



# Attention on prevention

Flu vaccinations in Newcastle

## About Healthwatch Newcastle

Healthwatch Newcastle is one of 152 local Healthwatch organisations established throughout England on 1 April 2013 under the provisions of the Health and Social Care Act 2012. We have a dual role to champion the rights of users of publicly funded health and social care services for both adults and children, and to hold the system to account for how well it engages with the public.

We collect feedback on services from people of all ages and from all communities. We do this through our network of voluntary and community sector organisations, during events, drop-in sessions and listening events at a range of venues across the city, online through the feedback centre on our website, via social media and from callers to our 'Just ask' helpline. As part of the remit to gather views, we also have the power to 'enter and view' services and conduct announced and unannounced visits.

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# 1. Introduction

The adult flu vaccination is available every year from the NHS to help protect adults at risk of flu. It is offered free of charge by the NHS to people who:

- Are aged 65 years or over
- Are pregnant
- Have certain medical conditions
- Are living in a long-stay residential care home or other long-stay care facility
- Receive a carer's allowance, or are the main carer for an elderly or disabled person whose welfare may be at risk if the carer falls ill

Each year, the World Health Organization (WHO) assesses the strains of flu virus that are most likely to be circulating in the northern hemisphere over winter. Based on this assessment, WHO recommends which flu strains the vaccines should contain for the forthcoming winter.

Production of the vaccine starts in March each year after WHO's announcement. The vaccine is usually available in the UK from September. NHS flu vaccinations can be administered at:

- GP surgeries
- Local pharmacies offering the service
- Midwifery services, if they offer it, for pregnant women <sup>1 2</sup>

People who are not eligible for a free flu vaccination can pay for a vaccination privately. This can often be done at some GP practices, pharmacies and supermarkets.

## Flu vaccination uptake in Newcastle

In January 2017 a paper titled 'Health Protection Statistics for Newcastle'<sup>3</sup> was shared at Newcastle Health Scrutiny Committee to provide an overview of the performance of screening and immunisation activities in Newcastle. The paper expressed a concern about poor uptake of flu vaccination by eligible patients.

As a consequence of this report, we decided to look more closely at the uptake data for adult flu vaccination. We used Public Health England's Fingertips Tool at <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk> to access the local uptake data.

As can be seen in the table below, flu vaccination uptake in Newcastle for people aged 65 and over is above the national target of 75%, except in the year 2015–16, where it dropped to 74%. Uptake in Newcastle is also higher than the North East region as a whole and the national average for England.

Uptake in Newcastle for other people considered at risk is below the national target of 75%. However, uptake in Newcastle is higher than the North East region as a whole and the national average for England.

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<sup>1</sup> Information obtained from [www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/how-flu-vaccine-works](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/how-flu-vaccine-works)

<sup>2</sup> Information obtained from [www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/flu-influenza-vaccine](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/flu-influenza-vaccine)

<sup>3</sup> <https://tinyurl.com/ybfo4bqs>

Year	Flu vaccination uptake (aged 65 or over) (national target: 75%)			Flu vaccination uptake (at risk) (national target: 75%)		
	Newcastle upon Tyne	North East	England	Newcastle upon Tyne	North East	England
10/11	76%	75%	73%	53%	52%	50%
11/12	78%	76%	74%	55%	54%	52%
12/13	78%	75%	73%	55%	52%	51%
13/14	77%	75%	73%	56%	53%	52%
14/15	77%	75%	73%	53%	51%	50%
15/16	74%	72%	71%	47%	45%	45%

We decided to conduct a small survey of people aged 65 or over, and those at risk, to find out:

- What encourages people to take up the vaccination
- What prevents or discourages people from taking up the vaccination
- How any barriers could be overcome

We hoped that the work would identify some methods that could be employed by health services and professionals to encourage people to get vaccinated, thus leading to an increase in uptake. We also hoped that it would identify areas for further research.

This work formed part of a larger in-depth engagement project we carried out, looking at cancer screening uptake.

## 2. Methodology

We used a survey to gather views from people living in Newcastle who are over the age of 65 or considered at risk. A copy of the survey can be found in appendix one (page 11).

The survey could be completed on paper or online. It was promoted through our online channels and e-newsletters. Paper copies were also taken to focus groups we ran during the period the survey was live (16 October to 8 December 2017).

## 3. Findings

We heard from 99 people in total. The majority of these people gave their views via the survey (93). In addition to this, four people chose to give their views via an email submission and two people chose to have a discussion with us about it.

Out of these 99 people, 85 had chosen to have the flu vaccination at some stage in their life and 13 had chosen not to. One person did not respond to this question. As we only heard from 13 people who had chosen not to have the vaccination, further targeted work with others who chose not to be vaccinated would be useful.

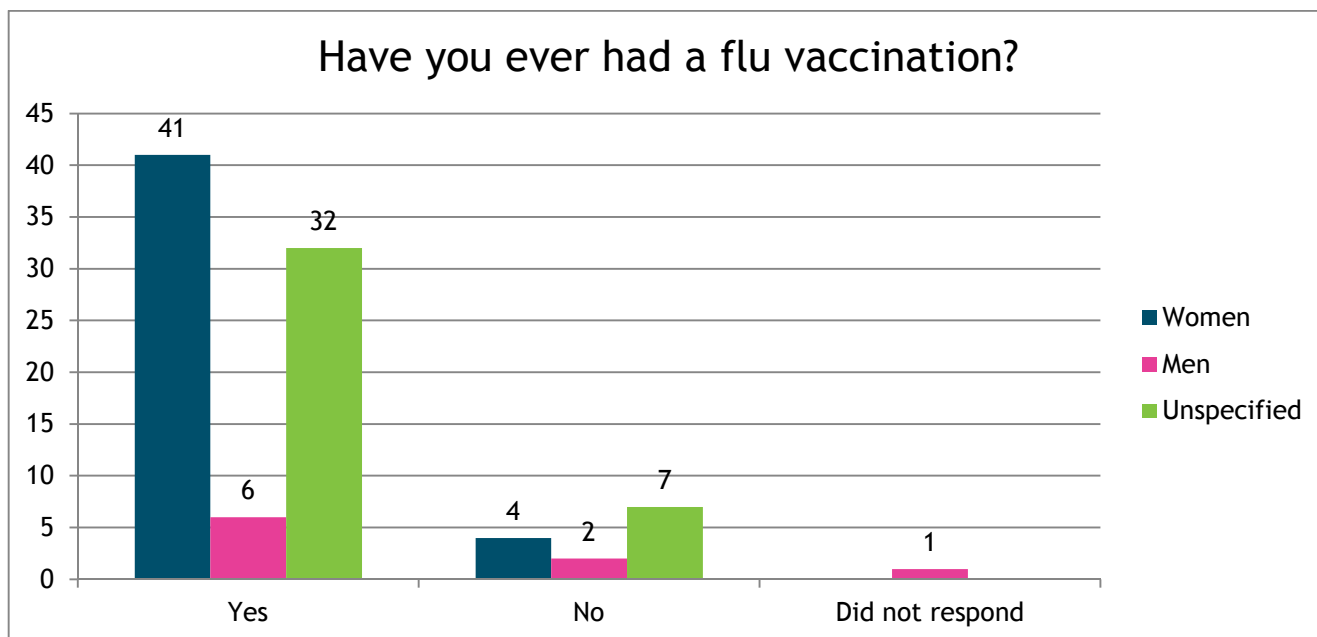
The demographics of the people we heard from is detailed in appendix two (page 14). Not all 99 respondents gave their demographic information as this was an optional part of the research.

## Survey, one-to-one discussions, and email responses

### Survey question one: Have you ever had a flu vaccination?

The graph below shows the responses of the people who completed the survey. It can be seen that 79 people said ‘yes’ and 13 people said ‘no’, with one person not responding.

It is interesting to note that 25% of male respondents said they did not have the vaccination, while only 9% of women said the same. This could suggest that fewer men engage than women. However, this was a small sample size and, in our experience, surveys are not always the best way to engage with men. More research is needed, particularly with men who have chosen not to have the flu vaccination.



In addition to this, all six people who submitted their views via email or one-to-one discussions (all women) got their vaccinations. With this data included, it means that 85 people said they had received the flu vaccination (of which 47 were women, six were men and 32 were unspecified gender) and that only 8% of women in our sample chose not to be vaccinated.

### Survey question two: When did you last have a flu vaccination?

People who answered ‘yes’ to question one (have you ever had a flu vaccination?) were asked when they last had a flu vaccination. Out of these 79 people, 27 did not respond.

The table below shows how people responded.

Response	Number of people
2017	38
2016	6
2015	4
2014	2
2010	1
2001	1
Did not respond	27

### Survey question three: How did you find the experience?

People who answered ‘yes’ to question one (have you ever had a flu vaccination?) were asked to rate their experience.

The graph below shows how these people responded. Out of 79 people, 23 did not respond.



Of the people (52) who described their experience as ‘very good’ or ‘good’, 38 people gave a reason:

Reasons	Number of people
Quick	13
Painless	9
Efficient service	6
Positive staff manner	4
Other/miscellaneous	6

The ‘quick’ and ‘painless’ themes were supported by some of the email submissions. Three email submissions mentioned the quick nature of the appointments and two email submissions mentioned that the procedure is painless.

Four people who had completed the survey wrote positively about using a pharmacy to get their flu vaccination:

“Pharmacy was good.”

“Easily accessible in my local pharmacy.”

Another four people wrote about their experiences after having the vaccination (three via survey and one via email submission). Two people stated that there were no adverse reactions, while the other two people gave different opinions. For example:

“Last year felt like a punch in the arm just for the day, but this year my arm became so painful I literally struggled to get dressed as certain movement was unbearable.”

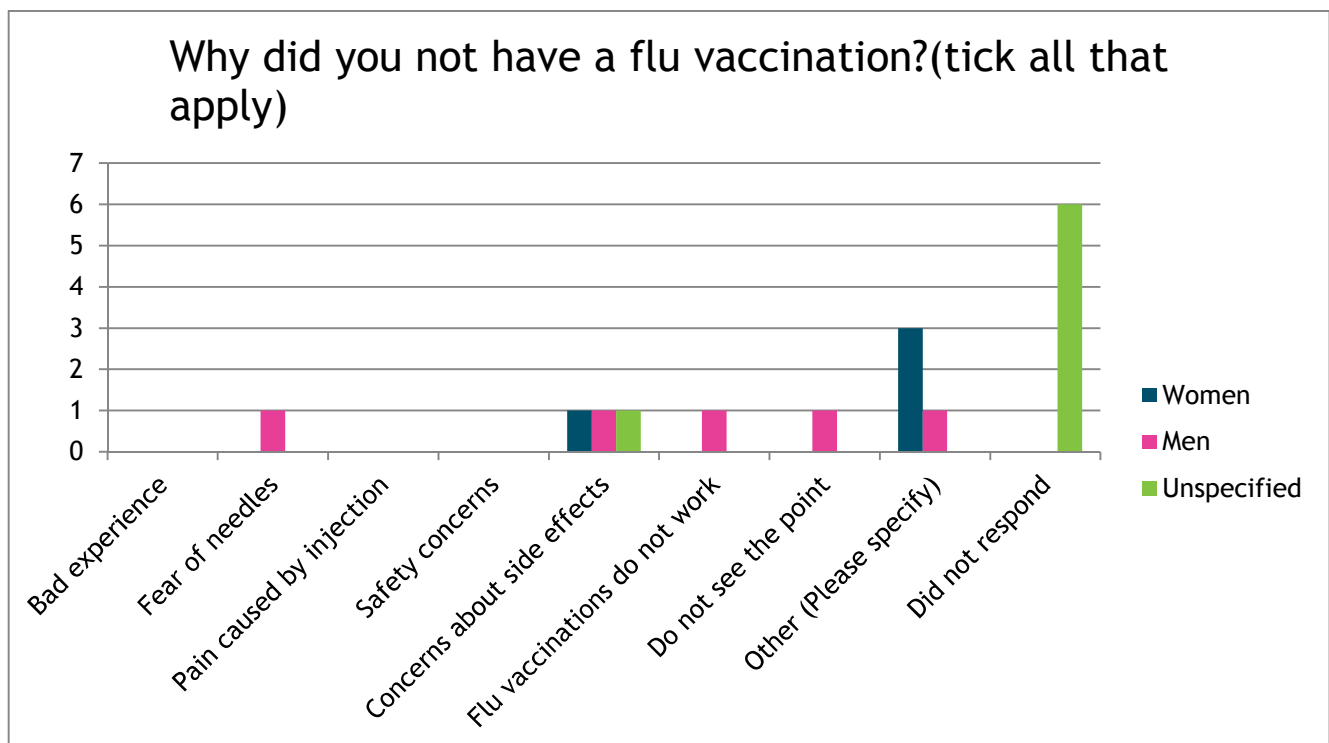
“Injection fine at the time but a few days later came down with a cold and continued to have them every few weeks, where previously very rarely got cold or flu.”

Only four people described their experience as ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’. All four people gave reasons for this which focused on adverse side effects (three) and allergic reactions (one).

#### Survey question four: Why did you not have a flu vaccination?

People who answered ‘no’ to question one (13 people) were asked why they chose not to have a vaccination.

The graph below shows how these people responded. Out of 13 people (four women, five men and seven unspecified), six did not respond. Views given in this graph add up to 16 because people could select more than one option.



Most people did not tell us why they choose not to have the vaccination.

The most common reason selected after this was ‘other’ and these people (three women and one man) specified the following:

“No need as I don’t go out.” (female respondent)

“Never been offered one.” (female respondent)

“I never know when the doctor is doing them.” (female respondent)

“Not sure I’m entitled as not older/pregnant/a child. Also concerned that of the varieties of flu they don’t always choose the right one to vaccinate against.” (male respondent)

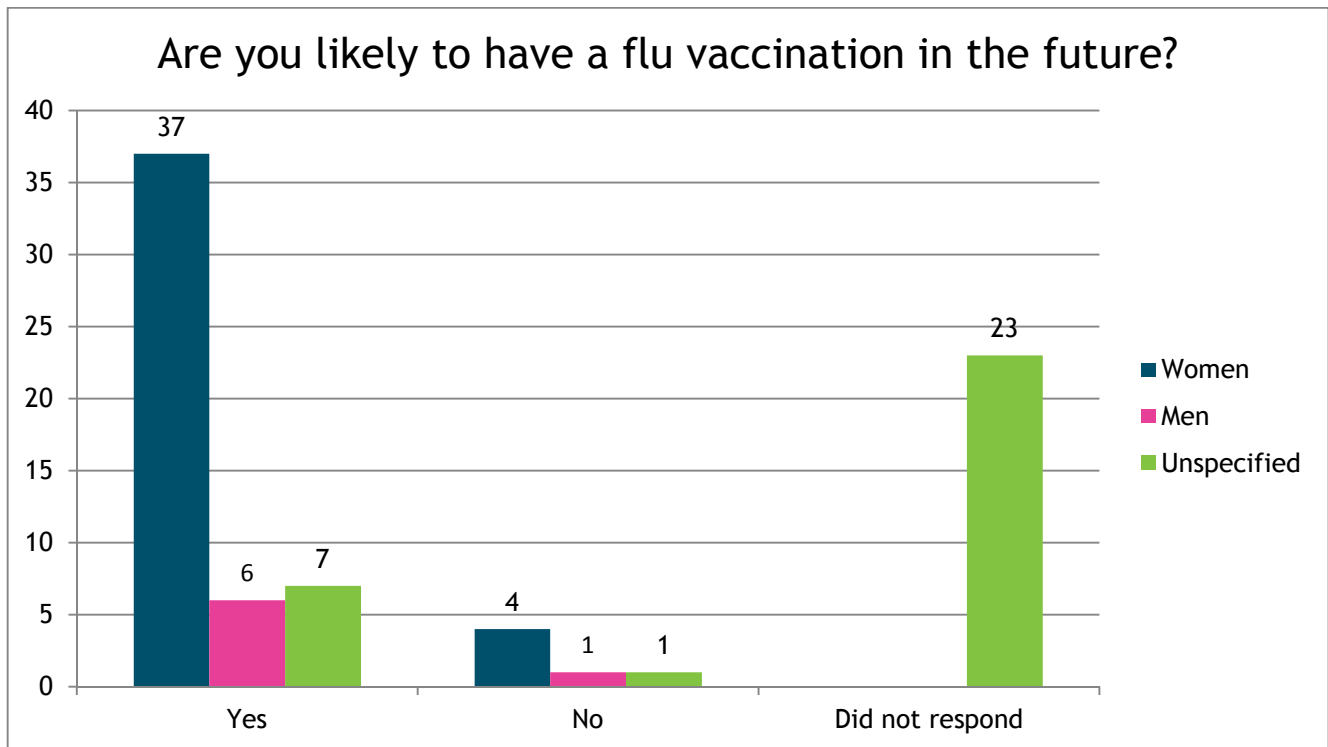
Three people (one woman, one man, and one unspecified) focussed on concerns around side effects. Due to the small number of people responding to this question, further work is needed to gather views from people who choose to not take up the flu vaccination.



**Survey question five: Are you likely to have a flu vaccination in the future?**

People who answered ‘yes’ to question one (have you ever had a flu vaccination?) were asked if they were likely to have the vaccination in the future.

The graph below shows that 50 people said ‘yes’, six said ‘no’ and 23 did not respond.



Of the 50 people who answered ‘yes’ to this question, 36 people gave a reason:

Reasons	Number of people
It protects me	12
I am entitled to it	10
Don't want to get the flu	6
Sensible to have it done	4
Other/miscellaneous	4

Examples of what people said are:

“Hopefully reducing my chances of contracting the flu and is free.”

“It is recommended due to long term health conditions.”

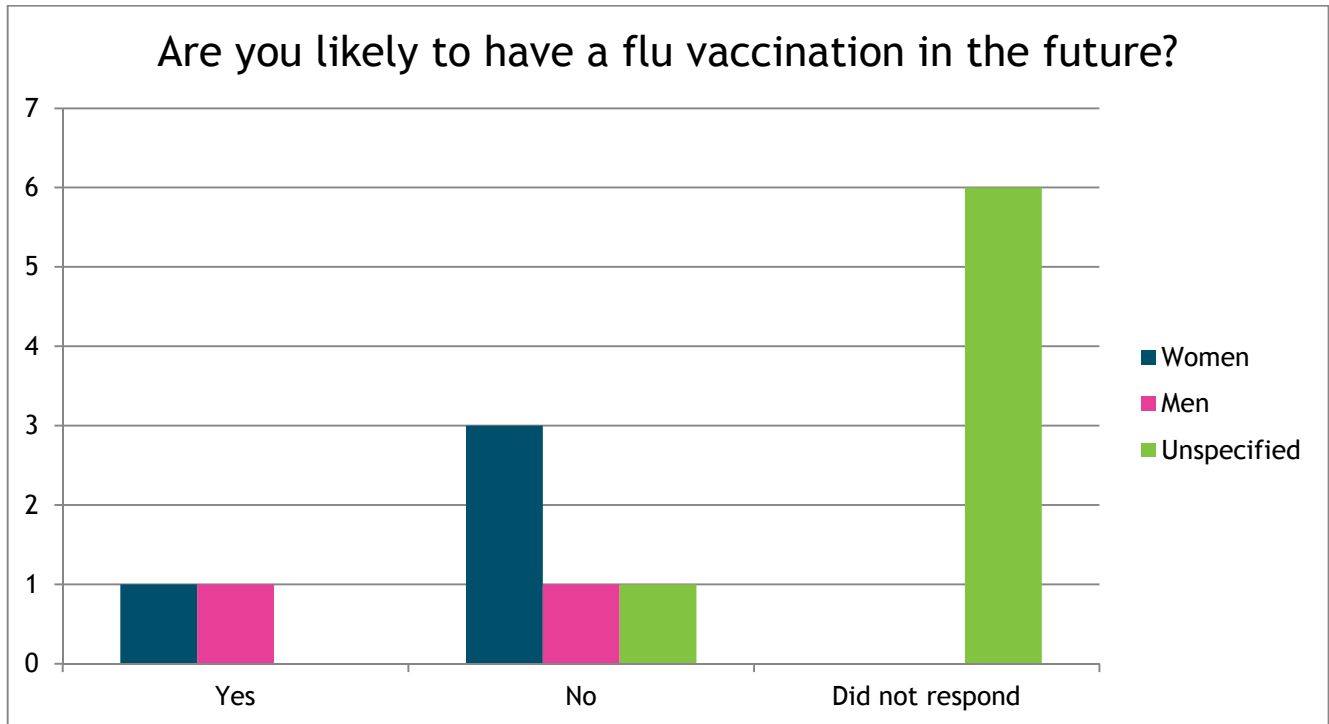
“I don't want to get flu or pass it to anyone else.”

The first two themes were also mentioned in one email submission (it protects me) and one one-to-one discussion (I am entitled to it).

The six people who answered ‘no’ to this question said that they would not have the vaccination again because they had experienced adverse side effects (three people), are not eligible (one), they do not see the point (one) or they can't afford it (one).

People who answered ‘no’ to question one (have you ever had a flu vaccination?) were also asked if they were likely to have a flu vaccination in the future.

The graph below shows how these people responded. Out of 13 people, six did not respond.



The two people who answered ‘yes’ gave these reasons for their answer:

“Yes, if I’m allowed one.”

“I’d have one if I was in a risk group.”

Three out of the five people who answered ‘no’ to this question gave these reasons:

“I don’t go out or have contact with anyone who might have flu.”

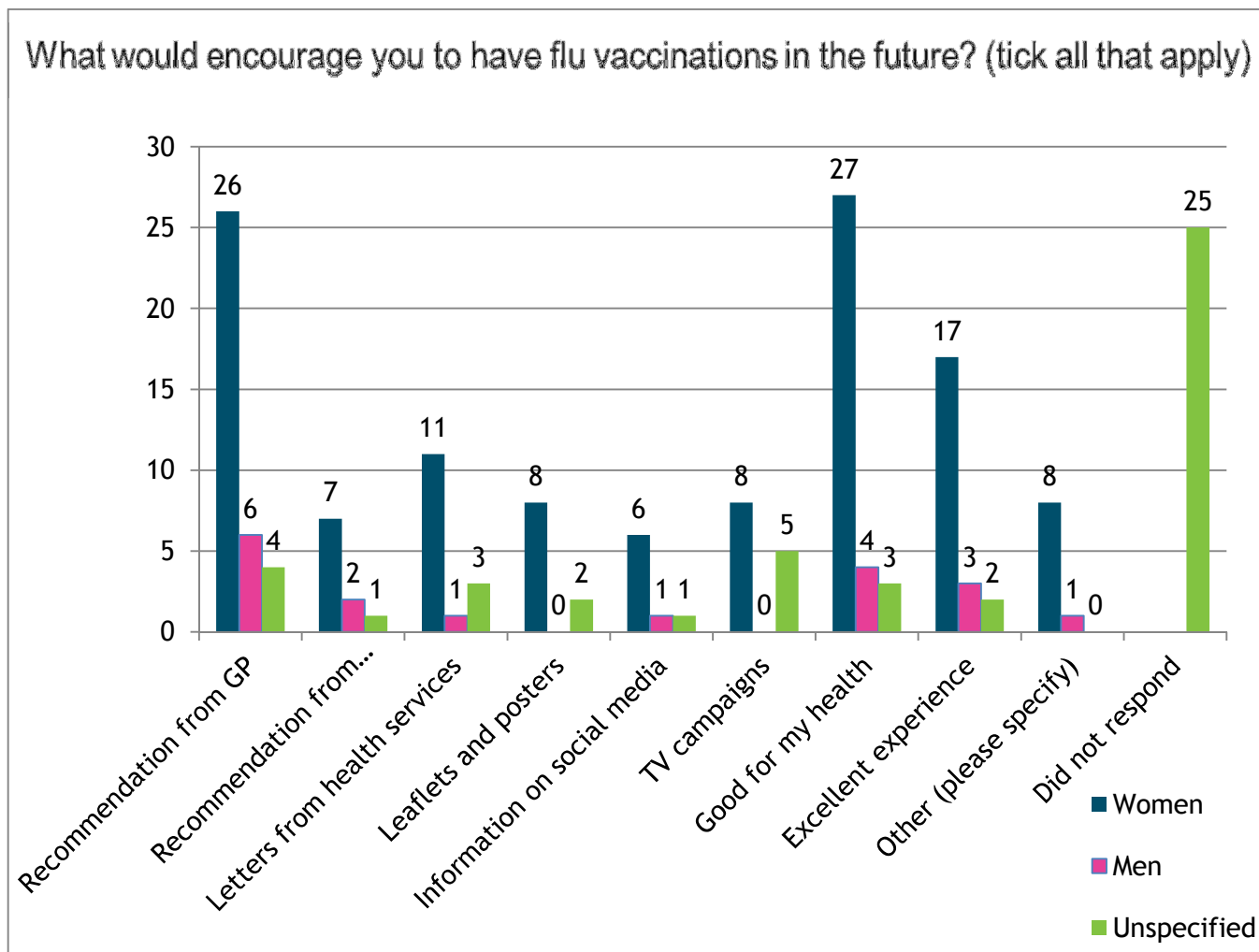
“I never know when doc is doing them.”

“Family members have collapsed after having the flu vaccine and it’s put me off having it. I also don’t feel the risk is worth it as it may not contain the strain of flu that comes.”

It appears that a person’s experience of having the vaccination (adverse reactions and allergic reactions) play a big part in whether people choose to attend in the future. Personal stories also appear to inform the decisions of people who have never been before. These people often choose not to go because they know someone who had an allergic reaction or an adverse side effect after having a vaccination. This suggests that work is needed to allay the concerns members of the public have about allergic reactions and adverse side effects.

**Survey question six: What would encourage you to have flu vaccinations in the future?** People who answered ‘yes’ to question one (have you ever had a flu vaccination?) were asked about what would encourage them to have the vaccination in the future.

The graph below shows how these people responded. Out of 79 people, 25 did not respond. Views given in this graph add up to 182 because people could select more than one option.



The top three reasons for women and men to take up the vaccination were:

Women	Men
Good for my health	Recommendation from GP/other health professional
Recommendation from GP/other health professional	Good for my health
Excellent experience of having flu vaccination	Excellent experience of having flu vaccination

For both women and men, social media scored low as a mechanism to encourage people to be vaccinated and, for men, letters from health services also scored low. No men said that leaflets, posters or TV campaigns would encourage them.

However, due to the sample size, more detailed research is needed to find out if there are true gender differences when it comes to what encourages people to be vaccinated.

Some people submitted other ideas via the survey and in one-to-one discussions or emails. The most common theme (by six people: two one-to-one discussions and four email submissions) covered improving the information and publicity for the flu vaccination. People mentioned the following:

“There should be a duty on GP practices to inform patients about the flu, running public health campaigns, etc.” (one-to-one respondent)

“Any publicity/campaigns should make it clear that you can have the vaccine up until March (I think that is right) but the sooner the better.” (email submission)

“Publicity of effects of flu – it's more than just a heavy cold! Publicity to include how quick, simple, safe and painless it is.” (email submission)

“Many people I know won't go for the vaccine as they believe it will itself give them a dose of the flu and they say they have friends who have suffered this fate! Of course, if it is not a live vaccine then this cannot be true and it must merely be a coincidence if they suffer a cold post-vaccine. Maybe this needs to be better explained.” (email submission)

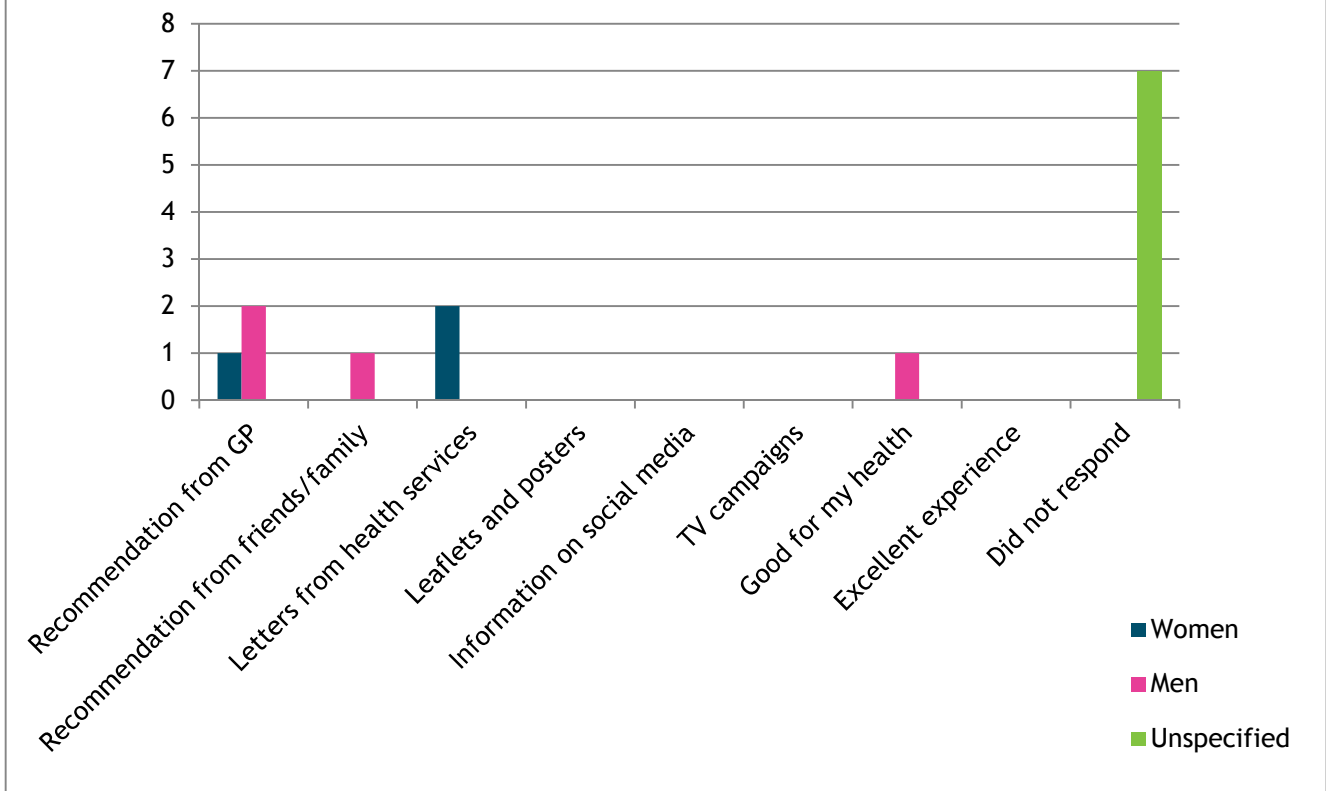
“I get put off by the constant letters and text from the doctors yet no one mentioned we could go to a... chemist and arrange to go in and have it done.” (email submission)

Second to this theme, four people (three survey submissions and one email submission) wrote about it being a personal choice based on the knowledge that people have about flu and the safety of the vaccination.

People who answered ‘no’ to question one (have you ever had a flu vaccination?) were also asked about what would encourage them to have the vaccination.

The graph on page 10 shows how these people responded. Out of 13 people, seven did not respond. Views given in this graph add up to 14 because people could select more than one option.

## What would encourage you to have the flu vaccinations in the future? (tick all that apply)



One woman specified that nothing would persuade her to have the flu vaccination as she never leaves her home so it is not needed. Another woman stated that she would only be persuaded if she could be assured that it was the right vaccination for the flu strain circulating that winter and that she was guaranteed that she would not collapse.

Due to the small sample of people answering this question, more detailed engagement needs to take place with people who choose not to have the vaccination to get a reliable answer.

## 4. Discussion

Due to the small sample size, further work is needed to identify some methods that could be employed by health services and professionals to encourage people to get vaccinated. It would be sensible to target people who are eligible for the flu vaccination because they are considered 'at risk'. This is because flu vaccination uptake in Newcastle by these people is low.

The purpose of this work would be to identify barriers and actions that services and health professionals could take forward to increase uptake. It would involve finding groups of people considered 'at risk' (i.e. pregnant women and people with certain medical conditions such as heart conditions, diabetes and respiratory conditions, etc.) and running focus groups and surveys for them.

# Appendices

## Appendix one

### Healthwatch Newcastle survey on flu vaccination

Healthwatch Newcastle is an independent organisation, here to listen to people's experiences of health and social care services. The feedback we gather is used to help improve services for everyone.

We are currently seeking views from people who are eligible to receive free flu vaccinations on the NHS.

If you live in Newcastle please complete this survey by **30 November 2017**. At the end of the survey there is an option to enter a prize draw to win a £25 Intu shopping voucher.

The information you provide will feed into our research project looking at how to increase the uptake of flu vaccinations in Newcastle.

If you take part in our survey all information will be treated confidentially and will remain anonymous. What you say will not be passed on to your care provider in a way that can be linked to you and it will not affect the care you receive today or in the future.

If you have any queries or would like to find out more please phone Healthwatch Newcastle on 0191 338 5720 or email [info@healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk)

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.  
Please return the survey to FREEPOST HEALTHWATCH NEWCASTLE.

### Flu vaccination survey

#### 1. Have you ever had a flu vaccination?

- Yes
- No  [please go to question 4](#)

#### 2. When did you last have a flu vaccination? (please give a year)

#### 3. How did you find the experience?

- Very good
- Good
- Bad
- Very bad

Please give a reason for your answer.

[Please go to question 5](#)

#### 4. Why did you not have a flu vaccination?

- Bad experience of having flu vaccination in the past
- Fear of needles
- Pain caused by injection
- Safety concerns about vaccination
- Concerns about side effects from vaccination
- Flu vaccinations do not work
- Do not see the point
- Other, please say \_\_\_\_\_

#### 5. Are you likely to have a flu vaccination in the future?

- Yes
- No

Please give a reason for your answer

#### 6. What would encourage you to have flu vaccinations in the future? (tick all that apply)

- Recommendation from GP/other health professional
- Recommendation from friends and family
- Letters from health services asking me to book an appointment
- Leaflets and posters about flu vaccination
- Information about flu vaccination on social media (Twitter, Facebook)
- TV campaigns
- Good for my health
- Excellent experience of having flu vaccination in the past
- Other... please say \_\_\_\_\_

#### 7. What ward do you live in?

- |                       |                          |               |                          |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| Benwell and Scotswood | <input type="checkbox"/> | North Jesmond | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Blakelaw              | <input type="checkbox"/> | Newburn       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Byker                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | Ouseburn      | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Castle	<input type="checkbox"/>	Parklands	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dene	<input type="checkbox"/>	South Heaton	<input type="checkbox"/>
Denton	<input type="checkbox"/>	South Jesmond	<input type="checkbox"/>
East Gosforth	<input type="checkbox"/>	Walker	<input type="checkbox"/>
Elswick	<input type="checkbox"/>	Walkergate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fawdon	<input type="checkbox"/>	Westerhope	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fenham	<input type="checkbox"/>	Westgate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kenton	<input type="checkbox"/>	West Gosforth	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lemington	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wingrove	<input type="checkbox"/>
North Heaton	<input type="checkbox"/>	Woolsington	<input type="checkbox"/>

**8. Which GP practice are you registered with?**

**9. Would you like to share more?**

Healthwatch Newcastle can call you to hear more about the issues you face. If this is of interest to you please leave your details below

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Everyone who completes this survey can be entered into a prize draw to win a £25 Intu shopping voucher. If you would like to take part please provide your full name and email address or phone number**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for completing the survey!**



## Appendix two

### Demographic data

<b>Gender</b>		<b>Sexuality</b>	
Male	9	Heterosexual	45
Female	46	Bisexual	1
Transgender		Gay man	1
Unknown	44	Gay woman	1
<b>Age</b>		Other	1
17 and under		Prefer not to say	
18-24		Unknown	50
25-49	9	<b>Ethnic groups</b>	
50-64	22	British	48
65-79	24	Irish	2
80+		Gypsy or Irish Traveller	
Unknown	44	Other white background	1
<b>Disability</b>		Indian	1
Yes	11	Pakistani	
No	43	Bangladeshi	
Unknown	45	Chinese	
<b>Carer</b>		Other Asian background	
Yes	8	White & Black Caribbean	
No	45	White & Black African	
Unknown	46	White & Asian	
<b>Employment status</b>		Other mixed background	
<b>Student</b>		Caribbean	
Employed/self-employed	19	African	1
Not in paid employment	4	Other Black background	
Retired	31	Arab	
Unknown	45	Other ethnic background	
<b>Marital status</b>		Unknown	46
Single	1		
Divorced			
Married			
Civil partnership			
Living with partner			
Widow			
Unknown	98		

## Contact details



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