



Winter 2023/24

Communications toolkit for UKHSA stakeholders

This winter the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is working with partners in the NHS, local and national government and across the health and care system to protect people's health, including the most vulnerable amongst us, and reduce pressures on our health services.

This toolkit aims to support stakeholders with messages to help protect people's health this winter. It contains background information, health and behaviour advice, social media assets and suggested copy, links to data and other useful information.

The information provided is correct as of 20 December 2023.

Further information:

For further information about our national communications please contact:
externalaffairs@ukhsa.gov.uk

For further information about our regional support please contact your UKHSA regional communications lead.

Sign up to [our Stakeholder Cascade](#) to receive a weekly newsletter with the latest news, updates and guidance from UKHSA

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Overview

The winter is a busy time for those working in public health and the health services.

This coming winter, there is potential for infectious diseases such as COVID-19, flu, RSV and norovirus to co-circulate. We can also anticipate that there may be weather events which could impact people's health and wellbeing, such as particularly cold spells and flooding. Additionally, the cost of living may have an impact on the ability of vulnerable people to keep warm and stay healthy.

Health security hazards like these require a coordinated response across the public health system to ensure the health of the nation is secure and protected. UKHSA provides advice, guidance, data and resources to help inform policy-makers, health professionals and the general public about the latest health protection issues.

Social media assets

We have a range of social media assets which communicate health prevention and management during winter. These are all available on [Google Drive](#) for use on stakeholders' channels. We have also prepared a [document compiling suggested post copy and alternative \(alt\) text](#).

These cover:

- Winter behaviours
- Flu – infection prevention messaging and 'Get Winter Strong' vaccination campaign
- COVID-19 – infection prevention messaging and 'Get Winter Strong' vaccination campaign
- Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)
- Diarrhoea and vomiting – including norovirus
- Scarlet fever
- Measles – infection awareness and communications on MMR vaccine
- Seasonal weather resources - cold weather, warm spaces and flooding

The sections below provide background information, health and behaviour advice, social media assets and suggested copy, links to data and other useful information for each of these areas.

Suggested posting strategy

We suggest using the following assets throughout the season.

Business as Usual (BA) / throughout winter:

- Vaccination - Get Winter Strong
- Behaviours - spread the love, not flu/COVID-19/norovirus

Cases rising but not yet 'high' or 'very high':

- Continue / increase posting cadence of vaccination assets (Get Winter Strong)
- Add 'It's still out there' assets to ramp up awareness

Cases 'high' or very high

- Increase use of all vaccination and behaviours assets
- Add 'Flu / COVID-19 is circulating at high levels

Seasonal illnesses - overview

Winter behaviours social media assets: 'Spread the love and joy'

We have a range of social media assets which communicate winter behaviours which can help minimise the spread of infection. These are available on [Google Drive](#). We have also prepared a [document compiling suggested post copy and alt text](#).

We will be sharing these on UKHSA channels throughout the winter season. For flu and COVID-19, we have prepared different social media assets for use according to whether case numbers are circulating at lower/stable levels, and high levels. These are outlined in the flu and COVID-19 sections in this document.

These are example assets that are being used on UKHSA social channels from Monday 18 December. The full range can be found in the Google Drive link.





Key messages

- **General winter behaviours:** If you don't feel well enough to go to work or carry out normal activities, try to stay at home and avoid contact with others.
- **Flu and/or COVID-19:** If you have symptoms of flu or COVID-19, try to stay at home and avoid close contact with others to protect friends and loved ones.
- **D+V/norovirus:** If you are experiencing diarrhoea and/or vomiting, try to stay at home and avoid close contact with others for 48 hours after your symptoms clear. Wash your hands regularly with soap and warm water and don't prepare food for others.

NHS advice

The [NHS website has useful information on winter health](#) including:

- The importance of people getting their seasonal flu and COVID-19 vaccinations
- Where to get help and advice if people feel unwell
- Keeping warm and getting help with heating
- Looking in on vulnerable neighbours and relatives

This information is available in other formats including leaflets (large print and easy read leaflets), British Sign Language and audio versions.

Data

UKHSA publishes weekly data on seasonal respiratory illnesses.

Our [Weekly Winter Briefing](#) summarises the data on flu, COVID-19, RSV and other seasonal respiratory illnesses, as found in our [National flu and COVID-19 surveillance reports](#). We also include a summary of our latest norovirus data from our [National norovirus and rotavirus surveillance reports](#).

Each week on our [X/Twitter account](#), we visualise our COVID-19 data into a [sharable infographic](#). These are shared every week on a Thursday afternoon after we publish our Weekly Winter Briefing report and press release.

The [UKHSA data dashboard](#) shows public health data across England and presents data on respiratory viruses.

Further information

- **Guidance for education and early years settings:** UKHSA has guidance on health protection in children and young people's settings (including education). [‘Managing specific infectious diseases: A to Z’](#) provides advice for teaching, education and early years staff on a range of infectious diseases including those more prevalent in winter.
- **Blog on protecting children and others this winter:** Our blog, [‘5 things to do to help manage winter illness’](#), sets out some of the simple actions that parents of school age children can take to help protect their families and those around them.

Influenza (flu)

Influenza, commonly known as flu, is caused by a virus, usually influenza A or B. Flu viruses are always changing so this winter's flu strains will be slightly different from previous winters.

Flu can affect anyone but if people have a long-term health condition the effects of flu can make it worse even if the health condition is well managed and they normally feel well.

Some people who may develop serious influenza complications are eligible for a flu vaccination.

Flu social media assets

Spread of infection (prevention)

Assets with messaging on how to prevent spread and to make people aware that flu season is underway are available.

The messages are pro-active in nature and are focused on preventing spread. Some have more seasonal messaging while others have a more general winter theme and can be used at any time during the winter season.

Posting cadence for these assets can be ramped up or down according to need and in response to local or national case rates. Our [Weekly Winter Briefing](#) summarises the data on flu and other seasonal respiratory illnesses, as found in our [National flu and COVID-19 surveillance reports](#).

We have also prepared a [document compiling suggested post copy and alt text](#).

1) Business as Usual (BAU) – throughout winter

We encourage stakeholders to use general winter behaviours messaging ('spread the love...not flu/COVID-19' alongside 'Get Winter Strong' vaccination assets.

These assets can be found on [Google Drive](#) – 'winter behaviours' on advice to minimise the spread of infection this winter.



2) Cases rising but not yet 'high' or 'very high':

When cases are rising but not yet hitting high thresholds, we would urge you to share messaging around preventative behaviours and vaccination, as well as reminders that these viruses are out there.

These assets can be found on [Google Drive](#) – 'It's still out there' assets.



3) Cases 'high' or 'very high' – alert level messaging

We have 'high level' alerts assets for when COVID-19 case rates are circulating at 'high' or 'very high' levels. Please liaise with your local Director of Public Health and regional UKHSA team to determine when to deploy these assets, based on local rates, or contact externalaffairs@ukhsa.gov.uk if you are unsure.



Vaccinations - overview

The flu vaccination programme helps to provide important protection to those eligible and their families over winter, preventing serious illness and death and helping to minimise hospitalisations during busy winter months.

[UKHSA modelling](#) shows last year's flu vaccinations prevented around 25,000 hospitalisations in England.

Approximately 30 million people across the country are eligible for a flu vaccine. Those eligible include:

- o People with certain underlying health conditions
- o People aged 65 and over
- o Pregnant women
- o Children who are aged 2 or 3 (on or before 31 August 2023) – parents/carers can book via their GP surgery.

You can check your eligibility at <http://www.nhs.uk/wintervaccinations>.

The National Booking System closed on 15 December. It's still possible to book your vaccinations until 31 March through local NHS vaccination services, like pharmacies or walk-in sites.

Flu and COVID-19 vaccination toolkit

The UKHSA External Affairs Team has prepared a [flu and COVID-19 vaccine communications toolkit](#).

The toolkit provides information on the flu and COVID-19 vaccination programme for 2023/24. It aims to support stakeholders to help communicate the importance of eligible people taking up the offer of a vaccine this autumn.

The briefing pack contains background information, data and statistics, key messages, social media assets, suggested social media copy, and links to useful information.

Vaccination campaign (Get Winter Strong)

We have produced a range of social media assets to support the flu and COVID-19 vaccines programme, encouraging those who are currently eligible for vaccination to come forward.

These resources are available on [Google Drive](#) ('Get Winter Strong' tab) and [Campaign Resource Centre](#).

They include static assets, GIFs, web banners and poster artwork, alongside post copy and ALT text.

For vaccine messaging, as the National Booking System has now closed the call to action is now encouraging people to check their eligibility and find out more about how they can access their vaccination offline.

We are still directing people to www.nhs.uk/wintervaccinations as this will be updated with advice on where people can book.

We encourage stakeholders to use the flu and COVID-19 vaccination campaign assets until the programme concludes (the COVID-19 programme ends on 31 January and the flu programme on 31 March).



Animations

We have produced some new animations, designed to support stakeholders with their local winter vaccine messages on YouTube/social media. Links below:

- [Link to download new animations](#)
- [Video \(skippable version\)](#)
- [Video \(non-skippable version\)](#)

NHS advice

There is further information on flu symptoms, advice and measures to reduce the risk of spreading flu on the [NHS website](http://www.nhs.uk).

Resources for health professionals

There are a range of resources – including posters and leaflets – available on the [Health Publications website](http://www.healthpublications.nhs.uk). This includes resources in accessible formats and translated materials in community languages.

Data

UKHSA publishes weekly data on flu. Our [Weekly Winter Briefing](#) summarises the data on flu and other seasonal respiratory illnesses, as found in our [National flu and COVID-19 surveillance reports](#).

The [UKHSA data dashboard](#) shows public health data across England and presents data on respiratory viruses including flu.

Further information

- UKHSA press release: '[Eligible people urged to get vaccinated as flu cases rise](#)' (15 December 2023).

COVID-19

COVID-19 and other respiratory infections are known to peak during the autumn and winter period.

The guidance on [Living Safely with respiratory infections including coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) issued in April 2022, still applies.

It sets out a range of simple actions people can continue to take to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory infections, and protect those at highest risk:

1. Get vaccinated if you are eligible
2. Let fresh air in if meeting others indoors
3. Practise good hygiene:
 - wash your hands with warm, soapy water
 - cover your coughs and sneezes
 - clean your surroundings frequently
4. Consider wearing a [face covering](#)

COVID-19 social media assets

Spread of infection

Assets with pro-active messaging on how to prevent COVID-19 spread are available.

The messages are pro-active in nature and are focused on preventing spread. Some have more seasonal messaging while others have a more general winter theme and can be used at any time during the winter season.

Posting cadence for these assets can be ramped up or down according to need and in response to local or national case rates. Our [Weekly Winter Briefing](#) summarises the data on flu and other seasonal respiratory illnesses, as found in our [National flu and COVID-19 surveillance reports](#).

We have also prepared a [document compiling suggested post copy and alt text](#).

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We encourage stakeholders to use general winter behaviours messaging ('spread the love...not flu/COVID-19' alongside 'Get Winter Strong' vaccination assets).

Our assets can be found on [Google Drive](#) – 'winter behaviours' on advice to minimise the spread of infection this winter.



2) Cases rising but not yet 'high' or 'very high':

When cases are rising but not yet hitting high thresholds we would urge you to share messaging around preventative behaviours and vaccination, as well as reminders that these viruses are out there.

These assets can be found on [Google Drive](#) – 'It's still out there' assets.



3) Cases 'high' or 'very high' – alert level messaging

We have 'high level' alerts assets for when COVID-19 case rates are circulating at 'high' or 'very high' levels. Please liaise with your local Director of Public Health and regional UKHSA team to determine when to deploy these assets, based on local rates, or contact externalaffairs@ukhsa.gov.uk if you are unsure.



Vaccinations - overview

Taking up the offer of a COVID-19 vaccine ahead of winter provides the best level of protection against severe illness and will help ease the pressure on the NHS this winter.

Approximately 21.5 million are eligible for a COVID-19 autumn booster this winter season. Those eligible include:

- o People with certain underlying health conditions
- o People aged 65 and over
- o Pregnant women

You can check your eligibility at <http://www.nhs.uk/wintervaccinations>.

The National Booking System closed on 15 December. It's still possible to book your vaccinations until 31 January through local NHS vaccination services, like pharmacies or walk-in sites.

Vaccination campaign

We have produced a range of social media assets to support the flu and COVID-19 vaccines programme, encouraging those who are currently eligible for vaccination to come forward.

As the National Booking System has now closed, the call to action is now encouraging people to check their eligibility and find out more about how they can access their vaccination.

We are still directing people to www.nhs.uk/wintervaccinations with the CTA 'find out more at' as this will be updated with advice on where people can book.

We encourage stakeholders to use the flu and COVID-19 vaccination campaign assets until the programme concludes (the COVID-19 programme ends on 31 January and the flu programme on 31 March).

These resources are available on [Google Drive](#). They include static assets, GIFs, web banners and poster artwork, alongside post copy and ALT text.

Flu and COVID-19 vaccination toolkit

The UKHSA External Affairs Team has prepared a [flu and COVID-19 vaccine communications toolkit](#).

The toolkit provides information on the flu and COVID-19 vaccination programme for 2023/24. It aims to support stakeholders to help communicate the importance of eligible people taking up the offer of a vaccine this autumn.

The briefing pack contains background information, data and statistics, key messages, social media assets, suggested social media copy, and links to useful information.

Animations

We have produced some new animations, designed to support stakeholders with their local winter vaccine messages on YouTube/social media. Links below:

- [Link to download new animations](#)
- [Video \(skippable version\)](#)
- [Video \(non-skippable version\)](#)

NHS advice

There is advice on the [NHS website about COVID-19](#), including its symptoms, looking after yourself at home, how to avoid catching and spreading it, treatments, vaccinations and long-term effects.

Resources for health professionals

There are a range of resources – including posters and leaflets – available on the [Health Publications website](#). This includes resources in accessible formats and translated materials in community languages.

Data

UKHSA publishes weekly data on COVID-19. Our [Weekly Winter Briefing](#) summarises the data on flu and other seasonal respiratory illnesses, as found in our [National flu and COVID-19 surveillance reports](#).

The [UKHSA data dashboard](#) shows public health data across England and presents data on respiratory viruses including COVID-19.

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is an enveloped RNA virus, in the same family as the human parainfluenza viruses and mumps and measles viruses. RSV is one of the common viruses that cause coughs and colds in winter.

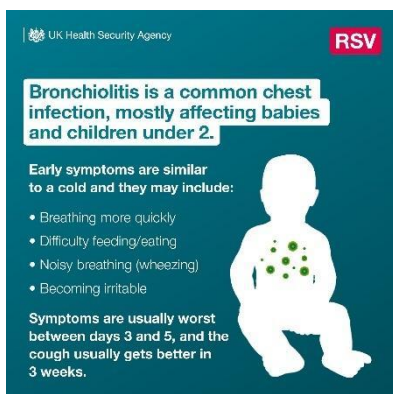
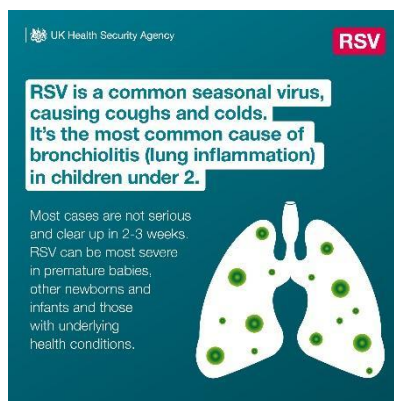
For most people, RSV infection causes a mild respiratory illness. For a small number of people who are at risk of more severe respiratory disease, RSV infection might cause severe disease which may result in hospitalisation. The very young (under 1 year of age) and the elderly are at the greatest risk.

RSV is the most common cause of bronchiolitis in infants. Over 60% of children have been infected by their first birthday, and over 80% by 2 years of age.

RSV social media assets

Our RSV assets can be found on [Google Drive](#).

We have prepared [suggested post copy and ALT text for these images](#).





We have prepared [suggested post copy and ALT text for these images](#).

NHS advice

The NHS website has more information on [RSV bronchiolitis and when to seek help](#).

Data

UKHSA publishes weekly data on RSV. Our [Weekly Winter Briefing](#) summarises the data on RSV and other seasonal respiratory illnesses, as found in our [National flu and COVID-19 surveillance reports](#).

The [UKHSA data dashboard](#) shows public health data across England and presents data on respiratory viruses including RSV.

Diarrhoea and vomiting – including norovirus

Diarrhoea and vomiting are common in adults, children and babies. They're often caused by a stomach bug and should stop in a few days.

The most commonly reported viral infection is norovirus. Norovirus is the most common cause of gastroenteritis in England. It is known as the 'winter vomiting bug'. Norovirus causes symptoms such as nausea, diarrhoea, and vomiting.

Anyone with diarrhoea and vomiting symptoms should follow the 48 hour rule to avoid infecting others: staying home for 48 hours after their symptoms clear.

Norovirus can spread from person to person through hand to mouth contact and can be picked up from contaminated surfaces. It can also spread through the air by sneezing and coughing, though this is less common.

D+V social media assets

Our [D&V assets are available to access via Google Drive](#). If you are having problems accessing please email externalaffairs@ukhsa.gov.uk.

We have prepared [suggested post copy and ALT text for these images](#).

Examples:



Key messages

- Diarrhoea and vomiting spread easily – follow this advice to avoid infecting others.
- Stay at home for 48 hours after your symptoms clear
- Wash your hands regularly, don't prepare food for others, stay away from vulnerable people and wash any soiled clothes/bedding at 60 degrees.
- Visit the NHS website for more information to help you recover

NHS advice

The [NHS website has advice on managing and treating diarrhoea and vomiting](#).

The [NHS has advice on norovirus](#).

Data

UKHSA produces [weekly norovirus and rotavirus surveillance reports](#). These provide summaries of norovirus and rotavirus laboratory surveillance and enteric virus outbreaks in hospital and community settings in England during the 2023 to 2024 season.

Scarlet fever

Scarlet fever (sometimes called scarlatina) is a bacterial illness caused by *Streptococcus pyogenes*, or group A streptococcus (GAS). It mostly affects young children. It is highly contagious and easily treated with antibiotics.

Scarlet fever social media assets

We have produced assets for use on stakeholders' channels. These can be used in response to local or national epidemiological data, e.g. a rise in scarlet fever cases.

These [scarlet fever assets are available to access via Google Drive](#). If you are having problems accessing please email externalaffairs@ukhsa.gov.uk

We have prepared [suggested post copy and ALT text for these images](#).



Health advice

Below is the health advice on scarlet fever:

Wash your hands regularly and thoroughly, catch coughs and sneezes in a tissue, and keep your home well ventilated. If you are unwell with any infection, you should avoid visiting vulnerable people, and stay away from school, nursery or work if you are unwell with a fever.

Please contact your GP if you suspect you or your child have scarlet fever – with symptoms such as fever, sore throat, difficulty swallowing and a sandpapery rash.

Most illnesses can be managed at home, and NHS.UK has information to help parents look after children with mild illnesses. Contact NHS 111 or your GP surgery if you think your child is getting worse, for instance, if they are feeding or eating less than normal, are dehydrated, have a high temperature that won't go down, are very hot and sweaty or seem more tired or irritable than normal.

There is further information on the [NHS website](#).

Measles

Measles is a highly infectious disease that can lead to serious problems in some people such as pneumonia, meningitis, and on rare occasions, long-term disability or death. Symptoms include a high fever, sore red watery eyes and a blotchy red-brown rash, and it is particularly easy to catch in environments when in close contact with others.

Measles is not a seasonal/winter illness but there have been recent, localised outbreaks. We have added this information to this communications pack to support stakeholders with messaging.

Having two doses of the Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR) vaccine is the best way to prevent it.

Measles communications assets

There is further information below which you may wish to use on your own channels:

- We have created a [variety of social media assets](#) which encourage people to check they and their children are up to date on their MMR vaccines.
- [UKHSA has produced a new poster](#) for health professionals in identifying measles, what to do if they suspect measles and ensuring staff are fully vaccinated. Health professionals can download and order the poster for free via the health publications website.
- [A video from Dr. Colin Campbell](#), Consultant Epidemiologist at UKHSA, who explains how infectious the measles virus is and information on the vaccine.
- We also have a [blog on immunisations](#) in which Vanessa Saliba, UKHSA's Consultant Epidemiologist for Immunisations, outlines the importance of protecting children through vaccination.
- Other publications and assets on MMR for can be downloaded and ordered for free by healthcare professionals on the [health publications website](#).
- UKHSA [resources on immunisation can be found on our website](#).



MMR vaccine

Vaccines are our best line of defence against diseases like measles and help stop outbreaks occurring in the community.

Children are offered the first dose of the MMR vaccine when aged one year and the second dose aged 3 years 4 months.

In recent years, the number of children vaccinated against measles has fallen. Uptake for the first dose of the MMR vaccine – which protects against measles, mumps and rubella – in children aged 2 years in England is 89% and uptake of 2 MMR doses in children aged 5 years is 85%. This is well below the 95% target set by the World Health Organization (WHO), which is necessary to achieve and maintain elimination.

We are calling on all parents and guardians to make sure their children are up to date with their 2 MMR doses. It's never too late to catch up, and you can get the MMR vaccine for free on the NHS whatever your age.

Key messages on MMR vaccine

- Measles spreads very easily and can lead to complications that require a stay in hospital and on rare occasions can cause lifelong disability or death.
- Vaccines are our best line of defence against diseases like measles, mumps and rubella and help stop outbreaks occurring in the community.
- We are calling on all parents and guardians to make sure their children are up to date with their 2 MMR doses. To see if your child is up to date with their MMR vaccines, check your child's personal child health record (PCHR), known as the [red book](#), or contact your GP practice.
- It is never too late to catch up. If anyone has missed one or both doses of the MMR vaccine, contact your GP practice to book an appointment.

Seasonal weather resources

Cold weather

Cold weather communications toolkit

This year's [cold weather communications toolkit](#) supports the [Adverse Weather and Health Plan](#) (AWHP) and the updated Cold-Health Alerting (CHA) service.

The communication material in this toolkit relates specifically to cold weather and is intended to provide basic health information that can be communicated during cold spells so that the right messages reach the right people at the right time. The content included in this toolkit can be used to target both public and professional audiences. It contains background information, key messages, suggested social media copy, social media assets and links to useful information.



Cold-Health alerting system

The [Cold-Health alerting system](#) went live on 1 November. During the winter season, UKHSA and the Met Office will monitor the weather forecasts and where episodes of cold weather are identified, a joint dynamic risk assessment will be carried out and the appropriate alert issued.

We are advising stakeholders to sign up to Weather-Health Alerts which are distributed via email. If you would like to receive the alerts, [please register and share the link with anyone you feel should be receiving them](#).

Further information

There is also [information on keeping warm and well and staying safe in cold weather on the UKHSA website](#).

Warm spaces

In England, concerns around the increasing costs of living and heating last winter saw the emergence of local interventions to establish warm spaces.

UKHSA's [warm spaces toolkit](#) provides a framework for organisations seeking to develop or evaluate a warm space for their local population during the winter. It is based on a systematic literature review, a small survey of local authorities across England and guidance from an expert network of providers of such spaces.

The toolkit includes case studies sharing examples of best and promising practice as well as signposting to resources to support organisations in developing their warm space offer.

Flooding

There have been changes to rainfall patterns and intensity, which combined with rising sea levels will lead to an increase in the frequency and severity of flood events in the future.

As such, we have produced a [flooding communications toolkit](#) to support any communications activity stakeholders choose to undertake during the course of a flood in relation to public health advice. Getting our message to all sections of our communities during adverse weather events and other incidents aids us to mitigate the impact of health inequalities.

The content included in this toolkit can be used to target both public and professional audiences. It contains background information, key messages, suggested social media copy, example press statements and links to useful information.