Flu vaccination in healthcare staff

Using incentives effectively to improve uptake of flu vaccination in staff

Background

NICE guidance recommends a multicomponent approach to help improve uptake of flu vaccination in healthcare workers and suggests organisations consider the use of incentives as part of their approach.

Incentives are complimentary ‘perks’ to encourage healthcare workers to have a flu vaccine, and can range from a sticker or a cup of coffee, to entering a prize draw for a mobile phone, or an incentive at an organisational or directorate level. Incentives serve to encourage staff and to recognise and reward them for getting their annual flu vaccination. They do not have to cost money. For example, an incentive could be as simple as a thank you from the chief executive.

Incentives can be used to reward not only vaccinated staff but also those who contributed to the flu campaign effort such as peer vaccinators.

It is important that staff incentives fit with the organisation’s culture, and with the values of its employees. Organisations will wish to consider the ethical implications of incentives. They may be helpful in encouraging staff to get a vaccine but may be perceived by some as inappropriate, akin to bribery, with some staff potentially feeling pressurised into getting a flu vaccine.

Evidence at a glance

The evidence base regarding the impact of using incentives to improve flu vaccination uptake in healthcare workers is limited and of limited quality.

Of the limited research, there is general support for using incentives as part of a wider multi-component approach to improve flu vaccination uptake in healthcare workers. A recent study by Stead et al (2019) found that trusts in England who incorporated incentives as part of a multicomponent approach achieved higher flu vaccination uptake when compared to those who did not. Their strategies did however include many other elements.
Evidence examined by NICE included mixed evidence of limited quality on use of a broad range of incentives to improve flu vaccination uptake, including:

- Drees (2015) found that organisational financial incentives helped achieve higher vaccination rates. A minimum 75% employee flu vaccination uptake rate was designated as a patient safety metric, which when met would result in an employee bonus with additional pay outs available if this percentage was exceeded (Drees, 2015).

- Marwaha (2015) found incentive-based flu campaigns (giving employees chocolates, opportunity to roll dice for a coffee gift card, automatically entering employees who had received a flu vaccine into weekly and grand prize draws for merchandise and $500 gift cards) made the experience of getting the flu vaccine fun and engaging for employees.

- In 2008, Munford evaluated the impact of incentive-based flu programmes and made a recommendation for organisations to include incentives in their flu campaign, especially the use of prize draws.

- A review of studies found one of the core components of successful healthcare worker flu vaccination programmes is using incentives as part of organisational activities (Hollmeyer, 2012).

- In a qualitative study, Lim (2014) found general attitudes towards the flu vaccination for healthcare workers by a range of stakeholders overall agreed the use of incentives could be used to increase flu vaccination uptake rates. Stakeholders views included immunisation managers, senior medical advisors, communicable disease directors and public health nurses responsible for coordinating the hospital campaign.

- It is worth noting, some studies that do not support the use of an incentives-based flu campaign. In 2016, Lytras examined the use of incentives as an intervention to increase flu vaccination uptake in healthcare workers. No significant difference was found between incentives-based flu campaigns and flu campaigns that do not use incentives.

When using incentives in the staff facing flu campaign, it is recommended more than one incentive is used as this is more likely to appeal to a wide range of staff. Incentives can help make the experience of getting a flu vaccine less daunting, more fun and engaging, for example: a complimentary sticker, food and drink related incentives, prize draws or charity related incentives (Stead et al, 2019; Marwaha, 2015; Munford, 2008).

Whilst there is limited evidence to demonstrate the positive impact of incentives on flu vaccination uptake, it is also worth noting that some studies show incentives do not statistically improve flu vaccination uptake (Lytras, 2016).
Organisations implementing incentives should consider:

- **Using incentives as part of a multi-component targeted approach** to improving flu vaccination uptake in healthcare workers. As part of a multi-component approach, Sussex community achieved 79.4% flu vaccination uptake in 2018-19 and used hampers to reward teams with the most vaccines to incentive competition and divisional uptake of the flu vaccine.

- **How the use of incentives fits** with your organisational culture and employee values. West Midlands Ambulance Service started at 28.7% flu vaccination uptake rates in 2015 but with a robust multicomponent approach managed to achieve over 75% flu vaccination uptake in 2018-19. Part of their success was taking an evidence-based approach to rewards and incentives by asking staff whether they would like a reward in a survey. The findings indicated staff did want incentives and this was used to inform their approach.

- **How the types of incentive used would fit with employee values** and be well received by staff. Birmingham Woman’s and Children's NHS Foundation Trust developed an initiative called ‘get a jab, gift a jab’ where the trust committed to match each flu jab given to a member of staff with a donation of 10 tetanus vaccinations to a UNICEF project. This approach was extremely popular and maintained high uptake rates with staff feeding back they felt confident their jab was making a meaningful difference.

- **The cost of incentives** does not have to be high and there are methods to attain them from (unions, etc). West Midlands Ambulance Service held their own flu awards for vaccinated staff and peer vaccinators. Sherwood Forrest used local staff side representatives to secure a mobile phone for their monthly prize draw when faced with budget restrictions.

- **Including staff members and those who contributed to the flu effort such as peer vaccinators in your incentive approach.** Sherwood Forrest achieved 81.06% flu vaccination uptake in 2018-19 with a robust multi-component approach. One of their top tips was to incentivise both staff who have the vaccine and peer vaccinators to encourage peer vaccinator volunteers.

**Conclusions and recommendations**

The evidence base relating to provision of incentives in flu vaccination of healthcare workers is limited. Within the evidence base there are a range of approaches taken, however the evidence does not enable us to draw firm conclusions about which approaches have the greatest impact on vaccine uptake.

Your organisation will wish to consider financial constraints and organisational values when deciding on the best options regarding offering incentives to staff.

It is recommended that the approach to the healthcare worker flu vaccination campaign across Wales continues to be multicomponent in nature, following the principles of the NHS Employers’ **seven elements to running a successful flu campaign**, and may include the use of incentives.
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Vaccine Preventable Disease Programme (VPDP)

References and further reading


Hollmeyer Helge, Hayden Frederick, Mounts Anthony, and Buchholz Udo (2013) Review: interventions to increase influenza vaccination among healthcare workers in hospitals. Influenza and other respiratory viruses 7(4), 604-21

Lim Yi Chen, and Seale Holly (2014) Examining the views of key stakeholders regarding the provision of occupational influenza vaccination for healthcare workers in Australia. Vaccine 32(5), 606-10

Lytras T, Kopsachilis F, Mouratidou E, Papamichail D, and Bonovas S (2015) Interventions to increase seasonal influenza vaccine coverage in healthcare workers: A systematic review and meta-regression analysis. Human Vaccines and Immunotherapeutics , 0


