

12 November 2020

To all in General Practice.

Flu vaccination reminder letters sent in error to individuals with a history of glandular fever

I am writing to apologise for an error that has occurred in the identification of the cohort of patients for whom flu vaccinations are recommended, and to let you know what actions we are taking to rectify this situation and the impact this may have on GP Practices.

Identifying individuals who should receive a flu vaccination is a complicated undertaking because of the complex nature of coding within GP systems, as you will be aware. The specification for the cohort of individuals who should receive a flu vaccination includes over 8000 terms and codes related to clinical conditions.

NHS Digital compiled the cohort for this year's flu vaccinations, on behalf of NHS England. We included the code for infectious mononucleosis disorder in this cohort erroneously. It was inappropriate to include these patients because individuals who have had glandular fever in the distant past do not have "persistent immunosuppression", which is the relevant criteria recommended by Public Health England for receiving the flu vaccine.

I would like to apologise for the fact that the inclusion of these individuals may have caused them undue anxiety about their vulnerability to flu. NHS Digital will be writing to them all individually to explain and apologise for this error and to reassure them that previous glandular fever does not put them at greater risk of complications from the flu.

Of the entire number of individuals identified as being eligible for the flu vaccination programme this season, less than 0.1% were sent a letter in error as a result of this issue. We recognise however, that this has caused significant disruption for some GPs.

Some of these patients will have already contacted their GP to question the basis of their invitation. When we write to patients to explain this error, we will be highlighting to these patients that their clinical records suggest they have suffered from, or potentially suffered from, glandular fever at some point in the past. This may trigger a second set of questions from patients who question the correctness of these records, because they do not recall a historical diagnosis of glandular fever. We apologise for the further workload that this may create for you, but together with NHS England we have determined that the priority is to alleviate potential anxiety to patients associated with this miscommunication, by communicating this error clearly to them.

My sincere apologies again,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sarah', written over a faint, light blue grid background.

Sarah Wilkinson
Chief Executive Officer
NHS Digital

To support your patient conversations / for your practice management / receptionist team:

- We are aware that, relative to the high number of individuals being contacted this year, a small number of patients with previous glandular fever have incorrectly received a letter recommending that they book a free flu vaccination.
- Having glandular fever previously does NOT put you at greater risk of complications from the flu
- The NHS apologises if this has caused any anxieties or health concerns
- If you received one of these letters incorrectly you will be written to again to let you know you don't need to book a flu vaccination now.
- [Full list of eligible cohorts](#) – for primary care use