwards. The programme runs until 31st March 2027, with a final booking date of 30th March.

So don't wait – get ahead of flu season and protect yourself and your loved ones!

How to Book

Book your NHS flu vaccination using the NHS [National Booking Service](#).

You can also book an appointment over the phone. You can call **119** free of charge, if you cannot book online. You can speak to an interpreter if you need to.

Further information about the flu vaccine, including detailed eligibility criteria can be found on the NHS website: [Flu vaccine - NHS](#).

Bowel Screening: Don't Put It in a Drawer. Do It Today!

Bowel screening is a quick and easy test that you can do at home. It checks for signs of bowel cancer and can help spot the disease before symptoms develop. In some cases, it may even help prevent bowel cancer developing. In England, everyone aged **50 to 74** who is registered with a GP should receive a free NHS bowel cancer screening kit every two years through the post. Make sure your GP has your correct address. The test can be completed in the privacy of your

own home in just a few minutes, use the stick to collect a small sample of poo, put the stick back in the tube, place the tube in the self addressed packet and pop it in the post box - it couldn't be simpler to save your life.

The test, known as the FIT test (faecal immunochemical test) is a simple home screening test that checks a small sample of poo for tiny amounts of blood that may not be visible to the naked eye. Earlier this year, the threshold for further investigation was reduced from 120 to 80 micrograms of blood per gram of poo, helping to identify more people who may need follow-up tests.

The NHS estimates this change could help detect around 600 more bowel cancers early each year in England – around an 11% increase – and find 2,000 more people with high-risk polyps in their bowel, allowing patients to have preventative surgery before any cancers develop.

If an NHS bowel screening kit arrives through your letterbox, don't ignore it or leave it in a drawer. Taking part could make all the difference. If you're aged 75 or over, you can still request a screening kit every two years by contacting the NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Programme. [Your guide to NHS bowel cancer screening](#)

A simple test at home could help save your life.

Find out more:



[Bowel cancer screening](#)

The main symptoms of bowel cancer are:

- changes in your poo, such as having softer poo, diarrhoea or constipation that is not usual for you
- needing to poo more or less often than usual for you
- blood in your poo, which may look red or black

- bleeding from your bottom
- often feeling like you need to poo, even if you've just been to the toilet
- tummy pain
- a lump in your tummy
- bloating
- losing weight without trying
- feeling very tired for no reason

I got my screening kit three months ago and forgot to use it. Is it still okay to use?

NHS bowel screening kits (FIT kits) typically have a shelf life of several months to a year.

How to check your kit:

1. **Look at the tube:** Look at the small plastic collection bottle inside your kit.
2. **Find the expiry date:** Check the label on the side or back of the tube for an explicit expiry date.
3. **Confirm the date:** If that date has not passed yet, you can safely use the kit today!

The most critical timeframe is after you collect your sample. Once you use the stick to collect your poo sample and seal it inside the tube, write the date on the tube and drop it into a post box the very same day or the next morning.

What do I do if it has expired?

If you check the tube and find that it has actually expired, do not use it. Throw it away and call the free NHS Bowel Cancer Screening Helpline on **0800 707 6060** to request a fresh replacement kit.

If you've received a screening kit through the post, take a few minutes today to check whether it's still waiting to be completed. Your future self will thank you.

When Temperatures Drop: Protecting Your Health



As summer begins to ease into autumn, it's a good time to start thinking ahead. While temperatures may still feel warm, we have already seen some cooler mornings, darker evenings and changeable weather can all have an impact on our health and wellbeing.

Small steps now can help you stay well as the seasons change. Dressing in layers, keeping an eye on weather forecasts and staying up to date with NHS vaccinations can all help you prepare for the months ahead. Autumn is also a good time to check that vulnerable family members, neighbours and friends have the support they need as temperatures begin to fall.

Remember, cold weather doesn't need to arrive overnight to affect health. Being prepared early can help you stay comfortable, active and healthy throughout the autumn and winter months.

Top tips for early autumn:

- Check weather forecasts before heading out.
- Keep a light jacket or warm layer handy for cooler mornings and evenings.
- Stay physically active to support your health and wellbeing.
- Book any NHS vaccinations you're eligible for, including flu vaccination.

- Check in on older relatives, neighbours and those with long-term health conditions.

Cold temperatures can affect anyone, but older adults, young children, pregnant women, and people with long-term health conditions are at greater risk of illness. Exposure to cold weather can increase the risk of heart attacks, strokes, respiratory illnesses, falls, and worsening of existing health conditions.

One of the easiest ways to stay informed is by signing up for the **UKHSA and Met Office Weather-Health Alert system**. Running from **1 November to 31 March**, this free email service provides early warning of cold weather conditions that could impact health and wellbeing, giving you time to prepare and take action.

The alerts use a simple colour-coded system to identify the potential likelihood and impact risk-see below:

Green (Preparedness) – No severe weather expected.

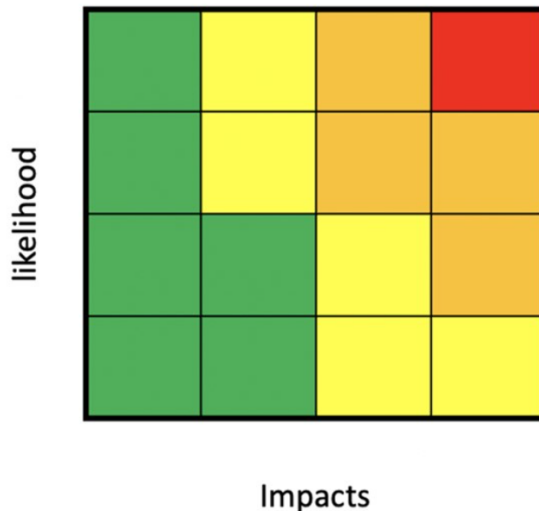
Yellow (Response) – Be aware. Cold weather may affect vulnerable people and cause minor disruption.

Amber (Enhanced Response) – Be prepared. Significant impacts on health services and communities are likely, with increased risks to health.

Red (Emergency Response) – Take action. Severe weather poses a substantial risk to life and wellbeing.

Receiving these alerts can help you plan ahead by ensuring your home is warm, checking heating is working properly, stocking up on essential medications, and staying connected with family, friends, neighbours, or vulnerable residents who may need additional support.

A little preparation can make a big difference. Sign up today and help protect your health, and the health of those around you, when temperatures begin to fall.



To sign up:

Visit the [Met Office email alerts page](#).

Choose your region (e.g. North West England), enter your email and confirm your free subscription.

Stay ahead of the weather — sign up today and be winter ready!

A Strong Start for RSV Vaccination

The RSV vaccination programme is already making a significant difference, helping to protect some of the most vulnerable people in our communities.

New UKHSA data shows that since the vaccine was introduced, there have been around **50%** fewer intensive care admissions among babies under six months old with RSV disease in England. Among older adults aged 75 to 80 who were eligible for vaccination, hospital admissions have fallen by more than **40%**.

Vaccine uptake has also been encouraging, with just over 60% of pregnant women and around 65% of eligible older adults receiving the vaccine.

The programme continues to expand. Since September 2024, RSV vaccination has been offered to pregnant women and adults aged 75 to 79. Earlier this year, eligibility was extended to all adults aged 80 and over and eligible residents in older adult care homes.

From 1 September 2026, the programme will be expanded again to include **adults aged 65 to 74 with certain clinical risk factors**, including some chronic lung conditions and people who are immunosuppressed due to disease or treatment.

With winter approaching, these encouraging results highlight the important role vaccination plays in protecting vulnerable residents and reducing pressure on health services.

[RSV Annual Report UKHSA](#)

Meet the team





1 - Image designed by Microsoft Copilot

The Health Protection Team are getting out and about, speaking to local residents to raise awareness on the national screening and vaccination programmes available.

In next month's edition:

- AAA Screening (abdominal aortic aneurysm)
- NHS Seasonal Flu Programme
- Starting University: A Degree of Protection
- Not Just One and Done: Why Some Vaccines Need More Than One Dose
- Tricks, Treats and Staying Healthy This Winter

[Health Protection Archive: All Previous Issues in One Place](#)

Each month, we've shared updates, insights, and resources to support our work and keep everyone informed. Below, you'll find links to all past issues—feel free to revisit any that you may have missed or want to explore again.

[Heads Up From Health Protection Archives](#)

This information has been produced by the Health Protection Team at Lancashire County Council.

If you require a printable version of this Health Protection bulletin, please email the team at healthprotection@lancashire.gov.uk

(Information correct as of September 2026)



A: The most widely attributed origin relates to a plague that struck Rome in 590 and people were asked by the Pope to say a brief prayer for the sneezer.

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allowfullscreen webkitallowfullscreen mozallowfullscreen msallowfullscreen> </iframe>