

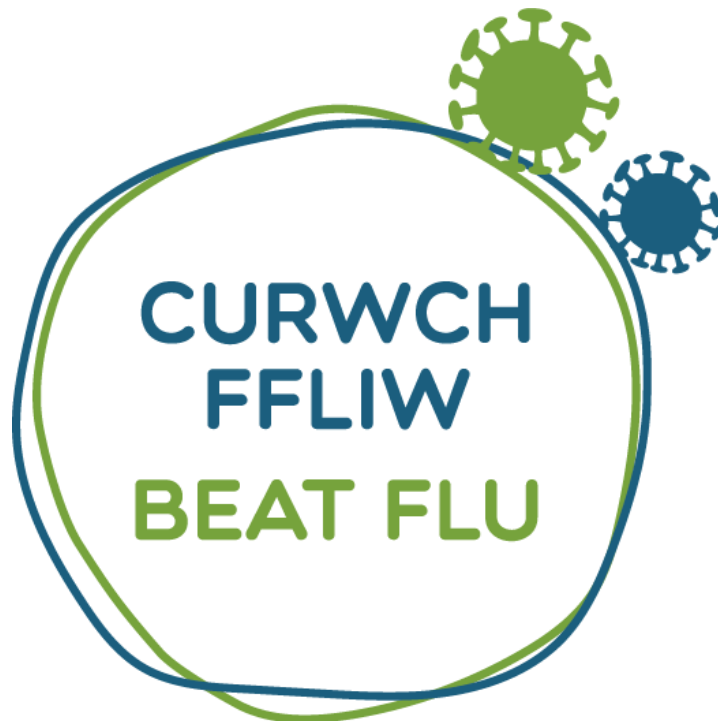


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The Influenza Campaign: A guide for care homes

2019/20



www.publichealthwales.org/fluguideforcarehomes

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Key facts about flu & flu vaccination in care homes

Care home and social care staff have a duty of care to protect their clients / residents from infection

- **Flu can spread easily in care home settings, putting staff, residents and visitors at risk**
- **Care home residents are extremely vulnerable to complications of flu**

Flu kills

- **Flu vaccine is the best way to protect against catching or spreading flu – The contents of flu vaccine are reviewed each year to be as effective as possible**
- **All staff who are in regular contact with residents in adult nursing and residential care homes in Wales are entitled to a FREE flu vaccine from their community pharmacy**
- **Flu vaccines are very safe**
- **Vaccination of health and social care workers helps lower rates of flu-like illness, hospitalisation and death in the elderly**
- **Employers should actively promote the benefits of vaccination by giving staff balanced, correct and timely information, and help staff understand that if they refuse their flu vaccine they put themselves, their families and the people they care for at unnecessary risk**



Introduction

Influenza (also known as flu) is a very common infectious disease which spreads rapidly in a closed environment like a care home and happens mostly during the winter. This is due to the close contact between residents and staff.

Flu can have serious consequences for some people. Every winter people in Wales die from flu and its complications.

Care home residents are extremely vulnerable to flu because they are often elderly and frail and often also have many underlying diseases/health conditions.

Care home staff infected with flu can easily spread it to colleagues and vulnerable residents, even if they have few or no symptoms. Last winter, there were 62 reported flu outbreaks in Wales, of which 10 (16%) happened in care homes.

Information gathered in 2014 from care homes in Wales showed that flu vaccine uptake in care home residents was good (75%) but vaccine uptake in staff was only around 10%. However, the recording of residents' and staff's flu vaccination status varied considerably, with many care homes unable to give accurate information. There was considerable variation in the policies, practices and processes that care homes had for advising about, arranging, and recording flu vaccines.

People living in long stay residential care homes or other long stay care facilities are eligible for a free NHS flu vaccine.

Since 2018 in Wales all staff employed at adult residential and nursing care homes with regular contact with residents are also eligible for a free flu vaccination. The majority of these staff will be providing direct personal or clinical care. Smaller homes are likely to employ staff whose role brings them into regular contact with residents but do not provide direct care. The vaccine is available at the community pharmacy.

All care homes are expected to take a planned approach to identifying staff in regular contact with residents and confirm their eligibility to community pharmacies to help ensure they get their free NHS flu vaccine in a timely way.

Find your local community pharmacy

<http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/LocalServices/Default.aspx?s=Pharmacy>



What is flu?

Flu is a highly infectious viral illness. Symptoms can appear very quickly and include:

- Fever
- chills
- headache
- muscle pain
- severe fatigue
- often also cough, sore throat and stuffy nose

Complications of flu can include sinusitis, bacterial chest infections and meningitis. They can be life threatening, and complications are most common in the very young, older people and people with certain underlying health conditions.

There are three main types of flu viruses: A, B and C, each of which have several different variations (called strains):

- **Type A** usually causes the more serious illness in people. The virus is most likely to change (mutate) into a new version, which people are not resistant to, leading to illness in very large numbers of people e.g. 'swine flu' strain.
- **Type B** generally causes a less severe illness and is responsible for smaller outbreaks. Type B mainly affects young children.
- **Type C** usually causes a mild illness similar to the common cold.

Most years, one or two strains of type A flu circulate, as well as type B.

How is flu spread?

Flu spreads rapidly, especially in closed communities such as care homes or hospitals.

The illness can be infectious from one day before, to several days after, symptoms start. This means that someone with flu may be contagious before they feel ill. Some individuals may not develop any symptoms (be asymptomatic) even though they are infected with flu virus, but they can still pass the infection on to other people.

Flu spreads via droplets – contact with respiratory secretions that are released into the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes

This may be by

- **direct contact** – through direct skin to skin contact, an infected person can pass the virus on for example by shaking hands.

Or

- **indirect contact** – flu virus can survive on surfaces in the environment for up to 24 hours, and people can easily pick up the virus on their hands.



How can flu be prevented?

There are three main ways of preventing flu from spreading:

- Flu vaccination
- Good hygiene
- Antiviral medicines

About flu vaccines

Annual flu vaccination is the single most effective way to protect from catching or spreading flu.

The flu vaccines used in adults contain three or four different types of killed (deactivated), flu virus (two A types and one/two B type). The viruses are killed so the vaccine **cannot** give you flu.

Annual flu vaccination is recommended for a wide range of people (table 1) including those at increased risk due to age or a long term condition, all residents of care homes and also care home staff with regular client/resident contact.

The flu vaccine is usually available from the end of September.

For best protection, flu vaccine should be given before flu starts to circulate in the community. However, the vaccine can still offer protection against flu even when given later in the winter.

Because the flu viruses that circulate and cause illness in the community continually change and different types/strains of flu virus can circulate each winter, the vaccine components are reviewed each year to provide the best protection. The vaccine components are decided each year by the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)).

Flu vaccines cause the body's immune system to make antibodies to flu viruses. It can take up to 14 days for the immune system to respond fully. This is why it's really important to get the vaccine before the flu season starts, if possible as having the vaccine before you come into contact with the virus is how you get the best protection.

A flu vaccination is required **EVERY YEAR** to ensure the best protection against the latest strain of the virus. This is because antibodies decrease over time, and also because the flu strains circulating and causing people to be ill can change each year.



Table 1: People for whom flu vaccination is recommended

At Risk Groups

- **People aged 65 years or over**
- **Pregnant women**
- **People (of any age) living in a residential or nursing home**
- **People from 6 months of age who have one or more long term health problems such as:**
 - **lung disease (including moderate to severe asthma)**
 - **heart disease**
 - **kidney disease (from stage 3)**
 - **liver disease**
 - **stroke or mini stroke**
 - **neurological disease (such as motor neurone disease, Parkinson's disease or multiple sclerosis)**
 - **a poorly functioning (or absent) spleen**
 - **a weakened immune system**
 - **diabetes**
- **Adults who are morbidly obese (a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 40 or above)**
- **Individuals with a learning disability who are clinically vulnerable**

Other groups

- **Care home staff who have regular patient/client/resident contact**
- **Carers**
- **Children aged 2 and 3 (age on 31st August 2019)**
- **Children in primary school (from reception class to year 6)**

It is also recommended for all frontline health and social care workers



Antiviral medication

Flu is caused by a virus, not a bacteria: that's why antibiotics do not help. (Although antibiotics cannot treat or cure flu, they can be used to treat some of the complications of flu, such as secondary pneumonia.)

There are medicines called antivirals that are sometimes used to treat flu.

Some groups of people – particularly the very young, older people, those with underlying medical problems and pregnant women – are more likely to develop complications if they catch flu. General Practitioners may prescribe antiviral medication for people who are in a 'high risk group' and medical advice should be sought at an early stage if anyone in these groups develop symptoms of flu.

Antivirals work by stopping the virus from multiplying in your body. They help to reduce the length of illness, relieve some of the symptoms and reduce the potential for serious complications. If there is an outbreak of flu in a care home, antiviral medication may be offered to residents and staff who have been in contact with someone with flu. This may be done even if the staff member or resident is not in a high risk group.

Most people who catch flu do not need antiviral medication. People who are otherwise fit and well can usually treat themselves by resting, keeping warm, drinking plenty of water (to avoid dehydration) and taking paracetamol or anti-inflammatory medication (to lower temperature and relieve aches).

Good hygiene

Preventing the spread of germs through good infection prevention and control procedures is a really important way to slow the spread of flu and lots of other infections.

Always:

- make sure you wash your hands regularly with soap and water thoroughly and frequently clean often touched surfaces (like grab rails, nurse call bells, light switches, telephones and door handles) to reduce the numbers of germs in the environment.
- make sure thorough environment and equipment cleaning / decontamination schedules are in place and followed.
- ensure cough/sneeze etiquette is followed amongst staff and residents i.e. cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze, and put used tissues in a bin as soon as possible, and always wash your hands after disposing of your tissue.

Staff with any symptoms of flu should be excluded from work until they have recovered, and symptomatic residents should be isolated and cared for within their room until recovered

Detailed information and guidance on infection prevention and outbreak control in care homes has been produced by Public Health Wales:

- [Guidance on the management of Influenza Outbreaks in Care Homes](#) [Public Health Wales. 2015]
- [Infection Control Guidelines for Care Homes](#) [Public Health Wales. 2015]
- [Winter preparedness pack](#) [Public Health Wales. 2019]

Responsibilities of care home employers

- It is the employer's responsibility to provide timely, accurate advice about vaccination in an appropriate format to their staff.
- It is the employer's responsibility to support their staff with regular resident / client contact working to access their free NHS flu vaccination at their community pharmacy.

Staff should not be directed to seek flu immunisation from their GP surgery unless they are in a risk group (table 1) because it is outside the remit of General Medical Services (GMS).

Letters to take to community pharmacies to allow your eligible staff to receive a free flu vaccination

In order for eligible staff to access their free flu vaccine at the community pharmacy they will need to provide evidence that they are employed in a care home and have regular client contact. You may wish to print a letter (appendix 1) onto your home's own headed paper and provide to your eligible staff for them to take to the community pharmacy so they can have a free flu vaccination there.

Common barriers and suggested solutions to help increase vaccination among care home staff and residents

During a survey in 2014, care home managers in Wales identified several barriers perceived by them to have a negative impact on flu vaccination uptake. The main barriers identified included issues around process, policy and practice and solutions that are currently in use by other care homes, or that have been found to help improve vaccine uptake elsewhere offer pointers to care homes on how they may wish to address these issues (appendix 2).

It is crucial to have accurate and up to date records of staff and residents vaccination status as you will be required to give this information to the HPT should a case or outbreak occur in the care home.

In the future, you may be asked about your staff and residents' vaccination status routinely during Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) audits of care homes.



What to do if staff or residents in your care home get influenza like illness

- Staff with influenza like illness (ILI) should be excluded from work until they have recovered.
- Residents with influenza like illness should have a prompt full assessment including consideration of the need for further medical intervention. They should be cared for in isolation and should have minimal contact with other residents e.g. have their meals in their own room rather than in the dining room until they are fully recovered.
- Older people and people with underlying medical problems are more likely to develop complications of flu, so if you think one of your residents has flu, contact their GP surgery at an early stage. The GP can make an assessment, diagnose if it is flu (or something different), and if appropriate prescribe antiviral medication for the patient.
- Ensure good infection prevention and control procedures are practiced in order to prevent spread of flu to other people

What is considered to be an outbreak of flu in a care home?

Symptoms of influenza are a fever, **PLUS** new onset, or acute worsening of one or more of the following symptoms:

- cough
- nasal discharge or congestion
- shortness of breath
- sore throat
- wheezing
- hoarseness
- chest pain

You may have an outbreak of flu if in the same area of the care home you have:

- **2 OR MORE** cases demonstrating the symptoms listed above arising **within the same 48-hour** period, **OR**
- **3 OR MORE** cases **within same 72-hour** period

At this time you should contact Public Health Wales' All Wales Acute Response (AWARe) Team on 0300 003 0032.



Outbreak Management

It is important to recognise potential flu outbreaks promptly. Care home staff should ensure timely and appropriate control measures are implemented to prevent further cases. Staff must be aware of signs of flu infection within both the residents and themselves, and the need to report these signs immediately to senior management staff when they occur.

Care homes should have their own clear and concise written outbreak plan appropriate to the services provided, detailing the actions to be taken in the event of an outbreak.

Care home management must communicate details regarding the outbreak to the following people:

- CIW
- GPs of symptomatic residents - for medical review
- Public Health Wales' All Wales Acute Response (AWARe) Team - for advice
- Residents
- Residents' families and visitors (advise on visiting and other control measures may be necessary)
- Other care providers, if a resident is admitted to hospital or transferred
- Infection Control Teams at health boards if hospitalisation of residents during outbreak occurs.

Consideration should be given to the most appropriate format and language of information and awareness raising resources so that everyone is fully informed of the situation (see [useful resources](#)).

Outbreak Actions

Effective communication of the outbreak needs to reach **all** staff (including, where relevant, agency staff and contractors) outlining some of the key actions that may be necessary during an outbreak:

- Reinforce hand and respiratory hygiene messages for residents, staff and visitors
- Appropriate isolation of symptomatic residents until recovered
- Enhanced cleaning schedules
- Enhanced observation to identify suspected new cases and if confirmed, implement necessary control measures
- Exclude affected staff from work until recovered
- Close care home to new admissions
- Postpone day care visits and outside trips
- Delay re-admission of a resident following discharge/transfer from hospital if they have not had flu
- Restrict visitors
- Postpone visits from non-essential outside service providers e.g. hairdresser, podiatrist, etc.

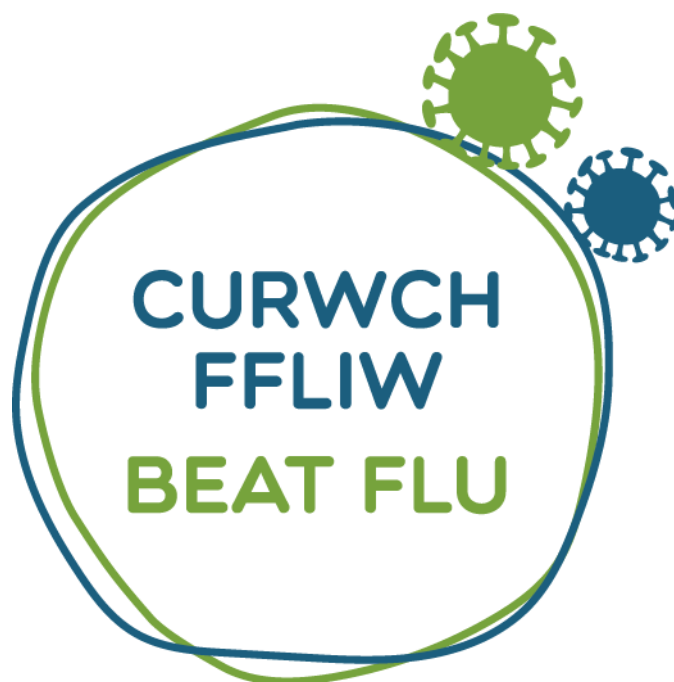
When discussing a possible outbreak with the All Wales Acute Response (AWARe) Team

The AWARe Team will ask you to provide lots of important information. Use the **'Outbreak Record Form'** on the following page to gather and record the information needed before you ring.

The care home staff should ensure clear written outbreak documentation is maintained including case listings, details, onset date, symptoms, outbreak measures in place, and further actions required. This record should be accessible to staff on duty. Additionally, the type of infection and how it was managed should be detailed in affected residents' individual notes.

Public Health Wales's All Wales Acute Response (AWARe) Team:

0300 003 0032



Outbreak Record Form

Resident/ Staff Name	DOB	Date of onset of symptoms	Date recovered	Symptoms	Flu vaccination		Date notified to AWARe	Assessed by GP Y/N & Date	Anti-virals prescribed Y/N
					Y/N	Date of most recent flu vaccination			

Useful Resources

The Beat Flu Campaign provides information, leaflets, videos and links:

<http://www.beatflu.org/>

This includes some resources aimed specifically at raising awareness in care homes

They can be viewed, downloaded and ordered from <https://phw.nhs.wales/services-and-teams/health-information-resources/>

Guidance on the Management of Influenza Outbreaks in Care Homes. Public Health Wales. 2015. Available at: <http://nww.immunisation.wales.nhs.uk/flu-guidance-and-reports#Guidance>

Infection prevention and control guidelines for care homes. Public Health Wales. 2015. Available at: <http://nww.immunisation.wales.nhs.uk/flu-guidance-and-reports#Guidance>

Winter preparedness pack. Public Health Wales. 2019. Available at: www.publichealthwales.org/care-home-winter-pack

The following information leaflet can be printed and shared with staff, residents and visitors to the care home.



There is currently an outbreak of influenza (flu) in this care home

What is a flu (influenza) outbreak?

Flu can be a serious disease. Flu-like illness affects many people during the winter months. Two or more cases of flu-like illness occurring within 48 hours in residents or staff from the same care home indicate that an outbreak of flu is possible.

Precautionary measures for homes with a possible flu outbreak

If care home staff suspect an outbreak of flu, they will ensure that measures are in place to reduce the risk of flu spread to other residents. They may advise on restrictions for staff and residents movements.

The All Wales Acute Response (AWARe) Team will be supporting the care home by advising:

- On adequate control measures to be taken to prevent the spread of infection
- That affected residents or staff receive appropriate treatment
- That residents, staff and carers receive appropriate and timely information on the measures being taken

What are the specific measures that staff can take?

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water and dry thoroughly
- Provide alcohol based hand gels throughout the home
- Ensure frequent cleaning of the care home environment
- Ensure that supplies of soap for hand washing and drying equipment for hand drying are available where all sinks are located
- Provide tissues and appropriate systems for disposal of tissues to residents and visitors who are coughing and/or sneezing
- Maintain appropriate infection control precautions while dealing with affected patients e.g. gloves, single use apron

How can residents and visitors help?

Residents with flu symptoms should:

- Cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing
- Avoid using common areas

Visitors should:

- Not attend care home whilst unwell
- Comply with visiting restrictions implemented within the home
- Wash their hands thoroughly on entry to/leaving the home
- Support the home by adhering to other restrictions which may be needed.

If you require any further assistance, please contact Public Health Wales's All Wales Acute Response (AWARe) Team on:

0300 003 0032

Appendix 1. Template text for a staff letter identifying eligibility
(available at <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/96850>)



Date

Dear Community Pharmacist,

As you know all adult care homes staff in regular contact with residents are eligible for a free NHS flu vaccine this year in Wales. (Welsh Health Circular (2019) 015: The National Influenza Immunisation Programme 2019-20).

Name of Staff Member:

Full Name of Care Home:

I confirm that the above individual is an employee of this care home and is in regular contact with residents.

Yours faithfully,

Your name

Care home manager/your position



Dyddiad

Annwyl Fferyllydd Cymunedol,

Fel y gwyddoch, mae pob aelod o staff mewn cartrefi gofal i oedolion sy'n dod i gyswllt rheolaidd â'r preswylwyr yn gymwys am frechiad y fflw am ddim gan y GIG eleni yng Nghymru. (Cylchlythyr Iechyd Cymru (2019) 015: Y Rhaglen Imiwneiddio Genedlaethol Rhag y Fflw 2019-20).

Enw'r Aelod o Staff:

Enw Llawn y Cartref Gofal:

Rwyf yn cadarnhau bod yr unigolyn uchod yn gweithio yn y cartref gofal hwn ac mewn cyswllt rheolaidd â'r preswylwyr.

Yn gywir,

Eich enw

Rheolwr y cartref



Appendix 2

Reported barriers and potential solutions for increasing flu vaccination uptake

Vaccination of residents	
Reported barriers	Suggested solutions
Limited policies in place for residents flu immunisation	<p>All care homes should have a written flu immunisation policy in place for residents, which is known and understood by all care home staff, residents and (where appropriate) residents' next of kin.</p> <p>Residents should be provided with information, and encouraged / supported to have flu immunisation.</p>
Limited availability in the care home of documentation of residents' flu immunisation status	<p>Immunisation status of residents should be clearly recorded within their care home notes <i>and</i> within their primary care records.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This will assist a targeted approach to increasing immunisation uptake. • This will also assist primary care services and Public Health Wales should cases of flu or an outbreak occur within the care home.
Poor communication between primary care and the care home	<p>Have a named individual within the care home responsible for flu vaccination.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to close working and/or shared responsibility with primary care colleagues for advising, arranging and delivering flu vaccination to care home residents.</p>
Difficulty in obtaining general practice appointments for residents	Vaccination of residents within the care home is simplest for the residents.
Resident unwell on the day vaccination occurred / resident admitted to care home after vaccination day	Care homes should make provision, in collaboration with colleagues in primary care, to provide 'catch up' vaccination sessions for residents who miss the initial flu vaccination session, and for any residents who moved into the home after that date.
Vaccine given late in season	Consideration should be given to close working and/or shared responsibility with primary care colleagues for advising, arranging and delivering flu vaccination to residents in a timely way.
Limited information regarding flu vaccination available in the care home	Care homes must ensure that accurate and up-to-date information is available to residents, and that staff have sufficient knowledge to answer queries relating to flu vaccination accurately and in a timely way.

Difficulties in obtaining informed consent from residents and where necessary their next of kin	Consent procedures should be simplified wherever possible but residents (and if appropriate their next of kin) should be provided with the necessary information and support regarding the benefits of obtaining flu vaccination to enable them to make an informed decision in a timely way.
Care home nurses not able to vaccinate	Care home staff should have access to adequate training and competency assessments through their relevant health board. Please contact your health board immunisation coordinator for advice and for further details of local courses for immunisers.
Vaccination of staff	
Reported barriers	Suggested solutions
Advice on vaccination not provided to staff	All care homes should have written policies and procedures for the provision of advice about vaccines and the administration of flu vaccine (and other occupational health vaccinations) to all staff. You can find information about flu and the flu vaccine from Public Health Wales at www.beatflu.org/ Public Health Wales have developed an on-line eLearning module about flu (FluOne) which we recommend your staff complete. FluOne is free, only 10 minutes long, and available at: www.wales.nhs.uk/immslearning If you have any difficulties accessing the e-learning module, contact: Phw.immslearning@wales.nhs.uk
Staff flu vaccination not offered or encouraged by employers	It is the employers' responsibility to support eligible staff access annual flu vaccination at the community pharmacy. It is the employers' responsibility to provide advice, and support eligible staff members access vaccination. Having a named individual responsible for flu vaccination within the care home is considered beneficial in ensuring staff understand the benefits, and are offered flu vaccination.
Staff having to independently fund their own flu vaccination.	This should no longer be a barrier in Wales as staff in adult care homes in Wales with regular client contact are now eligible for free flu vaccination.
Accessibility of vaccine – care home staff are busy people often juggling shift-work and family commitments.	Free flu vaccine is now available in community pharmacies for care home staff with regular client contact, many of which are open in the evening and on weekends etc.

Insufficient knowledge regarding flu and flu vaccination among staff.	Care home employers must ensure accurate and up-to-date information is available for staff. Care home staff should have access to adequate training. Please contact your health board immunisation coordinator for further details of local courses for immunisers. E-learning is available at: www.wales.nhs.uk/immslearning
Flu immunisation training not undertaken by staff.	Public Health Wales have developed an on-line learning module FluOne, available at: www.wales.nhs.uk/immslearning If you have any difficulties accessing the e-learning module, contact: Phw.immslearning@wales.nhs.uk
General lack of understanding that flu vaccine is safe to be given to pregnant staff members	To provide education and information to all staff groups to ensure that they are fully aware of the benefits of vaccine and the potential life threatening consequences to both mother and child of influenza. Encourage all staff to complete FluOne at www.wales.nhs.uk/immslearning
Insufficient records kept by care homes on flu / flu immunisation training undertaken by staff.	Care homes should record the training undertaken by staff, and the training needs of staff. Maintaining up-to-date records will make it easier for care home managers to identify which staff members require training, or updates.
Immunisation status of staff not recorded by care home	All care homes must record the flu vaccination status of staff in a timely way. This is important for the protection of staff and residents during the management of cases / outbreaks, and in order that information about flu and flu vaccine can be provided to those staff members who have not received vaccine.
Relationships between care homes and health boards require improvement	Links between health boards and care homes should be strengthened to ensure adequate support and collaboration

Vaccination of staff and residents

Reported barriers	Suggested solutions
Inadequate accurate record of staff flu vaccination	All vaccinations must be recorded in residents' care home notes / staff member's file. There must be a system in place to ensure that information is passed to general practice in a timely way so it may be included in individuals personal medical records